

Jesus Our Priest - the Requirements

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn to Hebrews now, the letter to the Hebrews, and today we're looking at chapter 8 and the first couple of verses. We're looking this morning and indeed this evening at the theme of Jesus as our priest, or our high priest particularly.

Last week we looked at Jesus our King, and we're looking at Jesus our priest today. And that's mostly from this epistle, or entirely from the epistle to the Hebrews.

So we're going to look at these verses in chapter 8, but also we'll include some verses as we go along from other parts of Hebrews as well, just to fill in the details we have in this great epistle about this great subject of Jesus our high priest.

Now it helps always to know a shorter catechism, and most of us will have learned this particular catechism, number 25. Some of us have maybe forgotten it, but nevertheless it will come back to us, I'm sure, as you revisit it.

How does Christ execute the office of a priest? Christ executes the office of a priest in his once offering up of himself sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, to reconcile us to God, and in continuing to make intercession, or making continual intercession for us.

[1 : 2 5] So that's a summary, really, of how Christ exercises the office of a high priest, as it used to be put. And of course, office, we understand, some of the younger ones may think that an office is just something you have desks in, and that you go to if that's the kind of work you've got.

But of course, office in this means the kind of function that Jesus has as a priest for his people. He fills the office of a priest.

You could say that a minister has the office of a minister. An elder has the office of an elder. That's what their office, that's what their position is. And as far as Jesus is concerned, he has three offices.

There are three particular functions, or three positions that he has, all of them together in himself. The king, as we saw last time, the priest, high priest today, and also he has the office of a prophet.

We'll maybe come back, God willing, next week to look at the office of a prophet and how Jesus functions in that. Because it's so important for us to really understand our salvation that we understand what's at the heart of our salvation, what's at the very basis or foundation of our salvation.

[2 : 3 8] And of course, Jesus himself is at the basis of as the foundation or central to our salvation. But then you have to go a bit deeper than that and ask, well, what is it about Jesus that makes him so important centrally or foundationally to our salvation?

And this is one of the things that you look at. What offices does he act in? What sort of functions does he have? What position does he have in terms of being a king and a priest and a prophet?

And that really brings about pretty much everything that you need to know about how Christ is so central to your salvation. And out of the three offices, we could say that the office of being high priest is really central to them all.

It's in many respects the most important. They're all pretty much important, of course. But the office of being a priest is central, at least from the point of view that it's as a priest, especially, that he went to give himself as a sacrifice in his death on the cross to be an atonement for our sins.

And that's a particularly priestly activity where he fulfilled the Old Testament priesthood that brought the animals for sacrifice, which were really symbols or illustrations of the way in which Christ was to come and be himself the priest and also the sacrifice for our sins.

[4 : 13] And there are two things that we learn from Hebrews about Jesus as our high priest that are important for us to follow out. First of all, Jesus possesses all the required qualifications.

In the Old Testament, the qualifications for the priesthood were set out very clearly by God. And that's what chapter 5 there, as we've read through at the beginning of chapter 5, you find that that's really what's set out there in a way summarized there.

In other words, the priest had to fulfill three requirements before he could be the priest.

He had to be chosen by God. He had to act on behalf of men. And he had to be human himself. He was chosen from amongst men. He was chosen as a human amongst humans.

He was chosen to represent humans to God in the presence of God. He was chosen by God to do this. And these three requirements actually follow through into what's true about Jesus as well.

[5 : 31] He represents human. He's chosen from amongst men. Our high priest needed to be a human being. And there are various reasons for that.

One is that he could not represent human beings without knowing and understanding what it was to be human. And that's what Jesus himself actually does.

An angel could not fit the part or meet the requirements or have the qualifications of humanness to represent human beings, to act on behalf of human beings.

He needed to have sympathy, as it says there. He needed to have an understanding of human beings. He needed to understand human beings in their weakness, in their waywardness, in their ignorance.

The weakness that marks us as sinners. It had to be someone from a human standpoint, a real, actual human being that acted as our high priest.

[6 : 36] And Jesus, of course, met that. The Son of God met that by taking our humanness to himself. Now, I mentioned this last week in relation to his kingship as well.

That it's a kingship that's acted out or exercised through his human nature as well, through his becoming one of ourselves. But if you look back to chapter 2 there, you'll find an emphasis there on Jesus coming to be human.

Chapter 2, verse 14. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil.

Now, that tells us, gives another additional feature to it, that this high priest needed himself to die. It wasn't just that he needed to come with a sacrifice.

