

Now we're going to pray and we're going to add to the prayer that I will lead in the Lord's Prayer which we can say together at home please or wherever we're watching and some semblance of doing something together as we will in due course say aloud the Lord's Prayer.

But first let me lead in a prayer. We come before you, living God, unworthy as we are, to worship you. We come confessing our sins and acknowledging before you that the faithfulness, the stability, the rock, the dependability is you and not us.

[6 : 15] For we are changeable. We go up and down. And the health and strength is not ours but yours. So we come to worship you, almighty God.

We worship you as the creator of the universe, the creator of our world, the one who shows his care and magnificence and love, grandeur in and through creation.

We worship you as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, eternal God, eternally three and amazingly and marvelously revealed to us in the coming of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit in these last days of full redemption.

And we acknowledge that our redemption will be completely fulfilled on the day when Christ comes and remakes all things and judges this world and makes a new heaven and a new earth.

So we come to you in praise and worship. We thank you for grace shown to us day by day.

Sometimes we have wonderful days. Sometimes we have stressful days.

[7 : 37] Sometimes we just hang on by the skin of our teeth, as it were. But Lord, you are the God of every day. And we thank you that every day is in your gift and in your care.

We thank you that there is no day when we do not need and benefit from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And we want to be grateful for what he did.

Help us never to forget his sacrifice, his love and his mercy towards us. And we thank you that you are the God who keeps.

And we look to your faithfulness and we turn from ourselves to look to you in these days. Pray that you will fulfill your purposes.

Pray that you will do according to your plan. May your people, particularly in these times of difficulty, may your people learn perseverance, trust and maturity.

[9 : 01] And may you be making us the people you want us to be. And we pray, Lord, for your world. And pray that you will advance your purposes in this world.

We pray for this whole matter of the virus again and ask that you will use this to bring glory to your name. And we pray that people might heed the wake up call that is provided by this virus.

But we pray, Lord, that you in your mercy would be prepared to alleviate suffering, to have mercy on this suffering world. And in your wrath, remember mercy.

We pray for governments and we pray for our own government, that particularly our Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his cabinet would be wise and just and true in the way they act.

We know there are many pressures on politicians, that we pray on their behalf that they might conduct our nation justly and wisely and well and for the good of the citizens and inhabitants of the country.

[10 : 18] And indeed for the spread of the Gospel. So hear our prayers as we pray them in Jesus' name. Amen. And let us say together the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen. And now we're going to have Scripture read to us.

Rosemary's going to read from Hebrews chapter 4 verse 14 to chapter 5 verse 10. It's the passage that we read, had read to us last week. It tells us that Jesus is a great high priest and that he is supremely qualified and it particularly lays stress on the fact that he understands our situation and condition because of his true humanness.

[11 : 34] So thank you, Rosemary. Hebrews chapter 4 verse 14 to 5.10. Hebrews chapter 4 verse 14 to chapter 5 verse 10.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

[12:34] He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

No one takes this honour upon himself. He must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest.

But God said to him, You are my son. Today I have become your father. And he says in another place, You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered, and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

[13:55] That was Rosemary Redd. I wonder whether you noticed that the writer to the Hebrews seems to be quoting the wrong text. He's talking about priesthood, but he makes a quote from Psalm 2, You are my son today, I have become your father.

And that Psalm 2 is about, well, what is it about? I guess you would know this. It's not about being a priest, it's about being the king, the Messiah, and in particular being the son.

Now, I reckon there's a particular reason why the writer to the Hebrews makes that what looks like a mistake, but I don't think it is. We won't get into that today, but you might like to think about it and think what other connections the writer makes between Jesus in his sonship and Jesus in his priesthood.

But having been prompted to think of Psalm 2, which is obviously where the quote comes from, we're going to take the opportunity to sing that. It's not the version in praise, but the version from praises for the King of Kings.

