

We all need a priest

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[0:00] see connection between those two passages. because the title of the message is, we need a priest.

! Many of you might have had some rather bad experiences of a priest.

And you might think that one of the characteristics of coming into a church like this is that you don't see statues. There aren't people dressed up in robes.

And the one thing there isn't here is a priest. A priest. And that sort of Bible, reformed Bible thinking would suggest that the last thing we need amongst us here is a priest.

Priests are bad news. Here's our first scene. It's in the book of Judges, chapter 17.

[1:21] So please turn that up again. Page 261. And here we have this man Micah. Not to be confused with the prophet Micah.

Not the prophet Micah. This is a man who lived many, many years before that time. But he's called Micah. And it's an interesting word. Because the word Micah means, Who is like Yahweh?

Who is like Yahweh? Think of having your name like that. Who is like Yahweh? And Micah is not like Yahweh.

As we find out in this story. He doesn't live up to his name at all. This is one of many, many, many strange inconsistencies and oddities inside the book of Judges.

We know where it is. It's in the hill country of Ephraim. We know roughly what sort of time it is. It's about 1100 BC. So the people of Israel were laid out of captivity by Moses, followed by Joshua, a Red Sea through the desert into the promised land.

[2:35] And there they set about subduing. And there they set about subduing that land so it would be a place fit for the 12 tribes to live there under the governorship of God. Quite quickly things began to fall apart.

And they began to lose their way. And we're now living in that time of lostness. It's a bizarre sort of story, isn't it?

Everything about it is bizarre. You don't quite know what the mother says when this son, who's actually stolen 1100 shekels of silver. And he says, I took it.

And his mother said, Lord bless you, my son. I don't know what that really means. Whether she's saying it's going to be okay. And then strange things happen with this money.

This money is sent to a silversmith. The silversmith makes a carved image and a cast idol, et cetera, et cetera. There are many, many wrong things that go on in this one chapter.

[3:43] In fact, I've noticed that five of the Ten Commandments are broken in this chapter. Five of the Ten Commandments are actually broken by the behavior of this little family.

And this is DIY religion writ large. Verse 6. In those days Israel had no king.

Everyone did as he saw fit. That's exactly what Micah was doing there. So he gets himself a little shrine. A little corner of his house. He makes a shrine. And he gets a silversmith to make household gods.

It seems to be in the plural there. And he makes an ephod or gets hold of an ephod. This is the garment that actually the high priest in Israel was meant to wear. Which had enormous significance attached to it.

But he gets himself one of those as well. And then he gets a priest. And how does he do that? He just appoints one of his own sons, it says.

[4:45] Verse 5 then, you see. He made an ephod, some idols, and installed one of his sons as his priest. And then he gets a better priest. In verse

12.

This Levite just happens to be passing. And Micah says, oh, what are you doing? Where are you from? Man tells him. Micah thinks, aha, Levite, Levite.

That's good news. That rings a bell for me. I think a Levite would be a better person to have than one of my own sons. I'll make him a priest as well. So he installs him in his house.

And the upshot of it all is, in terms of Micah's thinking, is. Micah said, now I know that the Lord will be good to me. Since this Levite's become my priest. Sigh of relief.

Tick the boxes. I've got a shrine. I've got an ephod. I've got some idols. And I've got a priest. It's all going to be okay. And he uses a covenant word for God.

[5:59] How easy is this for us to make do-it-yourself religion? Sort of tick boxes. And think that everything's going to be okay in our lives. Because we've got the right ingredients.

I'll have one of those. I'll have one of those. One of these. One of those. Put them all in my house. God will look after me. Not to be recommended.

It all goes horribly wrong. In chapter 18. You can read the rather sad outcome of these things. Read it after lunch.

It's an interesting story. I hope you get to the end of 17. You think, what on earth is going to happen next? Well, you find out in chapter 18. It's not good. But Micah got something right.

He did get something right. And what he got right was this. That he realized that he needed a priest. Because although his story is extremely sad.

[7:10] As you find out in chapter 18. And although we look at it. And we think of it as sort of laughably superstitious. And sort of a throwback to days of ignorance.

And so, well, you say all that about this guy, Micah. But if there's something worse than Micah's story. It's the story of priestless religion. Priestless religion is where people feel that they have no problem in coming before God.

Because God's just out there somewhere. So, the sort of pantheistic religions. Of those in which we say. Well, we're all just part of God.

Well, God is just such a cozy, comfortable, nice figure. And when people don't appreciate any sense of their need. Especially in the fact that they are broken.

They are sinful. They are far from God. They are not as they should be. When people have no appreciation of that. They will feel no need for a priest.

[8:30] Why do you need a priest? If you're okay. And you will have a priestless religion.