Actually, as we learn from this and from what happened in the case of Jesus, he himself needed to be the sacrifice. And that's how God arranged this atonement, this answer, this requirement that God required for our sins to be met, for our guilt to be wiped clear, for our sin to be atoned for.

[8 : 03] It was done through Jesus taking this human nature to himself. But then if you look at chapter 7 and verse 26, you'll find another verse there related to this topic.

For it was fitting indeed that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

Four features there of Jesus as a priest. Let's leave the fourth one for the moment. We'll see it later, but the first three of those mentions his sinlessness, his spotlessness.

You remember the lamb that was to be taken for the sacrifice and the day of atonement, that the lambs, the sacrifice, the sacrificial animal, had to be free of any blemishes, any imperfections.

And that itself was as a type or a symbol really of the perfection of the high priest, the sacrifice that Jesus himself was going to be.

[9 : 09] Now there he says, That's talking about Jesus being sinless.

But that does not mean that Jesus was less than human. If you just pause for a moment and think about what it means to be human, in your mind, usually you and I have thoughts of being human, that it must involve somewhere being a sinner.

Well it does as far as we are now concerned as we are as sinners, as fallen human beings. But it did not involve sin when God created us.

He didn't create us as sinners. He didn't create us having already sinned or with a sinful, fallen human nature. He created us perfect.

We became sinners. We became fallen human beings. We did that ourselves. And to have a complete human nature, a sinless human nature, does not mean that Jesus is not fully human.

[10 : 27] He is fully human, but he never sinned. And why does it say there that it's important that we have this high priest to us without sin?

Well it's for this reason especially, that he has no sin because, as we'll see in a minute, he is able because of that to help us in our temptations.

But just keep that in mind. We'll come back to it in a moment. So he's not like every other high priest that chapter 5 mentions, where he's obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins, as he does for those of the people.

When you look at Leviticus chapter 16, you'll find there very carefully specified by God, before the high priest went in with sacrifice for the people, he needed to go and give a sacrifice for himself.

To deal with his own sin, first of all. Then he went with a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Now that part of it is absent in the case of Jesus.

[11 : 36] There's no need for him to go with a sacrifice for himself. He does not need to give something for his own sin. He doesn't have any. And that's one of the qualifications that he has for enabling him to give a sacrifice for those who are sinners.

If he wasn't perfect, he could not do this himself for others as he did. He is truly and fully human, is the first requirement that he meets, that he possesses.

The second requirement was that he was empathetic or sympathetic with humans. He needed to be human, but he also needed to have sympathy or empathy or understanding.

It says there in chapter 5, he can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset or surrounded with weakness.

That's one reason why the high priest, one main reason why the high priest needed to be human. He needed to have an understanding of things from a human point of view.

[12 : 48] And especially, he needed to have that understanding of what it meant to be weak, to have certain things in a human nature that meant you needed to depend on someone else.

And Jesus did that as well. Not only did he become human, he became, in becoming human, he became dependent, even as a human being, he was dependent, as a newborn infant, on his mother.

He was dependent on his mother's nursing, his mother's care. And in fact, you follow Jesus through every stage of human life and human experience, even before he was born.

The Son of God, in taking a human nature, occupied a human womb. He knows what it's like to be pre-born, which is one of the great points that needs to be mentioned in the whole debate and discussion of abortion.

Jesus has sanctified pre-birth life. The Son of God has done that by going himself into that pre-born life that exists before a person is born and given birth to by their mother.

[14 : 13] Jesus, the Son of God, was there and then experienced birth itself and experienced life as an infant in a real family home.

Experienced what it was to grow up into a teenager. He knows the kind of things that every teenager here, every young person here, experiences in life. All the difficulties of that, all the challenges of that, all the changes that take place in your constitution, even in terms of physical changes.

from childhood through to adulthood. Jesus has been there. The Son of God knows that. He has empathy with you in that. Nobody understands it better or as well.

Not even your parents understand it as perfectly as Jesus understands it, which is why when you have your teenage problems, as we all do, as I did, as all adults here did, as teenagers here experience the kind of challenges that that stage of life brings.

Of course, you depend upon those that you love, those older than you, especially of your parents. But the best thing you do would, of course, is you bring it to Christ.

[15 : 25] You bring it to Jesus Himself. You actually go over it with Him. And you know that He understands it because He's been there perfectly and He's able to relate to you.

and He's able to actually help you through it. And then right through it to adult life as well, of course, and all the way through. But it's very important that what we see here actually in chapter 4, as we come to that final bit of chapter 4 we read, that the emphasis in Hebrews on Jesus having an empathy with us in our human nature is in fact on the aspect of our being tempted.