Why do the heathen rage, why does the world conspire, the rulers plot against the Lord and his Messiah. So we're going to sing Psalm 2. Why do the heathen rage, why does the world conspire, the rulers plot against the Lord and his best son?

[15:55] Come, let us break their bonds and throw their fetters off. The Lord enthroned on high looks down to love and scorn.

In anger he rebukes, His wrath with terror fills. I have instilled my King inside my holy hill.

I'll tell the Lord's decree to be his chosen one. I have begotten you today, you are my Son.

Hearts free and of the earth, east, west and everywhere, and all the nations in this world, you are my Son.

You are my Son. You are my Son. With eye and centre rule in every land full sway, the nations you will break upon my thoughts of claim.

[17:25] Let all you kings be wise, and serve the Lord with fear, and trembling joy, whose anger lies forever near.

Now kiss the sun blessed thee, destroy you in your sin. God bless our all eternally determined. Amen. So our theme is, I've called it basic priest stuff.

I don't know whether that's a sufficiently theological and sophisticated title, but that's what we're going to look at. And to set us up for this, Mark is going to read an extract of the rules and regulations for the Jewish priests of the Old Testament, the Levitical priests or Aaron priests or Moses style priests.

They are to be from a particular family under the regulations that the Lord gave Moses, the family of Aaron, Moses' brother.

[18:44] And their work was geographically situated and limited in the area of the temple or actually in the time of Moses, the predecessor of the temple, which was the tent, the tabernacle.

And there's a lot of regulations, but we're just going to have read to us a few verses about this. And please notice how much care and attention, how many details needed to be put into place to equip

these men to be priests and indeed to protect them in what was actually rather a dangerous occupation and to prepare them for their ministry.

So thank you, Mark, for reading Leviticus 8 verses 1 to 12. The Lord said to Moses, Then he placed the turban on Aaron's head and set the gold plate, the sacred diadem, on the front of it, as the Lord commanded Moses. Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and everything in it, and so consecrated them.

He sprinkled some of the oil on the altar seven times, anointing the altar and all its utensils and the basin with its stand to consecrate them.

[21 : 01] He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him. This is the word of the Lord.

Now, Jesus is our great high priest. And let's remind ourselves again of that fact. It is not simply a wonderful fact, a wonderful truth, but it actually functions as the basis of the Christian life in terms of daily, hourly, in fact, moment by moment, prayerfulness, as we relate to Jesus as our great high priest, as we turn to him for help and strength day by day, and indeed, moment by moment, indeed, as we pray.

So we're going to sing, What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. O what peace we often forfeit.

O what needless pain we bear. O what peace we often forfeit.

[23 : 23] O what fear our sins and temptations. O is there trouble anywhere? O we should never be discouraged.

O take it to the Lord in prayer. O can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness Take it to the Lord in prayer Are we weak and heavy laden? Burdened with a load of care Jesus is our mighty Saviour He will listen to our prayer Do your friends despise forsake you?

Take it to the Lord in prayer In His arms He'll take and shield you Find your strength and comfort there And now we're going to pray that God will help us to hear His Word.

[25 : 29] Let's pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Help us to hear your Word as we hear it, not to harden our hearts, not to drift, but to be stirred up to love and honour and walk with Jesus Christ all the way through this world until we reach the promised rest.

Amen. Amen. Therefore, since we have a great High Priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We're going to continue thinking about this matter of the priesthood of Jesus, the priesthood as it's described to us in Hebrews. But let me begin with some basic human questions.

[26 : 40] Who am I? How do I fit into this big, wide world? How can I be sure of thriving in a chaotic, hostile world?

How can I be sure of being a Christian? So these are very fundamental questions about human beings. I think every human asks these questions at some point or another in one way or another. And my proposal is that there is an answer to this that lies in a six letter word.

That's it. It's actually the word priest. That's what I had in mind. And I'd like us to think about that for a few minutes just now. So this is really basic stuff about priests.