If you have no appreciation of the real God. If God is that sort of cozy figure I've just described there. Rather than a God who is utterly awesome.

Who is holy. Who is separate. Who is other than us. Who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. That happens to be the real God. And the God who has revealed himself in the Bible. But if you want to close your Bible. And try out another God.

A God who suits you. A God who is fashioned in your image. God who can be a little idol. Put in a little shrine. And kept there as a kind of comfort charm for you.

[9:43] Then you don't have a real appreciation of the real God. And you certainly won't need a priest. A priest. But when we appreciate something of our need.

And appreciate something of God's character. We know we need a priest. And so Job. Job. Job. Says.

In Job 9 verses 32 to 35. If only there was someone to mediate between us. Someone to bring us together. He recognized.

That there was a gulf that separated him from God. And that the more he understood about the God who really is there. The more he appreciated that gulf.

And the more inadequate he felt to be able to come near to this God. In the book of Hebrews it talks of God as being a consuming fire.

[10:55] God who burns up all that is unholy before him. God who burns up all that is unholy before him. God who burns up all that is unholy before him. If only there was someone to mediate between us.

Someone to bring us together. Job recognized his need for a priest. Here's our second scene. And it's found in the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem.

It's about 950 BC. So you remember that David's son Solomon. Was given this task. To build a temple for the Lord. And I want you to think about.

This temple. And the use of this temple. And I want you to think about. About what is going on in that temple. So there were actually many priests.

These Levites are priests. There are many people. Busying themselves around this temple. And there's an outer place. Where the people can gather. And then.

[12:01] In an outer place. Sacrifices are being made. And hands are being washed. And offerings are being made. And then there's a holy place. Where only the priests are allowed to enter.

Where there is symbolism in that holy place. And there's an approach being made to God here. But there's a further place. There's a.

There's a holiest place. The holy of holies. And there's a big curtain. That separates the holy place from the most holy place. And nobody goes in the most holy place.

Because that's where God lives. But once a year. One man. Is required to go there. A terrifying thought.

That man is the high priest. He wears an ephod. And on that ephod. This garment.

[13:00] This linen garment. And. There are two shoulder pads. And on those shoulder pads. Are inscribed. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Because he's going there.

Not for his own benefit. But to represent. The people. He is actually representing. The entire nation. On that one day of the year.

The day of atonement. He goes through the court. Through the holy place. And into the most holy place of all. He goes in a sense.

With clean hands. But he goes with blood. On those clean hands. Because he has had to make sacrifice. For himself. And for the people.

And so the marks of sacrifice. Are upon him. Because without sacrifice. It's impossible. For people to come to God. Without a life. Being sacrificed. There's no way.

[14:00] That that one man. Can go into that place. And come out alive. The only way. That people have confidence. To know that that man is alive.

Is because of the bells. That are upon. The tunic. The base of the tunic. As he goes in there. Little bells tinkle. And they keep on saying to people. It's all right. It's all right.

God has not consumed this man. He has not been judged. He's been accepted. This is not DIY religion.

This is the. Exactly what God said. Should take place. He told Moses. Exactly. How this thing. These things should be done.

Down to the tiniest detail. This is exactly what God intended. This is not DIY religion. So 950 BC. And so it carries on for nearly a thousand years.

[15:01] In this fashion. When the book of Hebrews. Is written. And it's written to Jewish people. People who are familiar. With this. They're familiar with the system. As it were. That.

When they read these things. This is very close to them. They understand this. In a way that you and I wouldn't. So please turn to Hebrews. Chapter 5.

And verse 1. Where the writer.

Speaks to people. Who have knowledge. Of these matters. So it's a kind of a. Common currency. For him to say. 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. I want to draw attention. To the following. Firstly.

[16:00] Every high priest. There was only one high priest. And it had to be a person. A man. Who was of the family. The line. The line. Of Aaron.

That was very specific. And required. And. It was disallowed. That any other. Should take that place. It was a single.

Appointed. Person. every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed what is appointed for?

to represent in matters related to God is a representative of the people before God Hebrews has a great deal to say about what that representation means it means on the one hand that this person is able to understand people is able to be sympathetic towards them because he knows what it is like to be a man a weak person and so that's a true representative a suitable person but also a person who is acceptable to God and thirdly this person is to be a sacrifice maker to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins those are three absolutely key qualities of the priest that God accepts and the priest that God requires a single appointed person a representative of the people before God and a sacrifice maker and so for a thousand plus years they have done this the picture is good but the practice is flawed the practice is flawed because that single person who gets used to the job and used to being able to represent the man dies the priest dies another priest comes the priest dies he can't adequately represent of course he can't he can't adequately stand for the people his sacrifices are just animal bodies and blood thousands and thousands and thousands of sacrifices have been made but there's just animal bodies and blood and so the book of Hebrews itself you have this damning verdict on all of that as good as it was the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming not the realities themselves for this reason it can never by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year make perfect those who draw near to worship if it could would they not have stopped being offered for the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins but those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins so there in Solomon's temple the priest goes in the bells ring he actually emerges relief but he has to do it again and again and again and every day the sacrifice has to be made more and more sacrifices have to be made and all the time the process is flawed in another place in Hebrews it says it's weak and useless so even this intricate demanding exhausting provision

