

“OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST”

Imagine Meeting Christ #19

Hebrews 7:23-28, 8:1-13

August 14 & 15, 2021

Ever since the fall of humanity from God’s presence, through the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we have been surrounded by sin and continuously separated from God the Father. But in His great love for all of us, God established a way for our sins to be atoned and the separation from Him bridged so that we might find unity with God.

In the Old Testament, we find God establishing sacrificial guidelines for His people to eliminate the separation caused by sin, using animal sacrifice and grain sacrifice. These sacrifices would atone for the sin of the people, and appease the wrath of God because of sin, thereby allowing humans to be able to draw near to Almighty God and find His blessings and guidance in their lives.

In order to guide the people of Israel back into a relationship with the Lord God, the family line of Aaron, the brother of Moses, was chosen and lifted up as the ones who would be responsible with attending to the sacrifices of the people. These “priests” of the family of Levi were to perform sacrifices for their own sins, and then make a sacrifice for the people of Israel so that both the sins of the priests and the people would be forgiven. God set up this priestly order so that they could help all the people atone for their sins and find a close relationship with God the Father.

But this was not to be the permanent solution to the problem humanity has with sin. This was a temporary solution, a stop-gap measure so to speak, put into place until just the right time when God would provide an ultimate solution to the condition we have with sin.

In this temporary solution, the priests were to become the mediators of God’s covenant with the people, standing between the people and God as an intercessor. And as time went on, there became a three-leveled order within the priests to make the intercession a smooth process. **The Levites**, those in the family of Levi, became the keepers of the sanctuary, taking care of the courts and chambers of the sanctuary, cleaning the sacred vessels, preparing the various grain offerings for the people, and assisting in the worship services as singers and musicians. The Levites also interpreted the Law for the people,

but this eventually became the duty of the scribes. The Levites would also assist in the administration of justice issues and would make sure that the treasury was carefully attended. They were what we would call lay servants today within the life of the church.

The priests were given the charge of caring for the duties of the law, performing the sacrifices for the people. They were also from the line of Levi, but they were consecrated to the Lord for the purpose of serving the Lord. Only the priests could offer the sacrifices on the altar. The priests were instrumental in instructing the people in the ways and requirements of God. They received revelation from the Lord in order to follow His guidelines, and they mediated between God and the people by following the Law, first in their own life, and then guiding the lives of others. The priests were the custodians of medical lore and so played an important part in safeguarding the health of the community. They would be the ones who would determine if a person was “clean” or “unclean,” they would determine what a person needed to do to become clean once more, and they were the ones that established when a person could once more return to the rest of the community, once they were well or healed. The priests maintained justice among the people, using the Law to maintain order and regulate the lifestyles of the people. The priests were also the ones responsible for blowing the trumpets which summoned the people for war or for keeping the feasts, and they alone were the ones to bless others in the name of God. Because they spent their lives serving the Lord in the Temple, part of the tithes and offerings of the people were given to the priests for their provision for housing and daily living. Today, these would be the pastors serving in local churches.

The last order was that of **the high priest**. The high priest traced his descent from Eleazar, the son of Aaron. The most important duty of the high priest was performing the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement. Only the high priest could enter the holy of holies in the Temple and sprinkle the mercy seat with the blood of the sin offering, and that only once a year. He offered this sacrifice for himself and for the people. He had to atone for his own sin and then for the people’s sin as a whole by sprinkling the blood of other sin offerings before the sanctuary veil and applying it to the horns of the

altar. He also performed the regular duties of a priest, in service to the Lord God. But the high priest was held to a higher purity code than the other priests because he presented himself before the Lord. Without such strict standards, it could be that he would not survive the presence of God. Now, this was a lifetime role, so when the high priest died, it signified the end of an era in the life of the Jewish community.¹ And we could relate this to the office of bishop or another leader of a church denomination.

But this was the temporary solution for the forgiveness of sins. It was a means by which the people could be guided and nurtured in their faith toward a greater relationship with God. God's permanent solution for the remedy of the sin problem we have in our lives had to come in a different way than offering an animal sacrifice, where the sins of the people were imposed on that animal and the death of that animal atoning for the sins laid upon it. So God would supply a permanent sacrifice for the payment of the debt we owe due to the sins in our lives.

The writer of the book of Hebrews lays all of this out to a group of Christians who were in danger of abandoning the Christian faith due to increased opposition and persecution from the Jews. As the writer explains how Jesus Christ is the true and final revelation of God, he explains Jesus' position as the eternal high priest, greater than any priest of the Old Testament. Most of the book of Hebrews explains the greatness of Jesus Christ and His role in God's Salvation for the people of the world. Listen to how the writer explains Jesus' position as our great high priest and the importance that He plays in our salvation. Our New Testament lesson begins with the last 3 verses of chapter 4 and then goes on into chapter 5. (READ Hebrews 4:14-5:10).

