

Christ as Priest (1)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 June 2024

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] On our recent holiday to Tenerife, Catherine and I went to a restaurant. The waiter who came to our table was a big, brawny, intimidating Spaniard with a very fierce voice.

And we asked him what he recommended, and following his recommendation, I ordered something I had never heard of before called chocos. When it arrived, after one bite, I realized I had chosen very well.

A moment later, the waiter returned and asked me what I thought. And as I do, rather than just replying, wonderful, I shook my head and I said, this is delicious.

Clearly, he didn't understand the word delicious, and took my shaking head and closed eyes as a sign of disapproval. With great disappointment in his eyes, he asked, no good?

Seeing his disappointment and realizing how big, brawny, and angry he was becoming, I quickly responded, yes, it really is very good, thank you. And at that, he smiled.

[1 : 16] As I thought through this interaction later on on the way home, it made me think of something far more important than a holiday meal.

When it comes to God, and to all he's done for us in Christ to secure our eternal salvation, and the blessings of our eternal covenant, by the way in which we so often think and behave, I can almost picture our master coming near and saying, no good?

We've been Christians for so many years, but so often we don't think and behave in a way that shows the wonder, and the beauty, and the joy of Christian salvation.

Where's our security, and assurance, and hope in Christ? When it comes to the cross and resurrection, our master looks at us in the eye and says, no good?

What more need Christ do than he has already done to make it better than it is? The problem with our discontent is not on Christ's side.

[2 : 31] The problem is entirely on ours in failing to experience and live out the wonder of every aspect of his saving work and his loving salvation.

One of the most underestimated aspects of salvation is Christ's work as priest. Perhaps that's because we don't have much experience of priests, and if we do, it's largely negative.

Perhaps it's also because the tendency in preaching in the modern church is to steer away from Christian doctrine, and to stress Christian living instead.

Don't tell me what to believe, tell me how to live. And yet, it should be obvious to any thinking Christian, and we're all thinking Christians in this church, that what we believe shapes the way we live, and that a healthy doctrine of Christ is the foundation of a healthy life for Christ.

So, in failing to understand and experience and live out the priesthood of Christ, we are far more likely to be Christians who think and behave as though Christ, His cross, and His resurrection are no good.

[3 : 43] Our fathers in the faith recognized the centrality of Christ's priestly work in our salvation, and so in the Shorter Catechism question 25, they asked the question, how does Christ execute the office of a priest?

How does He execute the office of a priest? And they answered, Christ executes the office of a priest in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.

Christ executes the office of a priest in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.

So, if you've got your phone, I'll give you permission to search that one up on Google. Question and answer 25, Westminster Catechism. Now, the priestly office of Christ is so central to our faith that I want to take two weeks to work it through.

Remember last week, we looked at Christ as prophet? This week, we want to examine what Christ has already done in offering Himself up as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and to reconcile us to God.

[5 : 08] Next week, I want us to explore what Christ is doing for us today as our great high priest in His continual heavenly intercession for us.

So, this week, with a view to us being entirely delighted and satisfied with Christ and His salvation, such that when He asks us, is this no good, we say it could not be better.

We want to understand what the Shorter Catechism tells us about what Christ, our priest, has already done for us under three headings. Christ sacrificed Himself.

Christ satisfied justice. Christ reconciled us. Christ sacrificed Himself. Christ satisfied justice.

Christ reconciled us. First of all, Christ sacrificed Himself. When I was an older teenager, I used to visit an elderly Christian man in the next village of Borora who had come from a brethren background.

[6 : 16] He loved nothing more than when I was with him to get his Bible out and he would turn to the books of Exodus and Leviticus and he would show me in detail how all the symbology of the Old Testament priesthood, tabernacle, and sacrifices pointed to what Jesus had done.

So, there were priests and there were lambs and there were altars and there were candlesticks and there were basins and there were curtains. There were even the pelts of beavers. And he showed me that all of them in one way or another pointed to the finished work of Jesus as our priest on the cross, what we call the atonement.

I think it's to our loss that we don't emphasize these things anymore. The central figures in the Old Testament worship of God's people were the priests.

To be a priest was to make offerings. Priests are offerers. We can replace the word priest with offerer because that's what priests do.

They offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people of God. So, in the Old Testament, priests offered many kinds of sacrifices. Bulls, goats, sheep, birds, grain.

[7 : 31] As we do of Exodus and Leviticus, we learn of all the sacrifices they offered, why they offered them and how they offered them. The tabernacle really was a slaughterhouse with the screams of dying animals ringing in the ears of the priests.

According to our fathers in Westminster, who were basing their answers on the Bible, on the cross, Christ was acting as a priest in offering a sacrifice to God.

He was fulfilling the role of Aaron, brother of Moses, the first priest. He was offering something on behalf of God's people to God.

So, Christ on the cross, think of it this way, was the ultimate offerer. But what was it He offered on the cross? He did not offer the blood of bulls and goats.

He offered Himself. He was both the priest and the sacrifice. He offered Himself there in all the beauty and purity of His righteousness, His glorious character, the majesty and dignity of His divine honor.

