

Good Friday 2014
The Passion According to Hebrews - Meditation

12.00

Hymn 363 Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne and Thy Kingly Crown

Hebrews 1 vv 1-14 p1201

Psalm 2

Address

We cannot get a grip on Who God is. God is so far beyond our understanding. He made heaven and earth! When we contemplate the wonders of this world, we are awe-struck. So what can we say about the One Who made heaven and earth? He did make the heavens as well as the earth – a whole realm of angels and archangels, as well as human beings and animals and plants and mountains and oceans and stars and planets. He made everything you can think of. He made us. And Creator is just one aspect of the nature of God, Who truly is infinite, beyond our imagining.

God is love and in His love He makes Himself known. He has revealed Himself in the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets. His final revelation of Himself is in Jesus. Jesus is as God is. God created heaven and earth through Jesus. Jesus is the image of God. The universe exists for Jesus. Yet it was through the suffering of death that the Son of God took His rightful place at God's right hand. It was through the suffering of death that Jesus purged our sins and opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

Angels are very wonderful and the bible says so, but Jesus is infinitely more wonderful than the angels. The bible texts, the word of God, referring to God apply equally to Jesus. The bible texts, the word of God, referring to humanity are fulfilled in Him.

Silence

12.20

Hymn 102 My Song is Love Unknown

Hebrews 2 vv 1-18 p1201

Psalm 8

Address

If you had been at Mount Sinai, when Moses went up the mountain into the Presence of God and there were thunder and lightning and all sorts of awesome sights and sounds, and if you had seen him come down the mountain with the two tablets of stone inscribed with the Ten Commandments, I expect it would have made a tremendous impression on you! If you and I had been there, however, and we had been the same as the rest of the Israelites, who were there, it wouldn't necessarily have made us obedient. The forty years in the wilderness are characterised by the Israelites' rebellions against Moses and God and the punishments which follow in consequence. Coming to church and reading the bible and all the other manifestations of C21 Christianity might seem tame in comparison with what the Israelites experienced crossing the Red Sea, receiving the Law on Mount Sinai and wandering through the wilderness for forty years before entering into the Promised Land. Hebrews reminds us

that our sense of awe ought to be much greater even than theirs. Human beings are, of the whole of creation, special. We, not the animals or even the angels, are made in the image of God. God has entrusted His creation into our hands. His Son becomes one of us. God the Son becomes our brother. God does not send an angel as His final revelation of Himself to us. Jesus does not take the nature of an angel. Jesus is one of us, a man. He suffers and dies for us as one of us. He knows from experience what it is to be us. In dying our death, He sets us free from death and the fear of death. God becomes human so that we might become divine. It is an awesome thought, an awful thought, which demands that we live up to our calling as the children of God and brothers and sisters of Christ.

Silence

[12.40](#)

[Hymn 106 My God I Love Thee](#)

[Hebrews 3 vv 1-19 p1202](#)

[Psalm 95](#)

[Address](#)

Consider the apostle and high priest of our calling, Jesus. The Old Testament looks to Moses and Moses was a very remarkable man. He was especially close to God and, because he was especially close to God, he achieved some amazing things. In a sense, he is the minister of the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, confirming the Israelites as the people of God, confirming God as the people's God. Moses, however, was just a man. He was a human being made by God, just as we all are. Jesus is so much more than Moses. Yes, He truly is a human being – the greatest human being Who ever walked this earth. Jesus is what every human being ought to be. He epitomises humanity. Jesus is the express image of God, which is the way human beings were created. He sympathises with our every weakness. He is tempted just as we are tempted. Jesus is also God. He is also the Creator as well as the created. He is infinitely more wonderful than Moses. Jesus is the minister of the New Covenant, the New Testament, under which people of all races are, through faith, the people of God and God is the God of all who trust in Him. The generation of Israelites who escaped from Egypt never entered into the Promised Land. They all died in the wilderness (except for Joshua and Caleb) because they did not have faith in God. They missed their chance. They let their day slip past. They were too timid to follow where God was leading and they never made it into the Promised Land. Hebrews tells that what we have as the people of God, with the promise of heaven before our eyes and Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, is much more precious than what the ancient Israelites had and that therefore we ought to be all the more careful not to miss out through lack of faith.