The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible (IDB) succinctly puts it this way: "The Levitical priesthood, along with the sacrificial system which it maintains, finds its culmination and fulfilment in Christ. He is the great High Priest, 1) one with the Father through His eternal son-ship, yet 2) by His incarnation identified with men. Hence He is 3) the perfect Mediator of the New Covenant, who has 4)

¹ (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, K-Q, [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985] pg. 877-890)

once for all made atonement for sin and 5) opened for men a new and living way into the presence of God.” (IDB, vol. 3, K-Q, pg. 878) Let’s explore each of these individually to see the importance of Jesus for us today.

First, the writer of Hebrews re-establishes the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. Using the Old Testament prophecies, it is made clear that Jesus was with God in the beginning of creation, putting everything in the universe in its place. And He is the One who will receive everything at the end of all things. As the Son of God, Jesus has all the power and authority over the whole universe, and can create or destroy with the power of His word. Throughout His life, Jesus demonstrated this great power as He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, calmed the storm, and raised the dead back to life. We hear the powerful words written about Him, how *“He reflects the brightness of God’s glory and is the exact likeness of God’s own being, sustaining the universe with His powerful word. After achieving forgiveness for the sins of mankind, He sat down in heaven at the right side of God, the Supreme Power”* (Hebrews 1:3).

Being one with God means that Jesus is greater than any of the angels who serve in heaven. He is greater than any demon or even Satan, himself. No other was told by God to *“sit down at My right side until I put Your enemies as a footstool under Your feet”* (Heb. 1:13).

Being one with God means that Jesus is eternal, unlike any human here on the earth. Though He had a human body, Jesus was not confined to the limitations of that human body. Yes, He bled when He was beaten, He felt pain as He was crucified, and He died like every one of us will, but death did not finish His life here. His resurrected body was no longer confined to space and time like we are. He defeated death, so He is no longer under its finality.

Second, when God’s time for the salvation of the world approached, Jesus came to the earth in the fullness of God, yet humbled Himself to become confined in a human body. He is God, the Son, yet fully human in every way that we are, yet without sin. His conception was unique, however, in that He was not a product of the love of a husband and wife, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, was

implanted into a woman, Mary, to take our form in our likeness as a human. Imagine, the enormity of God miniaturized into a single cell, that when joined with the seed of woman, became a man. None of His power or authority was diminished, but the glory of God now resided in flesh and blood. He looked human in every way and was tempted in every way just as we are, though He resisted the schemes of the Devil and remained pure and holy (Heb. 14:15).

That means that Jesus can relate to everything that we go through in our lives. He had plenty of opportunities to lie, He had many opportunities to take advantage of others and satisfy His human flesh, and He had every reason to become proud about being God's Son. He could have used His power to subject everyone under His control, and He could have used His authority to wipe out all His enemies right here on the earth. Jesus had plenty of opportunities to misuse all of His divine powers for His own personal benefit, **but He chose instead to remain under God's authority** and obey His calling to be the Savior of the World.

So Jesus knows what it's like to be tempted to do wrong. He knows what it is like to be hungry and not have a roof over His head. He knows the temptation to become rich, or to lord over people with a position of power. He knows the temptations to satisfy the human passions and desires. He knows the oppression of a tyrannical government, and He knows the heartbreak of losing someone close to Him in death. He knows what it is to be completely human, but He did not let that humanness lead Him into sin. And that means that we can relate to Him in every way. It means that He is relevant to everything that is happening in our life. As God, the Son, Jesus knows our every weakness, knows our every temptation, and knows the struggles we face from day to day. So we can relate to Him because He's been here, right where we are.

Third, since Jesus was like us in every way except for sin, He is the perfect Mediator of God's New Covenant. When the people of Israel broke the Old Covenant given to them on Mt. Sinai, the Ten Commandments no longer guided the people as they needed. It was no longer by following the Law that brought salvation. There needed to be another way in which Salvation was attained. God saw the need

to bring a better sacrifice than all that the priests were offering, a sacrifice that would permanently remedy the problem with sin. So Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies of the Messiah, lived a perfect life among the people, and then gave Himself to become the ultimate sacrifice that would take away the sins of all who put their trust in Him. “...we...see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, so that through God’s grace He should die for everyone. We see Him now crowned with glory and honor because of the death He suffered. It was only right that God, who creates and preserves all things, should make Jesus perfect through suffering in order to bring many sons to share His glory. For Jesus is the One who leads them to salvation” (Heb. 2:9-10).

Since Jesus took our place on the cross to pay the price of our sin and to bring all those who believe in Him forgiveness of their sins, He is the One who then stands between us and God, interceding for us, and pleading for us. Through Jesus we have eternal life. It is through Jesus’ blood poured out for us that we find forgiveness. Through Jesus we find our place with Him in the Father’s house as children of God and brothers and sisters with Jesus.

