

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 20th October 2024

Ordinary 29

Prepared by the Revd Peter Rayson

Call to Worship:

This is the day that the Lord has made.
We will rejoice and be glad in it!

Listen, read or sing hymn 15, *The splendour of the King*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ut5LBSi-YGE>

1 The splendour of the King,
clothed in majesty;
let all the earth rejoice,
let all the earth rejoice.
He wraps himself in light
and darkness tries to hide,
and trembles at his voice,
and trembles at his voice.

How great is our God, sing with me,
how great is our God, and all will see
how great, how great is our God.

2 And age to age he stands,
and time is in his hands;
beginning and the end,
beginning and the end.
The Godhead, Three in One,
Father, Spirit, Son,
the Lion and the Lamb,
the Lion and the Lamb.

How great is our God, sing with me,
how great is our God, and all will see
how great, how great is our God.

Name above all names,
worthy of all praise;
my heart will sing:
how great is our God.
Name above all names,
worthy of all praise;
my heart will sing:
how great is our God.

How great is our God, sing with me,
how great is our God, and all will see
how great, how great is our God.

Chris Tomlin (b. 1972), Ed Cash and Jesse Reeves

Our opening Prayers:

Holy God,
holy and strong,
holy and immortal:
have mercy on us.

Silence

Eternal God, source of all blessing,
help us to worship you
with all our heart and mind and strength;
for you alone are God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Silence

Holy God,
to you alone belong glory, honour and
praise.
We join with the hosts of heaven as we
worship.
You alone are worthy of adoration from
every mouth,
and every tongue shall sing your praise.
You create the earth by your power;
you save the human race in your mercy,
and renew it through your grace.
To you, loving God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be all glory, honour and praise
now and for ever. Amen.

A prayer of confession:

If we say that we have no sin,
we deceive ourselves
and the truth is not in us.
If we confess our sins,
God, who is faithful and just,
will forgive our sins
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Let us confess our sins.

Silence

God of truth and love,
be merciful to us,
as we claim your promised forgiveness
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
God, who is faithful and just,
assures us of pardon and peace.
Amen. Thanks be to God.

Now read Hebrews 5:1-10 (NRSVA)

⁵ Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; ³ and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. ⁴ And one does not presume to take this honour, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

⁵ So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

‘You are my Son,
today I have begotten you’;

⁶ as he says also in another place,

‘You are a priest for ever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.’

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹ and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰ having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Listen, read or sing hymn 274, *Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewIpRdDU9Q8>

1 Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice,
you became nothing, poured out to death.
Many times I've wondered at your gift of life,

and I'm in that place once again.
And I'm in that place once again.

And once again I look upon
the cross where you died,
I'm humbled by your mercy
and I'm broken inside.
Once again I thank you,
once again I pour out my life.

2 Now you are exalted to the highest place,
King of the heavens, where one day I'll bow.
But for now, I marvel at this saving grace,
and I'm full of praise once again.
I'm full of praise once again.

Refrain

Thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross, my Friend.
Thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross, my Friend.

Refrain

Matt Redman (b. 1974)

Sermon

The Letter to the Hebrews in an interesting book in many ways. Indeed, it's not even clear that it was written as a letter with some suggesting that it is the transcript of an early sermon, written down so that it could be shared more widely. And we don't know who wrote (or perhaps preached) it either. Although it was attributed to Paul for a long time, it is clear that the early Church did not believe that Paul wrote it and most modern scholars agree with them. There is, of course, debate over who did write it but I rather like the theory which originated around 1900 that Priscilla is the author. You may recall that she travelled widely with Paul as a co-worker and he refers to her in three of his letters. Luke also identifies her

as a doctrinal teacher in chapter 18 of Acts. It also appears that the letter originated in Italy from time when Priscilla would have been there. We cannot be sure that she did write it but there seems no good reason that she didn't!

What we do know is that the letter was written to Jewish converts to the Way (or Christianity as we know it) who were coming under persecution and being urged by others to return to the Jewish faith.