It doesn't get into particular detail on the text, but it just gives us the background against which the text is working. So just to remind us, we've been looking in the Bible at the letter to the Hebrews.

It has promises and warnings. It's particularly aimed at Christian people, people who know about Jesus Christ and being persuaded. It doesn't try and persuade them of that.

[27 : 44] It works on this eschatological basis that there is a future rest. And our job at this present time is to hear God's word and to receive it with obedient faith.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. And that we be careful that we don't fall short of arriving at that rest.

And the writer says that he has a chief point. He uses a word which is to do with the head. It's all headed up. Chapter 8, verse 1, in the assertion that we have a high priest.

The point of what we're saying, he says, is this. We have a great high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne in the majesty in heaven. And so it's tied up with the priesthood of Jesus. But I'm going to go way back, perhaps I should have done this before, and just ask what is a priest, a high priest, and how is this important? So I'm just going to look at it from that point of view just now.

[28 : 48] So we're not looking at a paragraph of text, but really the basic idea of what a priest is. So let's approach it, first of all, just in a very general way. Where do we find priests?

And the answer is, of course, we find priests in all sorts of cultures and in all sorts of places, not a specifically Christian thing. There are Hindu priests. So when I was in Sri Lanka, I met a converted Hindu priest.

Buddhists. Now, I wasn't quite sure, because I don't know enough about it, whether Buddhist monks are also thought of as priests. But I just put that there as a question. Christianity.

Some branches of Christianity are very strong on priests, aren't they? Roman Catholic professional ministers are called priests. And Greek Orthodox professional ministers are also called priests. And there's a picture of them, impressive, with their uniform, hat, and, of course, the beard. Interestingly, in Islam, there are not priests.

[29 : 51] They have an imam, a teacher. But on the presumption that every Muslim has direct access to God, there isn't a priesthood. And in Protestant Christianity, we don't have priests.

So particularly Baptist ministers resist the idea of being called a priest. And they would say they are pastors or shepherds. And in our UK culture, the idea of a priest is rather a strange one.

We don't seem to have priests much at all. And I wonder why that is. I'm going to have a little thought about that in a moment. So looking again in general, what is a priest? What is a priest? What does the word mean? Now, actually, the English word doesn't help us very much. If you look it up on Wikipedia, you'll find that they say it's derived from this or it isn't derived from that.

It doesn't really help us very much. It's odd and inconclusive, the derivation. If we go into Hebrew, we're on stronger ground. There is a Hebrew word for priest, which is used very consistently, Kohen, Cohen.

[30 : 59] And if you want people called Cohen nowadays, you can find them. There's one quite famous one. That's the super cool Jewish Canadian singer-songwriter, the late Leonard Cohen.

If you listen to his material, it's steeped in the Hebrew scriptures and also in New Testament thinking as well. I hasten to say he wasn't a believer, but he was just drawing on that very rich tradition.

So the general common idea of a priest is someone who stands between the people, that's us, and whatever divine power up above.

There's the people and the priest is in between. And his job is for the benefit of the people, the protection of the people, the blessing of the people in relation to the divine power.

I'm speaking in general, general religious terms at the moment. And that, in order to make that idea work, you have to believe there is a power above. And you have to believe that the people below are somehow lacking or disqualified to obtain their own benefit and their own protection and their own blessing.

[32 : 12] They need somebody to do that on their behalf. And so the person, whatever you call them, Kohen, priest, this is a very special person and a very powerful person.

And I ask again, where are the priests in our culture? Because we don't seem to have people quite like that, do we?

And one reason is that our culture is very muted on recognition of the divine power. That's not prevalent in UK culture. And our culture is not minded to accept that we have need of help.

To find out who we are or how we fit in or how we can thrive, we're reluctant to ask for help in our culture. We're masters of our own souls. What a great mistake that our culture makes in thinking that prayer is pointless or it's, you know, we don't do God, as I think it was Tony Blair said, wasn't it? What a great mistake. What a proud mistake. And what a loss. Because the help is there if we would only accept that we need it and call out for it. And when we do need help, who do we turn to?