that God made cannot deal with one sin it can't be done so here's the third scene and it's in God's heaven and it's now and there is a man and it's Jesus Christ turn again to the book of Hebrews chapter 4 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 we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are it was without sin this is what Hebrews calls the great high priest to distinguish him from all the others who have gone before he is the great high priest no one else has this name no one else has earned it no one else can be called it in this way he is the great high priest this one man and he represents us perfectly because as the writer is very careful to explain we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses like all the others that you've known but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are he's known the tests of the trials and the temptations of the devil upon him yet managed all of that without sin endeared it all so not only is he one who is able to understand us but he's one who is able to be accepted by his father because in every situation he has triumphed he has not failed he has won and he has taken his perfect sacrifice into heaven we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens or alternative reading would be he's gone into heaven the reason why he's in heaven now is because he has made a perfect sacrifice and the doors of heaven have been opened and he has been welcomed in because of that enormous and finished and completed work that he has achieved so in

[23:30] Hebrews 9 24 to 26 we read for Christ did not enter a man made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one which was the holy of holies he entered heaven itself now to appear for us in God's presence nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again the way the high priest enters the most holy place every year with blood that is not his own then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world but now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself and this is what we see at

Calvary where there is a man who has been crucified and gives his life blood but the man is the son of God and he has made that sacrifice not for himself but for us his blood has been shed for us the only blood that could ever take away our sin has been shed for us and his father so delighted with that exhausts him to the highest place and gives him a name above every name and I'm wondering if there ought to be a fourth scene because as wonderful as it is to be set in heaven there is a fourth

scene and which is you and which is here which is now because such a great provision has been made

Hebrews 7:26 says this such a high priest meets our need one who is holy blameless pure set apart from sinners exalted above the heavens we start with poor old Micah with his DIY approach let's get anybody off the street to be a priest how painfully bizarrely inadequate is that but at least he realized he needed a priest and then we have a thousand years years of God's provision God's message God's picture every year every year the priest going in but if they learned anything over a thousand years it was that they could never have a high priest who would be properly suitable for the people and properly accepted by God and never have a high priest who could make a proper sacrifice for himself and for others so the people end up after a thousand years exhausted the system's broken then on an afternoon outside

Jerusalem outside the temple on a Roman cross is one who's come from heaven to earth to be that priest for us and he makes one sacrifice and it's finished his body is broken once no more sacrifice required God so loved the world that he sent his son whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life such a high priest meets our need hallelujah and there's a great invitation which is offered in this book Hebrews 4 verse 16 says this let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need so here is a great invitation and it's made with all the authority of God's word to all of us today all of us today all of you today this invitation is made there is a throne of judgment but today it is for you a throne of grace today it is a throne of mercy today the arms of God are open wide and he is saying to you come you weary sin burdened broken needy down in the dust failures come all of you come come come because all has been sorted all has been provided the way to me is fully open those of you today who have wandered from God the arms of God are open wide there there is a throne of mercy there is a throne of grace and this is the day of opportunity it is what is called the day of grace it is the day of grace where God welcomes us he is saying to us come come just look at what I provided look at what

I have done Jesus was not put to death in a corner it was in a public place that all might see a sacrifice has been made and on the cross he cries triumphantly it is finished it is finished it is done it is completed so come all of you with your DIY religions and all your efforts to please God in a multitude of ways that you may feel that are absolutely necessary to do and God will say to you I don't want any of that I don't want any of that that gets in the way what I want you to do is to embrace the one my son the Lord Jesus embrace him bring glory to me by embracing Jesus nothing in my hands I bring simply to the cross I cling that's the way isn't it that's the only way [30:55] God has shut us all up to just this one way and Christian brothers and sisters we lose our way don't we and we substitute the things which God provides on his wonderful feasting plate for us with the sort of poor scraps of our own efforts but that's not the good news the good news is that he's saying come come welcome come find a place the only place where your sin can be cleansed come find the only place where a proper sacrifice can be made come stand near to the one who can properly intercede for you represent you before God come under his covering come under his protection come under his intercession Jesus

Christ is the priest we all need let's sing our closing song before the throne of God above ending Thank you.