Silence

1.00

Hymn 184 Dear Lord and Father of Mankind

Hebrews 4 vv 1-16 p1203

Psalm 122

Address

In the creation story, everything is accomplished in six days and God rests on the Sabbath day. This Sabbath rest comes to be seen as a sign and foretaste of the eternal rest which is yet to come. On the Sabbath, people leave off what the Bible calls servile work – the tasks which need doing so long as we live here on earth, but may be boring or hard work. Leaving off servile work gives us time for worship and rest, time for our relationships with family and friends and with God. On the Sabbath, we do not expect our servants to work or our families or even our animals. It is a day for *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance* – the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Kept as God intended it to be kept, the Sabbath is a sign and a foretaste of heaven, not the old-fashioned English Sunday with its censorious condemnation of even appearing to enjoy yourself, nor the modern English Sunday, which, for most people, is no better than any weekday and has therefore lost its power to bless us with a taste of heaven. The Israelites did not make it into the Promised Land. They did not enter into their rest. They failed to seize the day, the day when God told them to march into Canaan. Yet, in a sense, it is always *today*. It is always the right time to seize the day. It is always the right time to believe in God and to act on what we believe. But one day it will be too late. The Word of God will show us the way. Jesus sympathises with our every weakness, but we have to play our part. *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

Silence

1.20

Hymn 398 Once, Only Once, and Once for All

Hebrews 5 vv 1-14 p1204

Psalm 110

Address

The great day for the Jewish high priest must have been the Day of Atonement. He was the only person allowed to enter the holy of holies in the Jerusalem temple and he was only allowed to do so on that one day in the year. It was the only occasion on which the sacred Name of the LORD was pronounced. There were elaborate rituals and sacrifices before daring to come into the presence of God. It is sin which divides us from God, sin which alienates. Sin is the dividing wall between us and God. It is the gulf no man can cross. So God effects the atonement. God forgives our sin. He washes it away. He pays the purchase price. He expiates. He propitiates Himself. Only God can forgive sin. In Christ God does all that is necessary. The Jewish priests were sinners like we are. They had to offer sacrifice for their own sin before they could offer sacrifice for the sins of the people. Their sacrifices were imperfect. No one Day of Atonement was final. Sin was not dealt with once and for all on any Day of Atonement. It all had to be done again the following year and the year following that. The sacrifices signified and foreshadowed what Jesus would accomplish, but

they could not in themselves reconcile man to God in all eternity. Jesus is the sinless priest. He does not have to offer sacrifices for His own sins. Jesus is the perfect offering. His offering of Himself once offered on the Cross effects the eternal atonement. Man is reconciled to God in all eternity. All we have to do is to accept by faith what He has done for us. He so much loves us and understands us that in Him we can find the means to faith.
[Silence](#)

[1.40](#)

[Hymn 631 vv 1-5 The God of Abraham](#)

[Hebrews 6 vv 1-20 p1204](#)

[Psalm 42](#)

[Address](#)

In the Parable of the Sower, the seed is the Word of God. Some falls by the wayside and is soon eaten up by the birds. That seed never would come to anything worthwhile. On the other hand, some of the seed falls on good ground and that seed bears fruit, *some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred*. I think the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is worried about the other two categories – the seed which falls on the stony ground and the seed which falls among thorns. Both these categories of seed start off promisingly, but the seed on the stony ground dries up and withers in the face of persecution or discouragement and the seed among thorns gets so caught up in the affairs of this world that its spiritual life is choked out of it and there is no harvest in eternal life. It seems incredible that, having glimpsed anything of the vision of God, having experienced anything of the Saviour's love, having known anything of the inworking of the Holy Spirit, our love for God could in any sense grow cold, but it does happen. People do backslide. People do fall away from God. They can't take the discouragement. The demands of this world are just, well, so demanding. It happened in New Testament times. It happens today. What are our resources to resist temptation, to remain steadfast in the face of opposition, to keep our eye on the ball, to continue to put Christ first in the face of all the distractions of this world? The answer is in the faithfulness of God, not to lose sight of what He has done for us, to trust Him to bring us through every temptation. *But we see Jesus.*

[Silence](#)

2.00

Hymn 214 There is A Green Hill

Hebrews 7 vv 1-28 p1205

Psalm 99

Address

This is a bit complicated. Of the twelve tribes of Israel, it was the tribe of Levi which supplied the ministers of religion. Moses and his brother Aaron were Levites. Aaron was the first high priest and the other high priests were supposed to be Aaron's descendants. There was a strict division of power in ancient Israel. Kings were not priests and priests were not kings. *Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.* Only God can exercise absolute power justly and mercifully. Both kings and priests, however, were anointed. Messiah is Hebrew and Christ is Greek for the anointed One and the Old Testament talks about a priestly Messiah and a kingly Messiah. The hoped for king would be a descendant of David and therefore of the tribe of Judah, not Levi. Jesus fulfils all the Law and the Prophets. Hebrews looks to the Law to explain how this is the case. Long before Jerusalem became an Israelite city, it was ruled by priest kings, one of whom was Melchizedec, a mysterious character from the time of Abraham. Abraham evidently accepted Melchizedec's priesthood because he paid him tithes. Melchizedec offered Abraham bread and wine. There is therefore a precedent for a greater priesthood than Aaron's and the combination of the two rolls of priest and king in one man and in Melchizedec's story there are hints of an eternal rather than a mortal priesthood. Melchizedec is King of Righteousness and King of Peace. Jesus fulfils the Law and transforms the Law. He fulfils all the Law's demands and therefore opens a new way for all believers to enter into the Presence of God. The temple veil is rent in twain. *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