[33 : 27] Who are the priestly figures? Well, I don't know. I'm speculating here. Perhaps our priests are the scientists that we look to or the sociological insights we look to or the anthropological insights we look to.

Or it's really another way of saying ourselves. And what a mistake to look to ourselves instead of looking outside ourselves and above ourselves to someone who can put us in touch with the living God.

Anyway, some little thoughts there. And what can we say about the way that priests in general operate? Well, generally speaking, a priest has to have a sacrifice. They offer sacrifices to the power.

Something to please or stir or remind or placate or propitiate the power. Propitiate means to take away the anger of that divine power.

And in whatever culture it is, this gives the priest a real degree of power, human power, to grant or withhold blessing. And if you look back in Reformation history, this is one of the great things that the Protestants held against the Roman Catholic priestly system.

[34 : 38] They hated the abuse of it and would have used the term priestcraft to designate the abuse of that presumed ability to bring down blessing from heaven.

Another thing that we can say about priests generally is that they themselves need to be acceptable to this divine power. So they've got to have something divine about them.

And thus priests are often revered and feared figures. They're very special. And thirdly, sympathy. They need to be on the side of the people they represent.

You find this in institutional Christianity, don't you? A good priest, even now, a good human priest is one who loves his people and has compassion on his people.

And there's certainly merit in loving people and having compassion on them. But you keep these aspects of being a priest just in general.

[35 : 43] Now, let's come specifically to the Bible, because, in fact, the Bible takes this idea of priests and sort of sharpens it and corrects it and exemplifies it.

And it's very insightful and specific about priesthood. And so we've got huge chapters in the Old Testament devoted to the setting up and the running of a priestly system.

Genesis, Exodus, Moses. There's a lot to say. I'm not going to try and say it all just now, but I'm going to dip into a few things. So we could say that, in fact, the Bible is the expert book on priesthood and on priests or whatever name you want to give them.

Although, having said that, it's an interesting thing that when you come to the New Testament, you certainly get references to the Jewish priests that existed in the time of Jesus and in the time of the New Testament.

However, the references to Jesus using the vocabulary of priesthood are only in the letters of the Hebrews.

[36 : 55] And that's something worth exploring. Hopefully, we can look into that in the future. But the only time Jesus is called a priest or a high priest is in Hebrews. I know we say in John 17 there is the high priestly prayer, but it doesn't say that in John.

That's just something that people have said about that. And I'd like to say that the idea of the work of a priest is present throughout the New Testament, but it doesn't use that vocabulary.

But anyway, that's the vocabulary we're using just now, and I'll try not to go off in the wrong direction. Let's do a little tiny dip into the Bible on priests, because I think this is quite significant. The first time a priest is mentioned, and this surprised me looking this up, the first time a priest is mentioned is in Genesis 14, which is in fact the time when Abraham returned from defeating the kings.

It's in Genesis 14, verse 17. Some foreign kings invaded, and Abraham and his collaborators defeated them and sent them back off.

[38 : 08] Abraham returned from defeating Kedilema, and the kings allied with him. And the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh, that is the king's valley.

And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abraham, saying, Blessed be Abraham by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.

And Abraham gave a tenth of everything to him. Well, that's very interesting. It's the first mention of priests, and this is the original sort of prototype, as it seems.

The word priest is used there, and Melchizedek, so the MLK bit, Melech is to do with the Hebrew word king, and the Zedek is to do with the word for righteousness.

And Salem links, in our thinking, with Shalom, peace. So there's all these names and ideas linked to this king, who is, as I'm saying, the first reference to priests.

[39 : 33] And therefore, an important reference. It's the one that sort of sticks in the mind first, or sticks in the combined mind of Bible readers, as we go onward into the rest of the Bible.