[8 : 46] He did not offer the blood of animals, but His own divine blood He offered as a sacrifice for our sin. Now, these are all truths we believe as Christians, but let's think through them a little bit deeply, more deeply.

The preaching of the church, and mine too, regrettably, has often emphasized how Christ was a victim on the cross. We've emphasized His suffering at the hands of wicked men and talked about what they did to Him.

We've talked about how they beat Him and they tortured Him and they killed Him, and all these things are true. But what we have failed to emphasize is that Christ was not a passive victim of the violence of sinful men.

He did not beat Himself, but He allowed Himself to be beaten. He did not crucify Himself, but He allowed Himself to be crucified.

Christ was active in it all, actively offering Himself up as a sacrifice. Now, I'm going to go through a few Bible passages. In John chapter 10, verses 17 through 18, John 10, 17 through 18, Jesus says of Himself as the Good Shepherd, for this reason, the Father loves me because I laid down my life that I may take it up again.

[10 : 08] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.

No one takes it from me, He said. I lay it down of my own accord. Again in John 19, verse 30, when at the end of Jesus' life, we read, when Jesus received the sour wine, He said, it is finished.

And He bowed His head, and He gave up His spirit. He gave it up. It wasn't taken from Him. He freely gave up His spirit, having finished the work His Father had given Him to do.

Once more, Galatians 2, verse 20, the Apostle Paul, speaking of His new life as a Christian, writes, that the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

And then finally, from our text in Hebrews 9.14, we read of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God.

[11 : 24] And put all these biblical teachings together, we have the most amazing picture of what's really happening on the cross. Not that man in his hatred, cruelty, and malice was killing Christ.

But that Christ in His love, in His faithfulness, and in His obedience was offering Himself for man. The great free church father, Hugh Martin, once said, I refuse to believe in the cross of Christ as a mere passive endurance.

Listen to these words. He did not die until He gave Himself in death. He did not die until He gave Himself in death.

The cross was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament shadows precisely for this reason the priest was offering Himself. Jesus was not offering a bull or a goat, but His own blood.

[12 : 29] No one took His life from Him, not the Jewish authorities, not the Romans. Himself He offered. Aaron the priest did not sacrifice himself on the altar, and the lamb which was sacrificed was not the priest.

But Jesus was both, priest and sacrifice, offering and offerer. There was nothing passive about Jesus on the cross.

He was no passive sufferer. His life was not taken from Him. He laid it down for us. He sacrificed Himself for us. Before we conclude that all that Jesus has done for us is no good, let's remember that Jesus sacrificed Himself because He's our Good Shepherd who loved us, the Lamb of God who offered Himself on account of our sins.

At any stage of His life and passion, Jesus could have stopped it. He could have come down from the cross, but because of His infinitely committed love for us and His determination to fulfill the promise they had made to His Father, He patiently endured it all, knowing that His was the same fate and worse than all those countless bulls and goats slaughtered in the Old Testament tabernacle.

Himself He sacrificed because He loved us. No good? Not at all.

[14 : 02] Christ has done all things well. Second, Christ satisfied justice. Satisfied justice.

Over the centuries, many people have questioned whether the death of Christ on the cross was necessary. Was there not another way God could have saved us from our sins that did not include the death of His only Son?

Could God not have ignored our sin? Could God not have developed a system of salvation like that of the other world religions in which as long as we're generally good people, do all the right religious things, we'll be okay?

The problem with that is it doesn't take into account the supreme holiness and justice of God. At the beginning, God said to Adam concerning the fruit of the tree of life, in the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.

Sin is not a small thing to God because He is in His nature and in His essence infinitely holy unrighteous. His holy heart hates sin because it is everything He is not and in His justice sin must be punished.

[15 : 23] The justice of God demands satisfaction for the sins we've committed. We've already heard what God said to Adam, in the day you eat of this fruit you shall surely die.

In Ezekiel 18 verse 1 we read, the soul who sins shall die. In Romans 6 verse 23, the wages of sin is death.

In Hebrews 9, 22 words we read this evening, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Sin leads to death. The justice of God leads and cries out to the punishment of the offender. Justice fails when someone who has committed a crime gets off scot-free. Do we not all have a sense of inbuilt indignance when someone that's a criminal and done a crime fails to get punished?

The punishment of sin is death. The justice of God's essence and nature demands it. In the Old Testament it led to the death of thousands of bulls and goats and lambs at the hands of priests who offered up their blood.

[16:34] They died in the place of the people who offered them up. The justice of God was satisfied even as the sentence was meted out on those lambs and goats, these substitutes.

But given the severity of sin against the holiness of God no amount of animal blood was enough to make ultimate satisfaction. It took the blood of Jesus himself.

The God-man whose sacred blood was of infinite worth every drop. As the children's hymn reminds us, there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin.

Only the death of the God-man, Jesus, a lamb without blemish or spot as we read in our passage in Hebrews, only that was sufficient to pay the price for all the sins we had committed.

The blood that was shed for the forgiveness of our sin was not the blood of bulls and goats, nor was it our own blood. It was the blood of the Son of God himself.