Silence

2.20

Hymn 192 How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds

Hebrews 8 vv 1-13 p1206

Psalm 40

Address

But we see Jesus. When the children of Israel escaped from Egyptian slavery, they were baptised in the Red Sea; they were fed on the bread from heaven; they drank from the rock which is Christ; God led them and protected them in a pillar of fire and smoke. When they came to the holy mountain, Moses alone ascended into the Presence of God and God gave him a vision of the heavenly reality which provided the pattern for first the tabernacle and then the temple. The Jerusalem Temple with its holy of holies and its priesthood, its system of sacrifice and daily worship, foreshadows the heavenly reality of our entering into the Presence of God through the great High Priest, who is Christ, with the only offering which can truly atone for sin, Jesus Himself, to worship God in all eternity in spirit and in truth.

Under the old covenant, the law was inscribed on tablets of stone. It was something external, to read and learn and to act upon. In response to man's failure to keep the Law, fallible

priests offered inadequate sacrifices in a building made with human hands, a type and shadow of what was to come, a type and shadow of what God is doing in Christ, but only a shadow. The heavenly reality is that Jesus, our great high priest, offers Himself once and for all as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Not only is the temple veil rent in twain when Jesus dies, but the Kingdom of Heaven is opened to all believers. Christ reigns at God's Right Hand. All our prayers come through Him to the Throne of Grace. The Holy Spirit is poured out into our hearts whereby we cry out *Abba, Father*, because we are heirs of God, coheirs with Christ. God's perfect law of love is no longer an external thing merely to be read and learnt off stone tablets or parchments or books. In giving us the Holy Spirit, God writes His law of love in our hearts. It is internal – read, marked, learned and inwardly digested, *that by patience and the comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Silence

2.40

Hymn 107 Glory be to Jesus

Hebrews 9 vv 1-27 p1206

Psalm 22

Address

All this talk about blood can seem quite gruesome. The point about blood is that it stands for life. That is why Jewish people do not eat blood. When kosher meat is prepared to eat, the blood is poured out. The blood signifies the life. Life is sacred, even animal life. So, when killing an animal for food, the life is offered back to the God Who gave it. Blood stands for life. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* When the Blood of Jesus flows from His hands and His feet and from the wounds inflicted by the flogging and the crown of thorns, when blood and water flow from His side as the centurion stabs Him with His spear, when the Blood of Jesus is poured out on the soil of Cavalry, it is an outpouring of the Love of God. Calvary is the ultimate sacrifice. Calvary effects everything which the sacrificial system foreshadows. Calvary is the atoning sacrifice. It reconciles man to God. The love poured out in this sacred death effects an eternal communion between man and God, between the Creation and its Creator. This death is such an outpouring of love that it brings with it the gift of eternal life. Only death has this power. Only death can have this power as the perfect expression of love. Only Christ's Death has this power because only He is perfect love. So, once and for all, He fulfils all the Law's demands and in Him alone we have access to the Father. In Him we have life eternal. *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, by whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.*

Silence

Prayers

Hymn 108 When I Survey.

3.00

The above is all we will have time for in church on Good Friday but here, as promised in the magazine, are some points for meditation on the remaining chapters.

Hebrews 10 vv 1-39

The very fact that the offerings were made in the Temple daily and yearly proves that they were not sufficient. If anything the priests had done by way of sacrifice were in any way adequate, they would not have needed to be repeated. Human beings have this twist in our nature which we call original sin. *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.* We rebel against God. We fall short of His perfect Law of love both in our dealings with God and in our dealings with other people. Sometimes we are sorry. We ask for forgiveness. We fail again and again. The priests continued to offer the sacrifices, but none of them dealt once and for all with sin. They could not. The only perfect offering is a human life lived in perfect love. Only Jesus has that offering to offer, the sacrifice of Himself. The evidence that Christ's sacrifice deals with sin is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. We know God in Christ through the Spirit. The Spirit transforms our lives. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

To be a Christian is, by the grace of God, to cooperate with His Spirit working in our lives to transform us into the likeness of Christ. We know this by faith. If we draw back because of persecution or because we become entangled in the affairs of this world, it is a terrible thing. Christ's sacrifice is without price, but it is not without value. If we treat what Jesus has done for us as being worthless, we deserve nothing other than condemnation. We are not to give up meeting with other Christians. For all sorts of reasons, collective worship may be hard for us, but we are the Body of Christ. Individual members do not flourish unless they are nourished by the Body. Christ will come and take us home. Till then, we live by faith.