One particular problem, which was far more of an obstacle to Jews than Gentiles, was the nature of the Messiah. Prevailing Jewish expectation was that the Messiah would be a great warrior king, riding into battle and defeating Israel's enemies. Following His ascension, they were expecting Jesus' immanent return with his conquering armies and that just hadn't happened. Secondly, the Messiah was to be a king in the line of David but the apostles were calling Jesus "The great high priest". Priests are in the line of Aaron; you can't be both!

Except, as the writer of Hebrews explains, you can. "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek," he or she writes. This is a quotation directly from one of the Psalms, the one we call Psalm 110. This is a psalm attributed to King David and it begins, "The LORD said to my lord." It is the psalms which prophesies that the Messiah will be greater than King David and which also prophesies that the Messiah will indeed be a priest. But then who is this Melchizedek? We find him in the book of Genesis. He is the King of the city of Salem – which means 'peace' - he is also "a priest of God Most High," and his name, Melchizedek,

means "King of Righteousness". We read about him in chapter 14, in the passage following Abram's rescuing of Lot from Chedorlamer. Melchizedek comes out with bread and wine, and gives a blessing to Abram.

This was some 700 years before Aaron was anointed priest and the people of Israel returned to this land and to the city of Salem although it was by then known as Jeru-Salem, where another 1400 years later the Hebrews to whom this letter was written were living. The Messiah is the King of righteousness, the king of peace, the great high priest, in the line of Melchizedek as the psalmist had prophesied.

It is clear to anyone who reads it that the letter to the Hebrews is written by Jews for a Jewish audience to explain how Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the promised Jewish Messiah. You might well ask yourself, what is its relevance to us?

Firstly, because it is written as an apologetic to Jewish Christians, it contains a lot of doctrine. In fact, the only epistle which contains more doctrine is Paul's letter to the Romans. Because of this, Hebrews heavily influenced the ongoing development of Christian doctrine

But beyond the broad influence, there is something in today's passage which is crucial to our understanding of God's purpose in sending His Messiah. As I mentioned earlier, priests were from the line of Aaron. Aaron's decedents were God's priests for the Jewish people. This is what they were called and anointed to be. Melchizedek was a Gentile in every possible

sense of the word. He is not even described as a relative of Abram but he is described as a priest of God Most High. Melchizedek was God's priest to all people, Jews and Gentiles alike and the Messiah, as a priest of the order of Melchizedek, is therefore also the Priest of all people. As High Priest, he intercedes, not just for those who are his followers but for all people of every tribe and language and nation.

Jesus offers salvation to all and his love and care for all people is something we should always strive to remember. The world is particularly troubled at this time and so, I ask each and every one of you this week to pray for all peoples of the world that we might find ways to working together for the good of all and that we might all come to acknowledge the Messiah as king of all the nations so that the Great High Priest, the King of peace and the king of righteousness might reign over all.

Spend some time now praying for the world and all its peoples. Pray for those things which are most on your heart. Finish by saying The Lord's Prayer in which ever version you find most reassuring. (I have included an alternative modern translation below if you would like to use it.)

Our Father in heaven!

May your Name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us the food we need today.

Forgive us what we have done wrong,
as we too have forgiven those who have wronged us.

And do not lead us into hard testing,
but keep us safe from the Evil One.

For kingship, power and glory are your
forever. Amen

Listen to, read or sing hymn 319, *Christ triumphant, ever reigning*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPXSILECWm0>

- 1 Christ triumphant, ever reigning,
Saviour, Master, King!
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,
hear us as we sing:
Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!
- 2 Word incarnate, truth revealing,
Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing
by your humble birth:
- 3 Suffering servant, scorned, ill-treated,
victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated,
sinners justified:
- 4 Priestly king, enthroned for ever
high in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never
stifle hymns of love:
- 5 So, our hearts and voices raising
through the ages long,
ceaselessly upon you gazing,
this shall be our song:

Michael Saward (b. 1932)

As your time of worship ends, remember that you remain in God's presence and that God's love is with you always. Seek therefore to continually rejoice in the blessings he offers while striving to serve him in your words and in your deeds. Amen.

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