

Prayers

Thoughts on prayer

Take time to listen to God. Listen for His word to you within the ordinary things of life and of this day; listen to Him in the words other people speak to you; listen to Him in the music you listen to, whether the music itself or its words; listen to Him in the background noises of the wind, the traffic, or the murmur of people talking. His Word is ever present, so today, give yourself to listening ...

A prayer for today

Defend Your people O Lord; defend them against the attacks of the evil one which shatter hopes and dreams. Empower the fellowship of the church to be sensitive to the needs of those who are vulnerable, for whatever reason, and bless those ministries within the 'body of Christ' which give real and practical help to people in times of need. We ask all this through Jesus Christ our Lord, so that working together, we may see the renewal of our world in the image of God: AMEN

Meditation

Revelation is a mystery, a gift from the Almighty, pure;

A touch of the Spirit, heartfelt, changing everything.

Some claim to receive revelations from the Lord:

Yet all they have seen is their own reflection in a mirror.

Some feel that revelation only happens to others:

And keep a distance between themselves and any mystery.

Some give the impression they have a hot line to God;

Creating scepticism in others which renders limited service.

Some believe revelations were given only in times past;

So our job now is to live by that ancient testimony; no more.

But when the Almighty Lord of All reveals Himself to you;

And touches you to make Himself known, no doubts,

Then, in a moment, revelation is no lightweight discussion;

It is real; God has spoken; heaven is open; truth is clear.

And this your revelation drives your eager spirit forward,

Christ has shown His love; He trusts you with His Word!

Bible Passage

Hebrews 2:5-9

⁵ So God did not make the future of the world subject to the angels of which we speak. ⁶ Somewhere in Scripture someone has testified these words:

'What are mere people that You should bear them in mind, and who is the Son of Man that You should pay attention Him? ⁷ Though for a little while You made Him lower than the angels, You have now crowned Him with glory and honour! ⁸ You have put everything under His feet!'

Now in this work of subjection, and though we do not see everything in subjection to Him just now, God has not left anything out. ⁹ So we do indeed see that Jesus was for a short while was made lower than the angels, and He went through the suffering of death so that he would do this on behalf of everyone; but now He is now crowned with glory and honour!

Review

SUMMARY

Hebrews gives us proof from Scripture (Psalm 8 and Daniel 7) that Jesus, a man and not an angel, came from heaven to earth, suffered for all people and has now returned to heaven from where he rules on high!

For two thousand years, the Christian church has preached a Gospel which declares that Jesus is God's Son, that He came to earth to show people who God is, and through His death and resurrection, He has made it possible for sinful people to have a meaningful connection with their God, who is both righteous and loving. This message has been preached throughout the world and has been applied in many different cultures, it has been proved in countless people's lives and found effective in its basic premise. Through the person of Jesus, people of every kind may find God, as well as fulfilment and purpose.

Yet it is not easy for us to put ourselves in the place of early Christians who could take none of the details of this message for granted. They had been touched by the message of God's love in Christ and witnessed the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. But as they reflected on what they had seen, they spent much time working at the basic questions; who was this Jesus? How does His life and message connect with Scriptures? What does it mean to call Him God's Son, is He a different person from God or part of God Himself? (and much more). The only way they could verify their faith was to search through Old Testament Scripture for answers. The result of this quest is what we are now reading in Hebrews, in which half of the letter up to this point consists of quotes from the Old Testament!

The Son of Man - connection with Psalm 8

Here in our passage today Hebrews quotes Psalm 8, a key Old Testament passage thought by early Christians to speak of the divinity of Christ. If we read this Psalm in different translations, however, we will find it to be an Old Testament passages over which there is some fundamental disagreement. A literal translation of verses 4 to 6 of Psalm 8 reads like this, and it is not too different to what we find in Hebrews:

*What are people that You call them to mind
or the son of man that you care for Him?
For You have made Him a little lower than angels
and have crowned Him with glory and honour
You have given Him authority over all you have made
You have put all things under His feet*

At first reading we might think that this is about people. Certainly, the phrase 'son of man' reads literally in Hebrews 'son of Adam', and this appears to confirm the idea that the passage is about the place of people in God's heavenly order. The passage seems to say that people are 'just a little lower' than angels in God's heavenly order of spiritual beings, but made with great potential and godly authority on earth; '*crowned him with glory and honour ... given him authority ...*', but is this all it says?

The Son of Man - connection with Daniel 7

Going further, we can discover that there is one other place in Scripture where a similar phrase is used, and this is Daniel 7; '*I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven ... He approached the Ancient of Days ...*' (Daniel 7:13). This great text describes a heavenly being '*like a son of man*' who, if we read on further in Daniel, comes before God and receives His blessing to do His work. Certainly most Christians of the first century were convinced that this passage was a prophecy of the Messiah, Jesus Christ!

In the light of this, the phrase 'Son of Man' in Psalm 8 says something rather different! It prophesies that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would be '*made a little lower than the angels*' (2:7) for a brief period of time, before being '*crowned with glory and honour*' (2:7). Hebrews then says just this so that we can be in on doubt; he repeats and explains scripture in saying, '*so we do indeed see that Jesus was for a short while made lower than angels*' (2:9). At this key point in his letter, the writer then mentions Jesus for the first time, and his name appears with something not far short of dramatic impact!

