

Prayer

Glorious Lord, Jesus Christ; You came into this world with the full authority of the Father, and You committed Yourself completely to us, the people of this world who need Your teaching, Your love and Your salvation. Jesus, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, come into our lives this day, and give us the assurance of our sins forgiven, so that we may enter the presence of God with joy and thanksgiving. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Politicians

Pray for politicians who are finding it hard to meet the demands of national life and be adequate parents, wives and husbands. Pray for any Christian politicians you may know.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who spend their lives driving lorries on roads*
- *Pray for honesty and integrity to be shown by those in public life*
- *Give thanks to God the gift of laughter and fun*

Meditation

Save Your people O Lord, our Saviour,
And help us submit to Your piercing light

Bring to light what is useless, ineffective and lazy in us
And replace it with Your purpose, power and vitality.

Uncover what is rotten, broken, and diseased in us
And heal us deep within to make us whole again.

Reveal where there is prejudice, and insecurity in us
And change our hearts to be open, secure and free.

Expose the unease, rebellion and un-forgiveness in us
And enlighten us with Your salvation and assurance.

Root out the complacency, presumption and pride in us
And restore the work of Your Kingdom, power and Glory.

Save Your people, O Lord, our Saviour
And give us the courage to face what this means.

Bible Study - Hebrews 10:1-10

¹ *Since the law possesses only a shadow of the good things intended and not the true form of them, it can never make perfect those who come to worship by the same sacrifices repeated year after year.* ² *If it could, would they not have stopped the sacrifices being offered, since the worshippers, once cleansed, would no longer have felt guilt for their sins?* ³ *But in these sacrifices there is an annual reminder of sins,* ⁴ *for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins;* ⁵ *so when Christ came into the world, He said,*

'You have not desired sacrifices and offerings,

but have prepared a body for me;
⁶ *and you were not pleased with burnt offerings and sin offerings.*
⁷ *Then I said 'Look, I have come to do Your will O God,
as it is written about me in the scroll of the book.'*

⁸ *First, he says, 'You neither wanted nor delighted in sacrifices and offerings,
burnt offerings and sin offerings,' (which are offered according to the law),⁹
and he added, 'Look, I have come to do Your will.' He removes the first in order
to establish the second!¹⁰ And by this will of God we have been made holy
through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all.*

Review

The opening verses of our reading follow on the theme of the previous chapter (9) which is about the unique sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This reading today contains a most powerful description of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, constructed by the writer of Hebrews from Psalm 40:6,7 (as quoted in 10:5,6). The writer has consistently argued that what Jesus did was far better than the repeated sacrifices of the old covenant, performed under the Law and written in the Old Testament (principally in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy). In this passage, and by the aid of this quote, he adds a whole new dimension to our understanding of Christ's ministry by the simple technique of placing psalm 40 on the lips of Jesus Himself.

In verse 5, Hebrews says; 'so when Christ came into the world, He said ...' so there can be no misunderstanding about what the letter is saying; the next two verses must be read as if Jesus Himself was speaking. We do not know whether Jesus Himself used this quote or the writer of this letter simply wanted us to hear these words 'as said by the Messiah', and perceive their prophetic power, but the effect is the same. If we accept the writer's invitation to read the psalm as from Jesus' lips, we gain his message. By quoting these words (10:5,6,7), Jesus identified with the Old Testament tradition of the prophets of later times (long after Moses, the Judges or even David and Solomon), which asserted that whatever sacrifices and offerings were given to God in worship, nothing had real meaning unless the heart of the worshipper genuinely sought the Lord (e.g. Isaiah 1 and 2). Jesus said that He replaced these sacrifices by the offering of the body God had given Him; '(You) have prepared a body for me' (10:5, Psalm 40:6). Quoting the Psalm, Jesus then went on to say that because the old sacrifices were not pleasing to God, He came to 'do Your will, O God' (10:7, Psalm 40:8). As Hebrews is at pains to point out, these words from Jesus' own lips and from the Old Testament prove his point that the sacrifice of Jesus' body alone, once given, replaced every kind of Old Testament sacrifice. And just as the Old Testament sacrifices offered worship to God and dealt with some sins, Jesus' bodily sacrifice went further to deal with all human sin, making it possible for all our worship to be acceptable to God.

One thing is slightly awkward in this otherwise impressive argument within Hebrews, which is that if you read Psalm 40:6, it actually says 'sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear ...' ! It is hard to make sense of the Psalm at this point, and is rather different from what is quoted in Hebrews! There is a long story behind this and many theories (including some that connect the Hebrew word for 'ear' with the Greek for 'body'). However, I suggest one way of understanding this which may help. The Hebrew expression 'open ear' is unclear, but it may well refer to the ancient practice of marking the ear of a slave who is so content with his master that he volunteers to be a servant and slave for that master, for life; a practice which is clearly documented in Exodus 21:6 and Deuteronomy 15:17. Now, Jesus was completely committed to the Father in the same way as such a slave, so His body was 'prepared' or marked spiritually to indicate His

submission to the Father's will. The words quoted may be very different, but in ancient thought, they mean the same thing: absolute and complete service to God.

A number of Psalms are often quoted in the New Testament (e.g. Psalm 110) because they were regarded as showing how the Old Testament spoke about Jesus before He came; but Psalm 40 is not quoted anywhere else, despite its obvious connections with the Messiah. For this reason, most Bible commentators think that Psalm 40 is used in this passage as a literary technique to make a point, and a very good point, about Jesus. However, it is quite reasonable for us to wonder whether Jesus did indeed say these words about Himself, as He did with other scriptures (see Luke 4:18f. quoting Isaiah 61:1f.), and it is only here in Hebrews that the memory of Jesus saying these words is retained. They help to confirm our belief that Jesus knew what He was doing, and that all Scripture points towards His unique saving grace.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What do you believe to be the main point being made by Hebrews in this passage?
2. Discuss in your group what may be meant by the 'scroll of the book' mentioned in verse 7 (Psalm 40:7).
3. Read Psalm 40 and check out its connections with this passage. If you have other Bible dictionaries or commentaries, check out what they say about this passage.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Total commitment is an easy thing to say, but a hard act to perform! Most people who try to walk this path discover that it means different things at different points in life and is strongly related to the practicalities of living where God has called you to be. It is an attitude of the heart, like worship or love, all of which are the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Some feel that they can only be totally committed if they are doing a full time job for the Lord, such as some form of ministry. Others feel that they can express this total commitment by being the people they are without changing jobs. Each must be clear before the Lord about this.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *What is your experience of being 'totally committed'? If you do not feel that you are 'totally committed', then talk to the Lord about this. He will show you what, if anything, is lacking.*
- *Pray for the church and the many people within it who find it hard to understand what is meant by 'total commitment', and feel that this may be some kind of 'religious extremism'*

Final Prayer

Speak to me Lord in the quiet moments offered by this day. Touch me when I need to be reminded to turn to You and choose Your way. Encourage me to exercise the gifts and graces You have given me, as a child of God. Walk beside me all the way, Your wisdom ever present in what I do and say; AMEN