And noticeably, he combines, then, the idea of being a king and being a priest. And he does some very specific things. He feeds Abraham with bread and wine.

I'm reading that right, aren't I? He brought out bread and wine. He blesses Abraham. So there's something in which he is, as the writer of the Hebrews is going to go on to say, something superior about Abraham.

And this is done in the context of conflict. And it's done in the context of enrichment. So actually, there's quite a full picture there of priesthood in some degree of maturity, a sort of mature picture there.

And Abraham himself recognizes the specialness of this figure. In verse 20, he gives him a tenth of everything. So surely we're going to come back to Melchizedek.

[40 : 43] But there is our first look at that particular text with Melchizedek. And it's tempting to think that here is set the ideal model of a priest, of which later versions only approximate.

But here's the real thing. Well, there's a thought. And then let's come to the first mention of priesthood as regards the people of Israel.

And this, again, I was surprised at. I'm in Exodus 19, verse 6, where the vision, if I can use that, or the summary of the destiny and identity of Israel is referenced.

Moses went up to God. This is 19, verse 3.

So I find that rather fascinating. It's about redemption. God brings these people on eagles' wings to himself. He talks about a committed relationship.

[42 : 13] If you fully obey and keep my covenant. He talks about the affection and value he has.

And these people, you'll be my treasured possession. And this summary of their identity, you will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

And I'm struck by the fact it doesn't say you will be a kingdom that has priests. It says you will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. So here, it seems to me, is the founding vision of all the people being priests.

That's what it's really aimed at. That's the fullness of this vision. Although we know that there is a subset of people, one tribe is going to be particularly priests.

And I just wonder whether we're to think of that as perhaps being a limitation, perhaps a disappointment even. It's certainly a fact.

Well, I'll leave that for you to think about. So the first vision is there of priesthood as the destiny of Israel. I'm just going to jump over into the New Testament.

[43 : 19] Because Peter, in 1 Peter 2 verse 5, picks up this and says this is a wonderful summary description of what God has for his people in the New Testament.

My Bible used to have Peter in it. And I've actually found it now. 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 4 and 5 says, What I'd separated out of people, priest, access to God, access to the people, squashed it all together.

Because this is a vision of an uninterrupted, direct access to God by the people. Each one of them is a priest. And together they form a priesthood.

In other words, they're not kept at a distance by a sort of tier of middle management. They're brought to a place of uninterrupted, direct access to God. And it is said that that is through Jesus Christ.

What Jesus Christ does in his priesthood is makes it possible for us to be priests. And that is a reformation idea, a rediscovered idea, the brilliance of the priesthood of all believers.

[45 : 05] In other words, the priesthood of Jesus doesn't make us more distant from God, but is so effective that he brings us so close that it's almost as if we are priests ourselves with no need, with no barrier, no need for a sort of middle tier.

That's how effectively he brings us together. So you and I can pray to God and thank God and receive direct from God.

And Jesus Christ does this so brilliantly. And there is certainly no need for a human priest. It is through Jesus Christ. And of course, that is in contradiction to those Christian systems that push back a priest into that position of being an intermediary and different to the ordinary people.

Anyway, so we're looking sort of generally at priests. So the word has a realm of meaning across cultures and religions. Cultures and religions have got the idea, but it's all wrong or misguided somewhere or another.

But it's the Hebrew scriptures that set out the teaching on priesthood in the most insightful and authoritative and sophisticated way.

[46 : 33] And there's a picture of a Hebrew priest. It's very comprehensive in what it teaches. And yet, as the writer of the Hebrews will be quick to say, the teaching on priesthood in the Old Testament points beyond itself to something which was not yet disclosed, but only is revealed in Jesus.

So we'll spend some time now looking more specifically at the Moses-style priest from the Old Testament. If you're wondering, you might think, I know nothing whatsoever about this, but you might have seen Raiders of the Lost Ark.