That's especially where the focus is and that's so important. Because that's one of the big, big things, isn't it, as you go through life. How do you cope with?

How do you face up to? How, in fact, do you overcome temptation? That's the big thing. That's the thing that gets us most, isn't it, how often we don't actually overcome temptation.

Or put it the other way, how often we succumb to temptation. How often we actually give in to temptation. Now that's the emphasis there in chapter 4 there, is that we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we do have one who in every respect has been tempted like we are, yet without sin.

[16 : 53] Now we're going to come tonight to look at the benefits that we have from Jesus as our priest. And this is one of the benefits that we see very clearly locked into the fact that he's our sinless high priest in the way he himself overcame temptation.

And how that is going to enable us or to help us with our temptations and to overcome them. But we're leaving that for tonight. It is part of the passage. Let us then with confidence draw near so that we'll receive mercy and find grace to help.

But at the moment, what we're saying is, here is Jesus. He's become a human being. He's facing temptation. He is actually being assaulted with temptation, you might say, because the devil, you see, knows in the case of Jesus that he has to use every possible means open to him to try and get this human being to sin and therefore to disqualify him from being our saviour and our high priest.

And he has to use a lot more effort. He has to use all his skill and all his power against Jesus because when he comes to us, it's a relatively simple matter.

He already has sin in us to take hold of, to use, to manipulate, to twist, to get us to actually turn and succumb to temptation. He didn't have that in Jesus.

[18 : 25] He was without sin. In every respect, he's been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Now then, that does not mean that the temptation of Jesus was less than complete temptation.

You mustn't think that because Jesus was tempted and yet did not sin in any of that. That somehow or other, he doesn't really understand what it is to be tempted.

Remember, being tempted is not the same as giving in to temptation. Once you've given in to temptation, there's a sense in which you stop knowing the strength of the temptation.

You've given in to it. And therefore, the temptation itself, you might say, is less forceful. It's weaker than it is. When you think of whatever it is that's tempting you and it's mostly, of course, the work of the devil, the evil one that lays things before you to tempt you to do things you should not do or leave things undone that you should do.

Once you've succumbed to that, the temptation then doesn't need to be strong anymore. It's gone. You've given in. He's succeeded. But with Jesus, he knows the strength of temptation because the devil threw everything at him and yet he didn't sin.

[19 : 55] So nobody knows the strength of temptation as much as Jesus did and does. And the fact that it says that he did this without sin doesn't mean his temptation was less than complete.

But it does mean that because of it he is able to help us. If you cast back to chapter 2, the end of chapter 2, there's the same thing. Verse 18, because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

You see, you need to take all the strands together from Hebrews that mention this temptation and this temptation of our high priest. And when you take them all together, this is the picture you get.

He knows the strength of temptation because the devil had to hurl everything at him unsuccessfully because Jesus stood up against it and overcame it. And that's what makes him so able to help you in your temptations, with your temptations, stand against temptations and even receive help when you've fallen in temptation.

That's the way he has empathy with humans and how that's in Hebrews focused particularly on temptation and our involvement in temptation.

[21 : 20] So, Jesus possesses the required qualifications we mentioned too. He's truly human. He has empathy with humans especially in temptation. Thirdly, he was appointed by God.

We didn't appoint our own high priest. We didn't decide on a poll on a vote who the best human being would be that would represent us as high priest. You see what it's saying there in chapter 5 again.

Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God. So also in verse 5, Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest but was appointed by him who said, you are my son.

That's from Psalm 2. And the words are the words of God. And of course, God the Father is the one we especially in the New Testament associate with that voice, that voice that came from heaven.

When did it come from heaven? One of the times was at his baptism and also in relation to his temptation. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

- [22 : 32] He was appointed by God. And for one thing, that very clearly tells us that Psalm 2, and then there's a quotation from Psalm 110 that both these Psalms are actually about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And even when David is mentioned in them, yet, as Jesus said in the Gospel records when Jesus at one time was dealing with his own identity and he said, of whom was David speaking when he said, the Lord said, to my Lord, sit at my right hand.

You see, he was saying, this is actually about me. I am the one of whom the Lord said, sit at my right hand.

He is the Lord, of course, but there's another person. There's God the Father who says this about him. You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

So he was appointed by God. Let's just leave that point there. Jesus possesses all required qualifications. He is truly and fully human.

- [23 : 47] He has empathy with us humans and particularly so in regard to our being tempted. And he was appointed by God.

He was chosen specifically by God himself. where could you possibly find a better representative?

