

Prayer

Thank You Lord God for all the amazing things You have done through millions of Christian people throughout the centuries. You alone can comprehend the vast numbers of people who have responded to Your love and have accepted Your call to discipleship. You alone know the truth about people's lives, what they have done and what they believe, and You alone are the one true Judge. Make us worthy of Your call, we pray, and worthy to join Your saints in glory: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

(Offering alternatives that can broaden your experience of prayer)

Prayer ideas

After speaking to a friend or acquaintance, pray about the things you have discussed, and for your friend as well

On-going prayers

- **Pray against the evils within your society.** *Pray against the ungodliness of domination, whether political, or social, or forms of domination by which some control people around them, even in the home.*
- *Give thanks to God for your liberation from sin and death, and let Him know your enthusiasm!*
- *Pray that God will make something good out of the unrest that is stirring in many countries of the world today*

Meditation

(a prophecy for God's people, first given 13/03/07)

Be liberated, my people, be set free to be.
I made you, I have loved you, and I saved you;
I want to raise you up within my Kingdom,
But know that I look for servants not masters.

Read my Word faithfully, and I will guide you:
Pray to me and I will reveal the truth to you:
Worship me; seek me, let nothing distract you,
Enter my presence with an honest, contrite heart.

I knock upon your door, so open up and trust me:
I am with you as you break bread; remember me:
I build my church; I challenge and empower you,
I have given you your work, and I will protect you.

Be liberated, my people, and love each other,
Do what I tell you to do, but do not stand in my way;
Let me build my church; for if I am not welcomed,
I will build where my people really want 'new life'.

Bible passage - Hebrews 2:16-18

¹⁶ For He surely did not come to help angels, but rather, the descendants of Abraham; ¹⁷ and for this reason, He had to become like His brothers and sisters in every possible way so that He might be merciful, and be a faithful high priest in the service of God for the atonement of the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because He Himself was tested through suffering, He now has the power to help those who are being tested.

Bible Study

Review

At the very heart of the 'Good News' lies the spiritual authority of Christ to deal with people's sins before God, and help them in times of trial and temptation. The way that this is explained here in Hebrews is quite distinctive, and highlights the extraordinary way in which Jesus performed His task. Our passage tells us not only that He set aside all His privileges and powers to become human, He immersed Himself in being truly human, and though still God, He *'became like His brothers and sisters in every possible way'* (2:16). The phrase is memorable because it indicates Christ's purposeful intent to be like those He came to save; it suggests that Jesus had a deep and abiding affection for those He came to save.

But this passage says so much more. In many translations, verse 7 reads like this; *'so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest ...'*. You will notice that the translation above is different; it follows the Greek text by giving more prominence to the word 'merciful'; *'so that He might be merciful, and be a faithful High Priest ...'* (2:7). The text therefore says that Jesus is 'merciful' quite apart from his religious function as a high priest. His mercy is not just an 'add-on' to his work of salvation, it indicates His love of the people He met while on earth and His love for us now. We can read about this passion and love for people in many of the Gospel stories; for example, when He was *'moved with compassion'* for the two blind men calling out to him on the Jericho road (Matt 20:30-34), or His summons to John, whilst on the Cross, to look after His mother Mary (John 19:26f.).

Just as our actions will often derive from deeply held feelings, so Jesus' work of salvation has come not out of obligation or duty, but from love. When He died for us on the Cross, He did not do this as if it was a religious task to perform, He did this out of genuine passion and love for the people He came to save. Moreover, this same Jesus now lives and feels the same love towards us as he did the first disciples. His genuine passion and love for us is something we should never forget, for Christian faith is based not a philosophy or 'religious' principles, it is the truth about the one true God who loves us.

This same point is reinforced by the entire letter to the Hebrews and also the rest of the Bible. Although it is not obvious in the English translation, Greek words are used here which link what the Old Testament says about sacrificial worship. In ancient times, God gave His people a means of dealing with sins, in which an animal was sacrificed to symbolise the removal of a sin presented to God. The book of Leviticus lists a large number of ritual sacrificial acts that dealt with various sins. Interestingly, one special sacrificial act was prepared for the sins of the people of Israel, once a year on the 'Day of Atonement', but one of the prepared animal was not killed, it was released into the wild (Leviticus 16:21f.)! This is a clear indication that sin could be removed through release from death into life! There is no more powerful symbol of God's intent to save His Messiah from death and thus remove the sins of those who have faith in Him; in addition, now that Jesus has died to 'atone' for our sins, no other sacrifice is now necessary!

It is easy for us to talk about this now because Jesus' death and resurrection is now a fact of history. But we must never forget the personal cost of the Cross, and the love and faithfulness of Jesus in persisting with His task, against extraordinary opposition from His own people and the forces of evil ranged against Him. All this was obviously in the mind of the writer of Hebrews because in the very next verse, he proclaims another powerful message. He describes the way in which Jesus' suffering is a source of help to those who suffer in this life, for this is the evidence that God understands suffering, and has conquered it. This message is not the same as the message of salvation, it is more worldly, but it is nevertheless important. In the midst the inescapable sufferings we experience, we can be strengthened knowing that Jesus has suffered in the same way for our liberation and salvation.

Some may feel that all this is very 'theological', but it is not. It is just that these words from Hebrews have come alive to generations of people as they have sought to describe their experience of faith in the midst of suffering. This is a powerful, expressive and memorable passage of Hebrews.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. If Jesus came to help humans not angels, are there angels who need help, perhaps, fallen angels? What does God do with these?

2. Do you find this a helpful explanation of Jesus' suffering for you? What other Scripture help explain this?
3. How does Jesus 'help' us in the midst of our testing (2:18)? What experience do you have of this?

Personal comments by author

I continue to find it amazing that Jesus was willing to do for me what I cannot do for myself, and die for my sin. I cannot fully explain it, and I am entirely dependent upon Scripture for my understanding of it, but for me it is profoundly real and deeply important. It is extraordinary that God could have constructed a way to save me that does not depend upon me, only that I have to accept what He has done for me, by faith! I can believe in God and have all manner of spiritual experiences, but unless I am willing to accept that Christ has done what is necessary to grant me access to God, then I am as lost as the rest of humanity. I never fail to be amazed at this, however I explain it!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *There are many great places in the Scriptures where the Gospel is summarised in powerful ways, and this is one of them. Consider whether you would benefit from studying this passage and perhaps memorising it.*
- *Pray for those who suffer and find that there are no redeeming features of this suffering. There is some suffering that is hard to bear, and people need all the help we can give them.*

Final Prayer

Fill us with the joy of Your presence O Lord Jesus Christ! Clean our dirty souls, get rid of the rubbish of this world, and give us the delight of knowing that in You, we can be free to be creative and imaginative in the exercise of our faith. Praise God! AMEN
