

Prayer

I praise You, Jesus Christ my Saviour,
even though my heart is saddened by troubles all around:
For when these evils, wrongs and trial all affect me, as they surely do
The faith that You have placed within me rises over everything;
You stir the spiritual power within me, Jesus my Redeemer
And stand triumphant over every enemy.
Alleluia!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Politicians

Pray today for those politicians who represent you, whether to local, regional, state, or national government. Pray for God to break through in their lives with wisdom and power.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who face difficult or risky journeys today*
- *Pray for those who plan big events important to your country*
- *Give thanks to God for His mercies whilst travelling*

Meditation

We celebrate what Jesus Christ has done always for us:

He has placed His hand on us before we knew Him;
He has been faithful to us even when we have failed;
He has done far more with us than we can understand;
He has opened His arms to us with constant generosity;
He has enabled us to stand firm when evil is at hand;
He has always been there for us when we have needed Him;
He has not withheld His mercies from us even if we've failed;

Celebrate what He's done and worship Him forever!

Bible Study - Hebrews 9:6-14

⁶ *With these preparations having been made, the priests continually enter the first tent to perform their acts of worship; ⁷ but the high priest alone goes into the second, just once a year, and never without bringing the blood he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. ⁸ In this way, the Holy Spirit shows that as long as the first tent is still standing, the way into the Holy Place has not yet been revealed. ⁹ This is symbolic of the present time, in which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot make the conscience of the worshipper perfect, ¹⁰ as they are only a matter of food and drink and ritual washing. These are earthly regulations which apply until the opportunity arises to put in place a new system.*

¹¹ *When Christ arrived as a high priest of the good things that have indeed now come, then by passing through the greater, perfect tent (not made with hands,*

that is, not of this creation),¹² he made one unique entrance into the Holy Place to secure eternal redemption, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood.¹³ For if those who are ritually unclean have their bodies purified by the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkled blood of a heifer,¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself to God unblemished, purify our conscience from deeds which result in death, to worship the living God!

Review

In a remarkable way, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us in that the work of Jesus Christ as our High Priest is unique, complete and perfect! It deals with the sins of humanity finally and totally, because the Old Testament system of the forgiveness of sins could only deal with 'unintentional sin' (9:7). Now Jesus has secured a complete and perfect sacrifice that deals with every sin, even those that play on our consciences because they have been wilfully committed against others and maybe even the Lord. It may not be clear to you how the passage says this after a first reading, but the purpose of the study is to explain just how this works. It is essential for us to understand this, because it is still too easy for people to come to church, call themselves Christians and think of themselves as religious, and yet carry terrible inner burdens which lie forever unresolved. Hebrews, of all the great New Testament books, attempts to explain how it is that what Jesus did deals with the most completely with every sin.

The letter has already explained the basic twofold structure of the tent, or 'tabernacle', which housed the Ark of the Covenant in Old Testament times (see study on Hebrews 9:1-5). With this background, our passage begins with an explanation of the difference between the priests who offered the regular worship of God in the outer tent complex, and the work of the High Priest who, alone, went into the holiest inner tent annually, offering sacrifices for his own sins and the sins of the people. However, the important part of what is said here is in verse 7, which explains that the sins dealt with by this ritual were only unintentional sins. Certainly, if you read through Leviticus (a daunting prospect!) you will find that the rituals of worship and sacrifice deal with such unintentional sins, but other laws deal with sins such as murder and theft, which include (in some cases) the death penalty. Hebrews has therefore homed in on one of the fundamental weaknesses of the Old Covenant and its laws; it could repair the relationship between God and people in the case of some sins, but not others.

But this state of affairs was only ever a passing phase (see 9:8,9) because Hebrews observes that Christ came to change it (9:11f.). In verses 11 to 13, this passage creates a complex picture combining the old Temple system based on the tabernacle, with what Christ has done for us through his death on the Cross. The result is Hebrews' affirmation that Jesus our Lord has entered into the 'holiest place' with the sacrifice of His own sacrificial blood, to 'secure our eternal redemption' (9:12). Because Jesus, the Son of God, died in order to make this happen, what He did could 'purify our conscience from deeds which result in death' (9:14), which the old rituals could not do. Moreover, Jesus' sacrifice deals with all sin, including the most heinous sins of wickedness and rebellion against God, and all intentional sins not covered by the old system. Christ's work of salvation therefore offers redemption to all who will accept what He has done for us as our great High Priest.

In the last half century, this understanding of Christ's work of salvation has come under strong attack, and under the name of the 'Penal Substitution theory of the Atonement', many people, including those who might otherwise be thought to have a traditional evangelical outlook, have rejected it. This is because people do not like the idea that God allowed Christ to die 'for us' and offer His blood for our salvation; they reject the idea that

God saves us through punishing His Son by death. Because of this, you will find that fewer and fewer preachers today use texts such as this one from Hebrews, and the result is that many people who go to church are ignorant of this important strand of teaching in the Bible. Whilst the whole manner of Christ's substitutionary atonement according to the Old Testament model is likely to offend people of today's world for whom the idea that salvation can come through death is untenable, the abandonment of this has consequences.

As we saw earlier, Hebrews explains this whole theory of Christ's work to help us understand that all sins (not just unintentional ones) are dealt with. So now, if the full extent of Christ's work is not explained to people, it is hardly surprising that many people in the church (as we may easily observe) have no real assurance of the forgiveness of their sins. They may hear about forgiveness from the church, but no-one explains how it was achieved in Christ, and their sins remain locked inside their minds and consciences. For this reason, the rediscovery of passages like this in Scripture are essential for the future of God's people today.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group the difference between intentional and unintentional sin. Is the difference as clear as we might think?
2. In what ways is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross more effective for dealing with sin than Old Testament rituals?
3. How can we best explain the idea of the 'blood of Christ' today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Most of us do not spend a great deal of time going over the details of what we believe. If we have a faith by which we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, and we live by the guidance we receive from sermons we hear and Christians we meet, then we may not find or come across some of the important truths of faith that are part of our heritage and within God's Word. We need to make serious attempts to understand our faith and the work of Christ by reading the Bible and exploring our historic faith. An essential part of discipleship is the discipline with which we not only read such passages, but also think about them and use them.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Think carefully about what this Scripture says, and check out whether you agree with how this study has presented it. You may find yourself in disagreement with what has been said in the study, but this does not matter because this is my interpretation, not God's Word. God will guide into all truth.*
- *Pray for all those who are searching for the truth today and do not find it; pray that God will lead His people to engage with His Word with sincerity, love and deep desire.*

Final Prayer

Be at the centre of my life, Lord Jesus; and by Your Holy Spirit, be with me in my happiness and my joy, my thinking and my doing, my speaking and my listening, and my actions and my words. Then, when everything is finished at the end of the day, speak to me Lord Jesus. Speak Your Words of Life. AMEN