

Jesus, Our Great High Priest (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] Now, back in June and July, I looked on two Sundays at Jesus' great high priestly prayer in John 17.

I'll not question you to see how many of you remember it. But we're going to be thinking today about the high priest himself, our perfect high priest.

And we're going to be thinking about his qualifications as a high priest, his capabilities as high priest, and his intercession as high priest.

And we're going to see how he has been chosen from among men and appointed by God and was morally and spiritually perfect.

In the children's story, I told you how Richard, the soldier, needed a go-between before he could get to the president.

[1 : 08] And those who have understood, even a little, the greatness and holiness of God and the sinfulness of men and women, our own sinfulness, we have always felt that we dare not approach God directly.

The hymn writer wrote, Eternal light, eternal light, how pure the soul must be when faced within that searching light, it shrinks not but with candlelight, can live and look on thee.

How can I, a sinner, approach a holy God? We need an advocate, a go-between, someone who will stand between us and the awful holiness of God.

Job felt that need in his trouble. In Job 9, verse 33, he said, If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand on us both.

He felt a need, you see, for a go-between. Now, in the Old Testament, the priests were there to be that intermediary between men and God.

[2 : 34] And the whole story of the Old Testament as it approaches Jesus' birth and life was to help the people of Israel understand that they were too sinful to approach God directly.

They needed this, they needed a go-between, an arbitrator. And then God gave them. He gave them Aaron and his sons as priests to offer sacrifices before God.

The priests were to approach God on behalf of men, to act on behalf of men in relation to God, as we read in that passage there.

But even they couldn't approach God on their own, in their own righteousness, because they too were sinners. They needed to be continually offering sacrifices for their own sins.

And they were models of a great high priest who was to come. They were a shadow, we're told, a shadow of the reality that was to come.

[3 : 45] They were men who died. They were men who were sinful. They could never be the high priest that we need. And they pointed to a better high priest.

So God himself provided that high priest, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament high priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement with sacrifices to offer sacrifices of lambs and goats which could never take away sin.

Jesus offered himself once for all for all our sins. in the hymn of the Road. Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away its stain.

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb, takes all our sins away a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than name.

Christ, the heavenly Lamb, the high priest and the sacrifice. He is the high priest that we need. Now I'm going to be looking at Hebrews 4.

[5 : 02] If you've got your Bible there you might want to follow along. It's one of the defects of this present moment when we don't have the church Bibles. We need to bring our own. But if you haven't got one you just have to follow along by listening.

As I said to you before, we're going to see three things from this passage this morning. We're going to see Christ's qualifications as high priest, his capabilities as high priest, and we're going to see his intercession as high priest.

We're going to see that this afternoon because we're going to be carrying on with the subject this afternoon as well. So first of all then, Christ's qualifications as high priest.

If you look at Hebrews 5 verses 1 and 2 we read that every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward since he himself is beset with weakness. So what are the essential qualities of a high priest as we find them here?

[6 : 23] Well the first one is he is chosen from among men. Right? He has to be one of us. The Jewish priests were clearly one from men.

They were sinful men. And Jesus became a man. Fully man. He became a man so that he could feel our need.

He could experience our need. And he could have compassion on us. And he could be that intermediary.

That one who it was men who had sinned. And it was men who had to offer a sacrifice for sin. So Jesus had to become a man. And in becoming a man he knew weakness and tiredness himself in his life on earth.

You remember he sat by the well with the Samaritan woman at Sychar and asked the woman for a drink. He knew thirst. He knew tiredness as he walked the dusty hot roads of Palestine.

[7 : 30] He came as a working man not as a prince in a palace. He was a joiner not a king. He knew poverty and care. He knew temptation.

He was tempted in every way that we are yet without sin. He experienced what it is to be a man.

So he met the qualifications that are given in Hebrews chapter 2 where we read too that he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and fearful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

For because he himself has suffered when tempted he is able to help those who are being tempted. He had to be made like his brothers in every way including temptation.

He has known weakness and temptation. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward.

[8 : 46] Deal gently. Isn't that a lovely description of Jesus' dealings with us? Makes us think of that prophesy for the Messiah in Isaiah 42 where we read that a bruised not quench.

Jesus deals gently. He doesn't snuff out the wick that's nearly gone. He doesn't break the reed.

He's gently with us. And there's when you've failed him.

When you feel your weakness and need that our Jesus is the same gently doesn't mean that he condones sin or failure.

No. But nor is it being harsh and unforgiving to human weakness. Perhaps the woman taken in adultery is a good example of how Jesus deals with sin.

The men, the Pharisees that were there, they wanted to stone her. But Jesus, he didn't. he said, when they'd all gone away, convicted of their own sinfulness, he looked at her and he said, does no one condemn you?

[10 : 10] And she said, no, Lord. And he said, neither do I condemn you. He was gentle with her. Go and sin no more. Go and sin no more.

He doesn't condone sin, but he is patient, he is forgiving. And which of us is not thankful for that patience and mercy of God on the day when we sin and when we fall?

There is no place where our sorrows are more felt than up in heaven. There is no place where our feelings have such kindly judgments given.

So, he had to become a man chosen from among us. The second thing was he must be appointed by God.

Now, he wants the passage we read together, Hebrews 5 and 4, we read, no one takes his honor on himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

[11 : 14] So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, you are my son, today I have begotten you.