Four, when we stand before God with all our sins hanging out, God is initially repulsed by that sin, since He is Holy. On our own we have no way of finding the forgiveness of our sins. But when we accept Jesus as our Savior and believe that He has paid that horrible price to forgive our sin, Jesus steps between us and God, and claims us as His own, and God looks through Him to see us as redeemed and forgiven, made new in Him. All our sins are washed away, and we are redeemed by the blood of the ultimate sacrifice, made once for all who will receive it. When once God was ready to pronounce us guilty, when we have Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, He brings peace between us and God, for our guilty verdict changes to innocent as Jesus claims us as His own.

Once more, we are told, Jesus “*is not like other high priests; He does not need to offer sacrifices every day for His own sins first and then for the sins of the people. He offered one sacrifice, once and for all, when He offered Himself*” (Heb. 7:27). Jesus is the perfect sacrifice given to us for the atonement of our sin. Atonement is no longer achieved by the sacrifice of animals or grains made every

day at an altar to God. Jesus has made the once-for-all perfect sacrifice as our High Priest, and brought redemption for our souls as we put our hope and trust in Him. We can't pay enough to attain forgiveness. We can't do enough good works to attain forgiveness. We can't sacrifice our time enough to gain forgiveness. We can't find forgiveness in any way but through our great High Priest, Jesus. Only He has made it possible for us to be forgiven of our sin debt, and forgiveness comes to us as we confess Jesus Christ as our Savior, our Messiah, our Redeemer and our Friend. *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

This leads us to the **fifth** way that Jesus is our Great High Priest; He has opened for all of us a new and living way into the presence of God. Since Jesus is the perfect Son of God who has come to the earth in our likeness to become for us the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins so that we might come back into a relationship with God the Father, then it naturally follows that we become a part of the family of God, even while we are here on the earth, when we accept Him as our Savior. Having been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of perfect sacrifice, all of our sins are removed from us, and we are once more able to stand in the presence of God with rejoicing. We have no need to fear God's wrath, since we are now pure and holy before Him through Jesus, our Great High Priest.

You see, we find life through the Son of God, and when we trust in Jesus, we become heirs with Him into God's great kingdom of heaven. *“Now if we are children (of God), then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory”* (Romans 8:17). As we receive Christ Jesus as Lord, we are to walk in Him (Colossians 2:6), changing our ways from children of darkness into children of the Light. We are to present ourselves as righteous before God and the people, having been forgiven of our sins and made right with God once again.

Jesus as our High Priest calls us to live our lives differently than the rest of the world; for once we are redeemed through His ultimate sacrifice, we are no longer to live in sin. We are to remain pure

and holy. We are not to continue living according to the ways of the world, but fully conforming to the ways of God so that we might be the examples, the witnesses, of the transformation that Jesus makes in us when we trust in Him as our Savior.

Jesus, through His death and resurrection, has opened the gates of heaven for us to rejoice in the fullness of God when we put our faith in Him as Savior and Lord. He has become “...*the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey Him...*” (Heb. 5:9), and we are allowed to stand in the presence of God unashamed and unafraid.

But the danger in all of this is to flippantly receive Jesus as our Savior, and then go on living any old way that we want to live. We live in a world that demands that we conform to their will and their ways, which are contrary to the ways and will of God. When we stand up adamantly against the ways of the world, we will be treated harshly, because we are seen as the non-conformists, and thus deserve the wrath of the people. We see this in our world today, where ruling powers and governments are oppressing the people of faith heavily in order to try to convince them that faith in Jesus is wrong, that we are stupid to trust in Jesus, and that if we dare live outside of their standards, we will pay dearly for it.

But that is all the more reason to accept Jesus as our Great High Priest, because He endured the wrath of the people, the torture of the government, and the consequence of living in the ways of God. He knows what we are going through so that when we put our trust in Him, He encourages us, and empowers us to live for Him every day of our life, regardless of what might happen to us.

But the writer of Hebrews warns us carefully, “*For how can those who abandon their faith be brought back to repent again? They were once in God’s light; they tasted heaven’s gift and received their share of the Holy Spirit; they knew from experience that God’s word is good, and they had felt the powers of the coming age. And then they abandoned their faith! It is impossible to bring them back to repent again, because they are again crucifying the Son of God and exposing Him to public shame*” (Heb. 6:4-6).

Therefore, trust in Jesus Christ alone for your strength. Do not turn to the things of this world to bring delight, because they always lead us to sin. Stay faithful to the Lord Jesus and remain in His love as your High Priest, the One who takes away the sins of the world. Let's pray...

Father, thank You for bringing to us a permanent solution to our sin problem. Thank You for giving Jesus to us as the Perfect Sacrifice, so that we may trust in Him and find our sins forgiven. Lead us to greater faith in Him, so that we might not be afraid to live for Him, but boldly witness to the world all that Jesus has done for us. Oh God, do not let us wander away from You! Draw us so close that we never lose sight of Your goodness and Your glory. Each day walk with us so that we might never walk alone, but always with Jesus, through Your Holy Spirit. This we pray in Jesus' holy and powerful Name. AMEN.