This is, to me, a contemporary cultural reference, although it's actually years and years old, isn't it? Well, there's Raiders of the Lost Ark. When the fictional archaeologist René Belloc assists the nasty Nazis, Major Arnold Ernest Taut, the thud that you just heard was the German-speaking church members falling over and laughing on the floor.

They seek to unlock the secrets of the Ark of the Covenant. And that's the priest.

It's not bad representation. In the film, the guy puts on the uniform of a Jewish priest, and there it is close up. You can see some of the features of the uniform sort of life size.

[48 : 05] So, doing it in my little pictures, here we're going to look at the basic scheme. We have, just in broad outline, the place where God lives, the house or the tent, the tabernacle or the temple.

And that is Godward. God comes down there and things go through there to God. We have the people. So there's the people. And we have, in between the people and the dwelling of God, we have this figure, the priest.

And the priest, you can see his uniform there, he relates to the people and he stands between the people and God. And he has apparatus.

Quite specifically, he has an altar. And he has sacrifices. He has a wide vocabulary of sacrifices.

And there I've put a lamb killed, because that's what sacrifice necessitates.

And the animal, in various different ways, can be burnt. And a smell goes up, a sweet savour to God, which says something to him or reminds him of something, has some effect which he is prepared to respond to.

[49 : 22] And that's very, very broad brushstrokes, what the sacrificial system looks like. Now, as I keep on saying, the religions get it wrong, but the Bible gets it right.

And I'd like to focus it down just for a few more minutes on three things. The basic need that the Bible teaches, the extreme difficulty that the Bible teaches, and the effective provision that the Bible teaches.

And I'm going to try and be quick. So let's look at the basic need. So as the Bible teaches about priesthood, it says, this is actually what you should understand.

This teaching on priests teaches the basic need of people. And that is to do with not the ignorance. It's not lack of magic, but shame and guilt of sin.

And it says human beings do have a need. We're not OK. We're not basically good, basically OK, just needing reassurance.

[50 : 29] We are wrong. And humanity is guilty. And we are outside. That's the whole thing about priesthood, isn't it?

There's a distance between the people and God. We are naturally separated from God. We are not OK. He is not naturally favourable to us.

It teaches about uncleanness. And the priestly system had a lot to say about that, which I'm not going to go into. But when I have been working, let's imagine I've been working on the car, I come in all oily, sweaty, dirty, and sit down on the nice, clean chairs in the front room, covered with oil. I put there manure as well. That doesn't really fit with this particular illustration, doesn't it? But coming in dirty, sitting in a clean place. Get out! Get those dirty clothes off.

We come into God's presence as people who are unclean. And that is part of our basic need. We come into God's presence guilty, like the prisoner in the dock who has heard the words guilty, condemned.

[51 : 43] And this condemnation is not a minor thing. The sacrificial system necessitates the death of the lamb instead of the sinner.

It's a bit shocking, isn't it? If the sinner had gone himself before God, God would have demanded his death. And the lamb dies instead of the offerer.

It's a bit shocking. But it's guilt and worthy of death. And we come to God unforgiven, you know, like the bad atmosphere in a relationship, until the person says, look, I'm sorry.

I was wrong. Please forgive me. And that, in a nutshell, is the human basic need that this system teaches us.

And until we've got that point, we, well, we're not going to be Christians. That's where you and I start off from. And until we've got that, we haven't really started on the Christian journey.

[52 : 50] We haven't got ourselves in the right place at all. Lord, help us to understand our need as we come before you. Next thing, number two, the extreme difficulty.

Now, if you think back again to the Moses-style priest, you think of his gear, his uniform. I was sort of reminded of seeing a soldier going into battle with, you know, a helmet and with armour and, you know, a satellite system here and a guidance system there and knives and bullets and guns, just top to toe, filled with paraphernalia.