And in another place, you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Appointed by God, a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Now, Melchizedek, we can't spend too long thinking about Melchizedek today. He was the priest who met Abraham. Abraham gave him a tithe, which showed that he was greater than Abraham, but we don't know all that much about him.

We know there's no record of his birth or of his death. So he's a picture of one who remains a priest continually as Jesus was. He was greater than Abraham, he was greater than Levi, he was greater than Aaron.

So Jesus is appointed a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. You see, God himself provided the mediator that we need in Jesus.

[12:33] Before we even knew our need or reached out towards God, he was reaching out to us. He had appointed Jesus as a priest forever, even for the foundation of the world.

It's because he loves us, because we might know him. He appointed Jesus to be that priest for us. He was appointed by God.

Thirdly, he was morally and spiritually qualified. Hebrews 7, verse 24 tells us that he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever.

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separate from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

Our Jesus never sinned. He fulfilled his whole duty to God. He was entirely without guile and sin. He experienced the blast of temptation, but he never sinned.

[14:03] He is the one man who never sinned. He is innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, able to enter the very throne room of heaven, and yet he was a man, a man able to sympathize with us.

He didn't need to offer sacrifices for his own sins because he never had any. He offered one sacrifice once for all, for us.

He is our great high priest. The writer to the Hebrews summarizes where he's got to in Hebrews 8 verse 1. He says, we have such a high priest, one that we need, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God, throne of the majesty in heaven.

He sat down. In the Bible that tells us that his work was done. The work of redemption was finished, but not his work of high priest. He carries on with that.

So we see that he was taken from among men, he knows our situation, he was appointed by God, he was morally and spiritually perfect. I want us to think a bit about his capabilities as high priest.

[15:26] Capabilities as high priest. The first thing I want to say is that he is able to support us. We read already that verse from chapter 2, verse 18, I think we did anyway, for because he himself had suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Because he was truly man, our Lord is able to meet man, men, at the point of our human need, to give assistance, and to support us when we face temptation or hardship and distress.

You know, we have no strength of our own in this. We cannot stand. Like Paul, we will find that we are weak and that his strength is made perfect in weakness.

Often we're willing to help those who suffer, but we find we cannot. We're unable to help, we don't have the skills. Jesus, our great high priest, knows no such limitations.

He is able to help us. He is able to support us. Second thing is, he's able to sympathize. We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize.

[16:58] as we read together that verse, we are weak. We are not tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then draw confidence, with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We are approaching a high priest who can sympathize with us. sympathy is the ability to enter into the experiences of another as if they were one's own.

Sympathy is the deepest when one has suffered the same experience. So there's a Jesus who has known temptation, there's no weakness, he is able to enter into our trials and hardships and temptations.

and sympathize with us. Touched with the sympathy within, he knows our feeble frame, he knows what sore temptations mean, for he has felt the same.

He sympathizes with our weakness. And when you come to Jesus in your need, he sympathizes with you. And he's able to see us.

[18 : 22] well, you know that, don't we? He's the Savior. Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Grace to help is always available. He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him. He always lives to make intercession for them.

He's never out of earshot. You know, you phone somebody up and they don't answer the phone. They've left it somewhere in a corner or it's on charge or they're out of the house and they haven't taken it with them.

He's never out of contact. He's never asleep. He's always able to save. Now, this means that Jesus is able to save us from the consequences of our sins.

We need him as a saviour. Don't believe we're sinners. We need to come and find him as saviour and lord and king. That's true.

[19 : 36] He always is able to save to the uttermost. There's no sinner that he cannot. He will not forgive. He is not his death. He's adequate for the worst of sins.

He is able to save. But it also means that he's able to bring us safely to heaven, to the final completion of our Christian lives.

To say that he's able to save to the uttermost, it wouldn't be true if once heaven forgiven us and adopted us into his family. He was incapable of keeping us and bringing us safe to glory.

He is. He is the one who is able to bring us safe to glory. He is able to save to the uttermost.

Someone has said that faith in Christ to save us today includes faith that he will keep us tomorrow.

Faith in Christ to save us today includes faith that he will keep us tomorrow. Our high priest is able to save completely.

[20 : 58] No personal problem for which he's no solution. No enemy from which he cannot rescue. No sin from which he cannot deliver. No temptation, but he is able to strengthen us.

Why? Because he ever lives to make intercession for us. He saves to the uttermost and he will keep us to the day when he presents us faultless.

Faultless. We're not faultless now, but one day he presents us faultless before his father with great joy. So we have Jesus, our high priest.

He's a man, one of us, he's appointed by God, made like unto us in every way, but without sin, spiritually qualified to be that high priest, able to support us, able to save, to sympathize, and able to save to the uttermost.

This is our high priest. Him writer wrote, Before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea, a great high priest, whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me.

[22 : 16] My name is written on his hands, my name is written on his heart. I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me thence depart. May God bless his word to all our hearts today.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for that great high priest, our Lord Jesus, that he stands in heaven, that he intercedes for us, he always intercedes for us, and he ever lives for us.

We thank you for him, Lord. And Lord, we thank you that those of us who know you as our saviour, he is our saviour, he is our high priest. And we thank you if there is anyone here who doesn't know you as their saviour, that he is willing, that he invites them to come.

So Lord, bless your word to our hearts this morning. Encourage us, help us to live like those who have a great high priest always interceding for us.

We pray Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.