[17:48] This then is what Christ the priest has done. He has offered himself up to pay the price of our sin, to make satisfaction for it, to pay the penalty of it.

Now, this is all very technical, although it's important for us to understand. But at its most basic, we can say of what Jesus did, I committed the crime.

He took the punishment. I committed the crime. He took the punishment. In the court of divine justice, God's verdict over me was guilt.

But when it came time for the sentence of death to be carried out, Jesus took it in my place. He offered himself up as the substitute for our sins. We were the guilty ones who stood under the verdict of guilty.

We faced a penalty more serious than one we could not pay. But Christ took the punishment.

Christ, our priest, offered himself upon the cross, his sacrifice, was of such importance and of such value and of such efficacy that the apostle Paul could later write, there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[19:11] Again, with all reverence, our Lord and Master, Jesus, the one who died in our place, looks into the eyes of our hearts and he asks us about his salvation, he says, is it no good?

What more could he have done? How can we answer him? Is the cross no good? Christ satisfied justice.

And then lastly, Christ reconciled us. Christ reconciled us. Christ, as our priest, offered himself, made satisfaction or paid the price for all our sin.

But this was not the ultimate purpose of the cross. The ultimate purpose of the cross, to use technical language, was not judicial for the sentence of our condemnation to be carried out on him. The ultimate purpose of the cross was relational for there to be a reconciliation between us and God. Reconciliation is a big word, but I think we all know what it means according to the dictionary.

[20:22] Reconciliation means the restoration of friendly relations. The restoration of friendly relations. So, two friends fall out with each other.

They lose their friendship. Reconciliation takes place when those friendly relations are restored, when what came between those two friends to make them fall out with each other is dealt with.

Christ, our priest, offered himself ultimately to deal with what came between us and God in order to restore our relationship with him.

So, the ultimate aim of the cross was not judicial but relational. It had to be judicial to be relational.

Jesus had to pay the price but ultimately it was with a view to the restoration of friendly relations.

What came between us and God was our sin. That's what caused at the beginning the fall of man when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. That's when our relations as a human race with God were soured and God's condemnation fell upon our sin.

[21:42] Our sinfulness became the barrier between us and God. That's what came between us and broke the relationship between humankind and God.

but Jesus our high priest has offered himself as our substitute. Jesus as our priest has made satisfaction for our sin and paid its price.

The sin is taken away. The guilt atoned for. That which stood between us and God ever since that fateful day in the garden of Eden has been removed by the cross.

What came between us and God is gone. Jesus has destroyed it on the cross in his own body. This is where the shorter catechism is coming into its own.

People often accuse the authors of our catechism as doer intellectual Puritans who were only interested in doctrine and getting all the doctrinal I's dotted and the T's crossed and making sure that nobody danced.

[22 : 45] You know the reality was really very different. The Puritans and those who helped them frame the catechism were ultimately interested in one thing and one thing only. Knowing God.

They didn't just want to know about Him. They didn't just want to know how to be saved. What they longed for was a deep personal experience of the beauties and the wonders of knowing the God of all glory and love.

And that is why the high point of their discussion on the priesthood of Christ is about reconciliation, the restoration of friendly relations with God.

Without the reconciling work of Christ there could be no deep experience of the beauties of God. We would all have been strangers to God forever. and so they were at pains to point out how the priestly work of Christ on the cross by sacrificing Himself to satisfy the divine justice of God had this ultimate effect.

it restored friendly relationships between us and God. It opened the way to know God as He really is. We've already used the word satisfied to describe the way in which Jesus has paid our penalty but we can use the word satisfied in its proper sense now because when we come to know God as He really is we enjoy the true satisfaction of His presence with us His smile upon us and His hope within our hearts.

[24 : 30] The Shorter Catechism begins with the question what is man's chief end? To which it answers man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. What is the primary purpose of humankind?

What is your purpose in life and my purpose in life? What is it that will give you the ultimate satisfaction and make your life worth living? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We can neither glorify God nor enjoy Him unless we know Him as He really is. Only then will we find our true purpose in life and have ultimate satisfaction and we cannot know God as He is unless God the Son, Jesus Christ, should have offered Himself as our priest, paid the price of our sin and reconciled us to Him.

We see then, don't we, the loving wisdom of God in our salvation. For as we close, I want us to recognize none of this was our idea as human beings, not even the smallest iota was our idea as human beings.

we did reach up to God with our moral efforts and our religious observances. God reached down to us. God in His love for us sent His Son to be our priest, to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

[25 : 56] In love, the Son of God gave Himself for us on the cross. On that holiday in Tenerife, the waiter approached me and said, no good.

Given the loving wisdom of God in planning our salvation, and given the loving determination of Jesus to offer Himself as the sacrifice for all our sins so that we can know and experience God in the splendor of His majesty, with all reverence, He comes to us this evening and He says, no good. Really, really, really is all Jesus has done for us, no good. Or is it so good that we'll all bow down before Him and in faith and trust commit our lives to Him, serving Him hopefully and knowing Him joyfully?