

Prayer

Loving Lord Jesus Christ, by Your Cross and Resurrection You have overcome the problems of the world. Minister to all whose lives remain scarred by illness, injury, bitterness, despair, pain, and every kind of personal anguish. Make it clear to us where we can be of help to others or where we should stand aside, so that Your perfect will may be done for those who need Your help: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

(Offering alternatives that can broaden your experience of prayer)

Prayer ideas

Sing a worship song known well to you, and let this sing become your praise. Sing it out loud, in your mind and at every opportunity; do not be afraid of repetition, but let the song bless your spirit and your mind.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for your family.** *Pray for any member of your family who is distanced from the Lord or from His church. Pray that God will hasten the time when he or she will be willing to hear the full Gospel of God's love.*
- *Pray for the IMF as the controversies surrounding its managing director continue. Pray about this whole matter and its current implications*
- *Give thanks to God for the many people that God has saved today, from their sins, from sickness and distress, or from danger*

Meditation

How blind!

The God who has given us liberty and free speech
Through the work of godly people in the past
Is rejected by rulers who think they know better!

How deaf!

The voice of the poor, marginalised and suffering
Is drowned out in a world of aggression and wealth
Because the rich make the rules, for their own benefit.

How dumb!

The church watches as the world wallows helplessly;
Its prophetic voice muffled by self-centredness,
Its witness quashed by lack of freedom in the Spirit,

How awesome!

The Spirit seeks to heal the church's bones again,
Restore its flesh, and make God's presence known
Within a world that needs to hear its Maker's voice ...

How amazing!

The Gospel makes the world an offer it can't refuse,
Its Maker seeks to fashion it once again,
To show His endless glory, not our torrid faults!

Bible passage - Hebrews 5:1-4

¹ Every human high priest who is chosen is responsible for the things of God on behalf of other people, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He is able to empathise with those who are

ignorant or have been misled, since he himself is subject to weakness; ³ and for this reason, he must offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as for those of the people. ⁴ No-one takes this honour on himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

Bible Study

Review

In the course of yesterday's reading, Hebrews introduced the idea that in Jesus Christ we have a 'High Priest' who is sympathetic to our needs because He was human. For this reason, we can call on His help when we suffer from any human weakness; and the reason why this point is made is because Hebrews is particularly concerned about those within the church who are weak in faith for whatever reason. The letter now continues with a long section about the priesthood of Jesus and what it means.

Although many traditional churches still retain the idea of priesthood within the ordained leadership of the church, many Christian people today object to this, preferring the idea of the 'priesthood of all believers', which is found in the great Creeds, and is a loose way of describing what is found in 1 Peter 2:5-9. For this reason, not much effort is put into considering the nature of 'priesthood'. However, there is much to learn from what is said in the Bible about it, and Hebrews is the best place in the New Testament to do this. Our passage today begins to describe what priesthood is, looking at the nature of Old Testament priesthood. We must bear in mind however, that Hebrews is describing this in order to build a picture of what Christ has done for us. Anything else we learn from this is a bonus!

Firstly, a priest is someone chosen by God, whose work is to represent people to God, and God to people. If we look at verse 1 and then verse 4, it is noticeable that a priest is essentially chosen. Priesthood is not something you can just have, aspire to, or apply for; and especially, it is not an 'honour' that we take on ourselves without God's sanction. By implication therefore, priesthood requires the utmost humility; and Hebrews gives the example of Aaron. He came to meet his brother Moses and found himself called to speak for him (Ex 4:27) according to the words spoken by the Lord, and was eventually installed as High Priest of God's people (Ex 31:10, 35:19, 38:21 etc.). Indeed, Moses and Aaron were both from the tribe of Levi, and God designated the Levites as His tribe of priests from amongst all the tribes of Israel (Ex 32:38,39).

The specific job of an Old Testament priest required that they made representation to God for people, seeking forgiveness of their sins through the offering of sacrifices (5:1 and also Leviticus 1f.) Hebrews points out that a traditional Israelite priest was no less a sinner than anyone else, so in order to do their work, they had to perform sacrifices for themselves as well (5:3). However, Hebrews is careful to tell us that a priest should be humble enough to 'empathise' with the sins of anyone, because they also have their own weaknesses. You may object to my use of the word 'empathise' here, because it is an English word created only in the last one hundred years (it means the ability to fully enter into the experience of another). However, in this sentence it accurately conveys what is meant by the rare Greek word 'metriopathein' (the word comes from Stoic philosophy and is all about the balance between too much and too little feeling in relationships). Given all this, empathy is an essential quality for a priest.

Hebrews will take this further as the chapter evolves. However, what we have read has something to say to us today whatever we believe about priests in the church, and especially to those who believe in the 'priesthood of all believers'. If all of Christ's disciples have a priesthood which means representing God to others and representing them to God, then we need to be conscious of our calling from God, and not consider ourselves self appointed, even as evangelists; and humility and empathy are the key qualities required. These are not options; these are essential qualities for all who would do the Lord's work! However, we will see in the next study what Hebrews goes on to say about priesthood and Christ in particular.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss what you know about the work of a priest in Old Testament times. How does this relate to the work of a priest (in those churches that use the office) today?
2. Truly, how easy is it to 'empathise' with those who have committed sins of which we have no experience?

3. In what ways do people take to themselves the honour and glory of doing God's work (see verse 4). When and where have you seen this happen in your church?

Personal comments by author

Our discipleship follows on from God's call, and what we do depends on what we believe the Lord has told us to do. However, we all need to check out what we do against Scripture, and discuss it with others. We should check out whether our discipleship bears any relationship to the values of service and humility demonstrated by Jesus. I know that in my own life, I have had to stop and do such an exercise from time to time so that I do not just imagine that I am doing something for God when I am not. In the 'priesthood of all believers, there is a great wealth of wisdom to be found to help us with our spiritual journey if we will avail of it.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- **Something to think about:** *In what ways do you measure up to the call of being a 'priest'? It may well be that you feel the call is for someone else, but read this passage carefully and find those parts that speak to you.*
- **Something to pray about:** *Pray for those who bear the name 'priest' within the church, whether you accept that designation or not. Pray for them, bearing in mind what is said by this passage of Scripture.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, save me from imagining more of myself than is true or right. Help me to understand the call You have placed on my life, and give me the grace to accept the things You have asked me to do; then, as I live each day, may I be content to do Your will. AMEN