And so is the priest here from his head, where he has a special hat with a gold thing at the front and his chest, which has got these jewels, 12 of them linked to the 12 tribes that he's representing.

His various layers of clothing right down to his feet. He's totally equipped to do this priestly work.

You know, sometimes people are ill-equipped.

The thing that comes to my mind is people who try to climb Snowden under winter conditions just wearing flip-flops. And they're pretty soon destined to become a statistic. It's extremely difficult to be a priest.

[54 : 19] You've got to be properly kitted out, properly protected. And you can't come empty-handed. The priest has a very, very specific set of sacrifices. They can be animal, vegetable sacrifices.

There are thanksgivings. There's prayers. There are different sorts of sacrifices. But this person can't just come any old howl. So there's the lamb. And there's the altar.

And there's the blood. And there's the offering. So this is not a trivial matter. To get this right, you need the right priest.

You need the right sacrifice. And the writer in Hebrews was at pains to point out to us that Jesus did not take this honour upon himself. But God appointed him.

No one takes this honour upon himself. He must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, you are my son.

[55 : 22] Today I have become your father. Which you remember is the wrong text for some reason. Why does he say that? And then he says in another place, you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

So there's something very specific that God has appointed to this very exacting role. And the dangers, if you get it wrong. Well, Nadab and Avihu offered the wrong incense, you remember? Got swallowed up. I think it's in Malachi. I just put that down. They offered the wrong animals, blind animals, lame animals. Well, they came with the wrong attitude.

They thought this was a pointless sacrifice to make. And the source of this mismatch between our sin and guilt and God's holy...

Sorry. The source of this mismatch is that our sin is very sinful and God is very holy. That's what makes it difficult to bring the two together.

[56 : 20] If you think it's like the difficulty of entering a radioactive nuclear site. Think of Chernobyl. Or you think of the Japanese reactor that went wrong a few years ago.

God's holiness is so extreme as to make entry into his presence potentially deadly. So who can possibly bring people like us into the presence and blessing of an almighty and holy God?

See, if somebody can do that, that is really something. And that's what Jesus does. We have a great high priest. And thirdly, the effective provision.

I think there's a huge encouragement here. You see, I've set out how exacting this situation is. But the thing is that God, who knows how exacting it is, is the very person who has set out to solve all the problems.

Priesthood in the Bible is not something that we've dreamt up. Something that we have thought, well, we'll see whether we can do this. God probably likes animal sacrifices. No, it isn't like that at all.

[57 : 37] It's God's provision for his people. It was he in the Old Testament who wanted to live with his people. I want to live with you. That's a wonderful thing, isn't it?

To be able to be close, living together like that. I want to be in community with you, says God.

Knowing how difficult it is, I'm going to provide something that will, that will make that work.

And the priestly system is God's provision. It's not our guess. It's not our instinct. It's not what we sense God would like. And if God provides a solution, he provides an effective solution.

And the Levitical system, the Moses system, it wasn't the effective solution.

It points forward to something which is the effective solution. But the principles that it demonstrates are the right ones. And as God puts this into operation through Jesus Christ, the problems are completely solved.

[58 : 42] So there is a complete covering for our sins. My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought. My sin, not in part but in whole, is nailed to his cross and I bear it no more.

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. My sin is covered because God has undertaken to cover it. This system provides a complete removal of uncleanness.

How I, a defiled sinner, can come into the resplendent presence of God is a little bit like the fairy godmother saying to Cinderella, all you've got is tatters and rags, but you shall go to the ball and you shall be dressed accordingly.

You'll be cleaned up and spruced up and you won't feel at all out of place at the ball, Cinderella.

Mind you, Cinderella had to be back by midnight, otherwise it all went back to what it was before, wasn't it?

But Jesus provides for us in such a way that there is a permanent provision. We'll never be expelled from the presence of God. We'll never suddenly feel ashamed because he completely removes our uncleanness.

[59 : 56] And there is a guarantee, a comprehensive guarantee of blessing procured. Will his blessing dwindle, run out?