Hebrews 11 vv 1-40

This chapter is something of a marathon, but it is written for our comfort. Faith is essential if we are to please God. We cannot have a relationship with God if we do not believe in Him. Faith is believing that God exists, but it is more than that. Faith is knowing that God is in Himself and that everything else which exists is the creation of God. Faith is believing that God hears our prayers and that He answers us. Faith is our relationship with the living God. Faith is knowing God.

In order to encourage us, Hebrews gives us this long list of Old Testament heroes of the faith. We are told what they accomplished through faith, what faith made it possible for them to endure. It is an amazing account of thousands of years of faithful people finding in God the strength to live the lives God willed them to live. If we read their stories in the Bible, we cannot but be impressed, but, for all that they had, they lacked what we have got – the knowledge of Jesus and the Kingdom of God which He inaugurates. We might well think that, if we have faith, we ought to be able to follow the examples of Abraham, Moses and the rest – great men though they were. That is true, but it is more than that. We are infinitely more privileged than they were. We know Jesus. It is not unreasonable for God to ask of us more than He asked of all those Old Testament saints, and He supplies the grace for us to do all the good works He has prepared for each one of us to walk in.

Hebrews 12 vv 1-29

As Christians we have these tremendous resources. We have the examples of all these great people in the bible story. Above all, we have the example of Jesus, His life of self-sacrificial love, His life the perfect human life, which our lives would be if only we would *let go and let God*. More than their example, we have their fellowship within the communion of saints. More than Christ's example, we have His Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts. We may sometimes feel alone, weak and helpless, but in reality there are tremendous forces on our side, tremendous forces for good, making it possible for us to vanquish sin, the world and the devil.

We can trust God. If we endure trouble or persecution, God knows what He is doing. He loves us. It will make us better people.

The fact that all this is free does not mean that we should take it for granted. The mark of a Christian is love, love in our dealings with God, love in our dealings with all other people. If we fall short of love in any area of our lives, we sin. Just because forgiveness is free, that does not mean that forgiveness is cheap. The atonement – our reconciliation to God – cost Jesus His life. Our Christian calling, to live the life of heaven on earth with heaven itself as our ultimate prize, is not something to treat with anything less than total seriousness. There is a judgment and the judgment is not to be despised. We may enter into the Presence of God through Christ because He has dealt with our sins by the shedding of His Blood, not because sin does not matter. We have faith that God has dealt with our lovelessness by the outpouring of Himself in complete love for us. That is the Christian truth. It is not Christian to believe that God is too nice to bother about sin and that sinners will get off because He is indulgent. To keep Christ's commandments is more necessary, not less necessary, than to keep the commandments which God gave to Moses on Sinai.

Hebrews 13 vv 1-25

Let brotherly love continue. Brotherly love is the characteristic of the Christian and of the Christian community, the Church, and of Christians' dealings with the world. God is love. Christ became human in order that we should become divine. So, on earth, we live by the principle of love. We are hospitable to one another. We care when other Christians, maybe in other places, are called upon to suffer for their faith. We are indeed free. We are free to live in accordance with the divine love, not licensed to do just as we please if what we please is not loving. So Christians keep the commandments – faithful in marriage, not covetous, dishonest or violent, respectful of authority in Church and state, people of prayer. We know that we can trust God for what we need. *You Father knoweth what things ye have need of before you ask him.* We're not too worried what other people think of us. Jesus died an outsider for outsiders. Whatever other people think, Christians simply carry on living good lives, worshipping together around the Lord's Table and humbly caring for the needs of other people. All this is pleasant enough, but what is to come when Jesus comes again, when we no longer see as through a glass darkly, when we meet Him, when we see Him face to face, when we know as we are known, when we are made like Him? What then? Even the Bible cannot describe the indescribable, *the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* We shall just have to wait and see. Now we live by faith. One day, because of

what Jesus has accomplished for us on the Cross, we, if we have faith will be together once again with all our loved ones who have gone before us in the Lord, eternally worshipping in the heavenly temple, with the angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven, in the eternal joy of the Beatific Vision of that holy blessed and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God, Whose praises infinitely exceed our resources but Whose love welcomes us into His Presence for ever.