

## Prayer

Gracious Lord, we worship You; come and pour out Your Spirit on us again and again. Convict us of our sins, and empower us to be a people on the march for righteousness and justice. Strengthen us in faith, in love, and in hope; and may the gifts of Spirit enable us to do Your will. May Your Kingdom come, gracious Lord: AMEN!

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Houses

*Pray for people who build houses. Building is highly regulated in some countries, but in others it is not, and people work in considerable danger. Pray for those who work in fear.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the many people you know, and for friendship
- Pray for those employed in gathering tax for governments
- Pray for the continuing worldwide concerns about swine flu

## Meditation

When everything happens all around me too fast,  
Lord Jesus, slow me down.

When everything all around is in chaotic disorder,  
Lord Jesus, bring me calm repose.

When everything I come across is incomprehensible,  
Lord Jesus, grant me understanding:

When everything I try to do seems dominated by others,  
Lord Jesus, give me humility and perspective:

When everything appears to be drifting out of control  
Lord Jesus, help me place my hope in You

For You are the Master of all, the great organiser,  
And the accurate timekeeper of all history!  
We therefore put our trust in You.

## Bible Study - Hebrews 8:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Now the summary of what we are saying is this: we have a high priest who is indeed like this, One who has sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens! <sup>2</sup> One who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up not by mortals but by the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Now every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, so it was necessary for this priest also to have had something to offer. <sup>4</sup> If He were here on earth, He would not be a priest, as there are already priests here who offer gifts according to the law. <sup>5</sup> They offer a copy or shadow of heavenly service, which is why Moses was warned as he was about to complete the tabernacle; 'Make sure that you do everything according to the plan shown to you on the mountain.' <sup>6</sup> But Christ now operates a far superior ministry, as he is the mediator of a covenant which is far better, because it is based upon better promises.

## Review

By the admission of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, this is the 'heart of the matter'. It is what the first sentence of this passage says, and it arrests our attention after the previous sections of the letter that for some, are quite difficult to understand (notably chapter 7). The focus of this passage is directly upon Christ and His priestly ministry, and even if we have to read the text with care, the overall message is clear enough. Jesus has finished His earthly work, and is now in God's presence, offering us help that is 'far superior' (8:6) to any priestly ministry known from the Old Testament. Indeed, it is a 'better Covenant' (8:6). In the context of the whole Bible, what this means is that the Covenant relationship we may have with God through Jesus Christ is whole and complete, because Jesus intercedes for us in the presence of the Father.

Verse 1 begins by telling us what we know, which is that Jesus has finished his earthly work and is in the presence of the Father. The previous verses from chapter 7 describe Jesus as our priest because of the salvation He brings us through His death, and He also prays for us before God in Glory. In this passage today, Jesus' name is not mentioned until the end, but there is no doubt that He is the 'One' referred to in verses 1 and 2. The language of the first verse is interesting, because Jesus is described here as sitting in order to serve us, whereas in the Old Testament, a priest would stand to serve! The language of this passage therefore says that Jesus is both our king and our priest, because He sits in regal authority to serve us! To a Jew, it would have been scandalous to put together the idea of kingship and priesthood; but for a Christian, this is exactly what we believe about Jesus Christ!

Hebrews then spends the next four verses (8:3-6) making a comparison between Jesus and the earthly priests of Aaron's lineage, who served God by means of gifts and sacrifices in the old 'tabernacle', first built under instruction from Moses and as described in Exodus 25 and 26. This was the original 'dwelling place of God' on earth, which was carried by the people of Israel through the desert, on their journey from Egypt to Canaan. The tabernacle consisted of a box called the 'Ark of the Covenant' and it contained the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. The Ark was housed in a small tent complex, which entered by priests when offering 'gifts and sacrifices' (8:3). This was itself housed in a large tented but open area, large enough for groups of people to gather for worship. Both the small inner tent and the large outer one are sometimes called 'the tabernacle'.

Hebrews emphasises that what was done in the tabernacle was only a 'copy or shadow' of God's greater plan, and tells us that Moses was ordered by God to stick closely to the plan he was given (8:5). The tabernacle was a partial representation of the presence of God, but it was nevertheless holy! What then does Jesus do for us as our high priest, which is so much better (8:6)? Some Christians suggest that Jesus continually offers himself for our sins, a service not available in the old tabernacle, but that is not what this passage says. Jesus' work on the Cross is finished and can never be repeated (7:27), and the awesome work He did for us is something we enter into by our baptism (6:1f.). The work Christ does for us now is that of a 'mediator' of a 'Covenant which is far better' (8:6). Tomorrow, we will find out more about what this Covenant is, though we know from the Old Testament that a 'Covenant' describes a relationship with God. For now, the word 'mediator' (8:6) explains the ministry of Christ by which He stands between us and God, and this is what 'mediator' does.

It is remarkable to think that Jesus represents us to God and intercedes for us before our Maker. This is His priestly work for us now that He is sitting at the right hand of the Father. He does not repeat His own sacrifice or make any others, but He prays for us.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss what you believe Jesus does for you as your great 'high priest'.
2. How much of this passage is relevant to people's belief in Jesus Christ today?
3. Discuss in your group how much you know about the Old testament 'tabernacle', and read Exodus 25 and 26 if necessary to check out your facts.

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*If you hold a discussion with people, you may find that they have a wide variety of views about what Jesus does for us and how He does it. This passage of Scripture is categorical about Jesus' intercession for us, so do you think that people know that Jesus prays for them today? Do you think of Jesus in this way yourself? We all know that helping people and praying for them can be demanding, so there is no question that this is an important part of Jesus' ministry.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Reflect upon what it means for Jesus to pray for you. Write down a list of what you would like Him to pray for you; He will know what you really need, but it may help you to try and obtain some understanding of what He will be praying for you!*
- *Jesus prays for us just as we pray for others ourselves. Pray for people you know who are in need, but do this thinking about what prayers Jesus might be saying for the same people for whom you pray.*

## Final Prayer

Help us, Lord Jesus, to pray for other people with care and regularity. Teach us how to pray for people who are in need; for those who have earthly needs and those who have spiritual needs. Give us a heart for prayer and true desire to see Your Kingdom come in our midst. May we be instruments of Your compassion and care; AMEN