Will he get tired of us? Will he go off us? Well, by God's grace and mercy, no, he won't.

The provision that he's made and the provision that continues, as we shall see in the priestly role of Christ, is comprehensive and guaranteed.

While Christ is my priest, I will never be allowed to fall away. While Christ is my priest, my sin shall never have the upper hand. While Christ is my priest, I shall not be lost.

While Christ is my priest, my prayers shall not be unanswered. While Christ is my priest, I won't become a statistic, but I will remain a dearly loved child.

[60 : 57] God will never look on his people with hatred or indifference. He will never visit them with wrathful punishment. All that is dealt with. And God is totally persuaded in this world to make his people thrive.

So, there was just a brief sort of summary of basic priest stuff. And what we take away with us is this, that Jesus is the absolute number one, tip-top, brilliant priest.

And we're encouraged to think of him like that. You want to go through those points again? He's brilliant on this matter of the basic need, because through him our sins are forgiven, our guilt is removed, our uncleanness cleansed.

He's brilliant that knowing the extreme difficulty of bringing sinners to a holy God, he is extremely competent. He is a great high priest.

And no doubt we'll see more of that another time, because it's a deep subject. And as he says in 5.11, there's much to say about this. And number three, he makes an effective provision.

[62 : 15] He does not fail to bring us to God. He will not fail to get us the help and mercy that we need. He is a dependable, consistent, expert high priest.

He does all that a high priest could be expected to do. Through Jesus, then we have the help from heaven we need to be his people, to serve in the place that he wants us to serve, to live in blessing, in a world of trial and temptation.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

So we've heard God's word together and now we're going to respond to what God says to us by singing to him and to one another insofar as one another can hear what we're doing. And this is the song we're going to sing about Jesus, the great high priest, the very familiar and precious song, Before the throne of God above, I have a strong, a perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me.

[63 : 32] So we're going to sing 503 Before the throne of God above. I have a strong, a perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me.

My name is written on his hands, my name is hidden in his grave, I know that while in heaven he stands, No part can force me to depart, No part can force me to depart. When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within, I look to help and see him there, who made an end of all my sin.

Because the sinless Savior died, When sinful soul is drafted through, The hope the just is satisfied To look on him and pardon me.

To look on him and pardon me. Behold him, My perfect spotless righteousness, The great unchangeable I am, the King of glory and of grace.

[65 : 51] But with himself I cannot die, my soul is purchased by his blood. All I can say, with Christ on high, with Christ my Saviour and my God.

With Christ my Saviour and my God. So to close our meeting I'm going to say a prayer and then we will play out with the song that we learned last week, O Lord my rock and my redeemer.

So same as last week, I hope you enjoyed it last week and I hope you enjoy it this week. But let me say this prayer and close.

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant, brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will. And may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

[67 : 13] And as I say, we'll play out with another song, but that's all from me for the time being. So I'll say goodbye just now. Bye bye from me. Bye.

Bye bye. Bye bye. Bye bye. Bye bye.

Bye bye. Bye bye.

Bye bye. Bye bye. Bye bye. is found in you alone.

Your grace I well too deep to fathom. Your love exceeds the heavens' reach.

[68 : 26] Your truth I found to perfect wisdom. My highest good and my unending need.

Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Strong defender of my weary heart.

My soul defied the cruel deceiver and my shield against his hateful dust.

My soul for an enemy is surrounding my journey. My hope when nights of sorrow rise.

My joy when trials are abounding. Your faithfulness I my refuge night.

[69 : 49] My love Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer Gracious saviour of my ruined life My guilt and cross laid on your shoulders In my place you suffered blood and died You lost the grave and never conquered You broke my bones and still ashamed You rose the grave and never conquered

You broke my bones and still ashamed Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer May all my days bring glory to your name May all my days bring glory to your name Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer May all my days bring glory to your name You died