Jesus - God brought to earth and returned to heaven

Verse 9 is a remarkable and powerful verse because within it, we are given an explanation of the person and work of Jesus. We are used to this message today, but the force of this passage in the first century was extraordinary. The writer was a Jew who believed in one undivided God, and he was also someone who had been brought up to believe that anything else was idolatry and a flagrant sin in the eyes of God (according to the 10 Commandments - Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5). But he uses Psalm 8 to justify and explain his view of the work of Jesus Christ as God's Messiah.

The words are daring. Not only has the author stated in the first chapter that the man Jesus is in fact some part of God Himself, he now sets out what Jesus, as a divine being, has done to achieve salvation. First, He has left His divinity in heaven and came to earth as a human being, '*made a little lower than the angels*' (2:7). Second, he has suffered death '*on behalf of everyone*' (2:9) as God's complete answer to sin, and His provision of salvation. Third, He has now returned to his divinity in heaven and is '*crowned with glory and honour*! This is classic theology today; it describes the work of Jesus using Old Testament Scripture to justify and explain the 'Good News'.

Scripture and the role of prophecy

There is no question that the writer chose this text because as far as he was concerned, Psalm 8 speaks prophetically about Jesus as the 'Son of Man' (a phrase which the Jewish writer Matthew uses throughout his Gospel). There may indeed be different ways for us to understand Psalm 8 and Daniel 7, but the writer of Hebrews can see how they come together to say something essential about the Gospel work of Jesus as Messiah. In this way, Hebrews uses Scripture in general as a prophetic writing, capable of pointing to Jesus Christ throughout, and explaining the work of salvation to us who receive it in the latter days.

The complete work of God

This is due, of course, to the nature of revelation. When God does a powerful work in the human soul, He does this through Jesus, and in a way which is all-encompassing. In verse 8, Hebrews says that God '*has not left anything out*' in subjecting all things to Jesus. Not only does this mean that God has thought of every angle on this and has provided in scripture, beforehand, explanations of His work for us to find. It means that Jesus is to be found everywhere, He is relevant to all things and pertinent to every discussion of every passage of Scripture; and to this day, God places the evidence of Christ everywhere for us to find. We should be looking!

Application

Discipleship issues

Declaring truth about Jesus

Some people believe that saying something is true about God or Jesus is dangerous. They believe we are wise to add a degree of caution to what we say about such things and argue that the nature of God, the Trinity, or the character and divinity of Jesus are at best theories, and not to be promoted as facts. In the face of such a strong attitude within society what is a Christian to do? Do we stand back? And if we do not and back, how do we stand for the truth of the Gospel we proclaim?

Just as the writer of Hebrews looked back across the centuries to prophetic works of Scripture (Daniel) and to the hymnal of the Jewish people (Psalms), and put together his argument for the work of Jesus (something he will say much more about in coming chapters), so we should look back and make our claims that what was foretold has been proven true. The fulfilment of prophecy is a powerful argument even if some will never see it or accept it.

We believe the same as Hebrews about Jesus, because what is said there agrees with one reasonable interpretation of the Old Testament and has also withstood the test of time as an explanation of the person and work of Christ; Christians have reflected on this and explored these ideas for centuries. So we are entitled to put this forward as truth, explained and tested in real history and literature, verified by the witness of people of faith, and promoted by God who builds His church on them. Of course people will disagree, and we should not be either surprised or cross because of this. Our best witness is that of a calm heart and sure mind which rests on the prophetically revealed truths of God, content that time will always prove Him true. Jesus is our Lord!

The world subject to Jesus

The early Christians read the Old Testament with the saving work of Jesus firmly imprinted upon their minds, and as they read, the phrase 'son of man' lit up Psalm 8:4, brought new meaning both to the Old Testament text, and to their understanding of faith. Hebrews does us

a great service today by reminding us that the world we experience is not merely muddling along according to various actions of people for good or ill. It is not even subject in any complete or ultimate sense to angelic powers or other spiritual forces (2:5). Ultimately, the world is subject to Jesus, and only when our hearts are opened to this truth will we see God's loving purposes revealed within it in power and glory!

It is very easy to think of the world today as something well beyond the influence of God, steeped in sin and struggling with itself. We can even pray with the presumption that God has given up on large swathes of humanity and they are lost in sin. At the very least, this passage should remind us that in His day, Jesus could have dismissed the whole world with this accusation and return to heaven to declare the world a lost cause. He did not, but rather, with no evidence of response from his own people, he pressed on to die for our salvation, and as a consequence, has given the whole world hope. We must now pray for that hope to touch the world in which we live, for its ultimate good.

Questions for groups

1. *Go to Psalm 8 and read through the whole Psalm. Discuss what is meant by verse 4 in the translations you have at your disposal.*
2. *Now check out what you have discovered against Hebrews 2:6,7,8. Discuss the differences.*
3. *Does it matter that there are apparent discrepancies between Old and New Testament quotes of the same passage?*

Final Prayer

Jesus, my Lord and my King; revitalise Your people. Come again in Pentecostal power to turn around the negativity and distress, the unhappiness and anger, which Satan has fomented amongst the Lord's people in almost every church and congregation. Satan, leave us alone! Jesus, show Yourself anew! Thank You God: AMEN