Where could you possibly find a person more perfectly qualified to act as your high priest than the one God has chosen?

The one God found qualified? The one who became fully and perfectly human? the one who has empathy with us even to the extent of understanding the full force of temptation and yet never succumbing to it.

Secondly Jesus our high priest in the requirements he carries out all the necessary functions of being a high priest.

- [24 : 56] And again you find that in these passages in Hebrews. the three functions that we can say are brought out for us here first of all he represents his people to God that's what a high priest that's what a priest was for in the Old Testament he stood as a representative of the people in dealing with God for them or on their behalf.

Secondly he offered himself as a sacrifice for sins you see the high priest there needed to come with a sacrifice in chapter 5 again we're focusing on that to act on behalf of men to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins and verse chapter 8 there now this is the point in what we are saying in this we have such a high priest one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven a minister in the holy places the true tent that's heaven that the Lord set up not man for every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer so he represents the people to God before God he has a sacrifice to offer as he acts on their behalf and thirdly he makes intercession for them which we'll briefly look at just in closing let's look at these three points just very briefly going over them he represents his people to God first of all when you think of representing the people it means he takes their case their situation their relationship to God you might say and he puts himself there he acts as their representative he has to try and represent all their needs all the detail of their case as he acts as their representative before God it's something you find in other areas of life too of course politicians they're representative of their constituencies so they have to try difficult task to represent all the various points of view in their constituencies sometimes that will mean having to just represent the majority more so than the minority but in the case of Jesus he has to actually represent all of his people in all of their case in all of their needs and that's the remarkable thing about this high priest there isn't a single detail of your case of your needs before God of the relationship between you and God and the needs that you have as a human being in relation to God with regard to your sin and your need of it being forgiven your guilt and your need of it being cleansed your whole case if you like as a fallen needy sinful human being

Jesus takes all of that case and fully presents it and fully represents you in the presence of God when you take it into a legal setting which the Bible often does and which you find in the letters of Paul especially where Jesus becomes a representative in a more sort of legal way if you like or in a legal context you can imagine a situation in a court of law where the QC is representing the client that's standing accused of something the client's in the dock the QC is presenting a case on his behalf he's acting on behalf of that person but very often and in fact almost always the QC is not going to be absolutely and perfectly familiar however skilled he is with every single aspect of that person's case there may be something that that person has deliberately withheld from his QC that he doesn't want to tell him about that he hasn't been really come clean about and even if he has the QC himself is still a limited human being he can't just possibly cover absolutely every angle of the case

Jesus dead Jesus does there's nothing in your case that he's left out nothing that's gone past his notice nothing that he has not come to represent you fully in as he brings you before God in himself in acting as your high priest and of course with him it's not just that he represents his people fully but he actually goes further than that he puts himself in their place and there's where it just it breaks down really doesn't it when you try and find a human illustration of that you just can't what you'd be required to do is not just find a QC in a court of law who takes his client's case and is able perfectly to present every point of the case you would need to go as far as to say this QC would actually say well that's not all I'm doing here your honor I'm actually going to jump into the dock instead of this person and I'm going to put this person free and I'm going to take the case not just for himself but in his place I'm going to take the wrap if you like for him that's what

Jesus did it's not just mere representation it's actual substitution we're in the dock we've got a case to answer he's taken that case he's our representative but you know he's saying to us actually it's not just enough that I represent you I need to go into the dock instead of you I need to take your penalty and pay the price of it myself I need to take your sin and make it my sin and that's what he did and that's why he's unique he had no sin of his own to answer for and in his great love of his people he took their sin and answered for it in their place and as their representative no wonder you love him no wonder you're saying today

[31 : 47] I'm so thankful that God has chosen this representative that God has actually appointed this person to be my high priest that God has not left me to come with my own sin and trying to get a sacrifice that will please him from something that I'm able to do myself because it wouldn't be enough it would never atone for my sin but he's done it and I thank God today that that's how it is he represents his people to God he offered himself as a sacrifice for sins chapter 7 and verse 27 especially you come to find that specified it was fitting we should have this high priest he has no need like those high priests to offer sacrifices first for his own sins since he did this once for all when he offered up himself what a great statement that is when he offered up himself here you see is one of the ways in which

Jesus as our high priest is unique he didn't just come with a sacrifice he came with himself as the sacrifice in other words he's not just the high priest who offers the sacrifice he is the sacrifice that's offered as well as the high priest who offered it I know we can't get that into our heads fully I can't either and I have to try and preach this kind of thing but it's there it's one of the great remarkable things about this provision of God that in the person of his son in our nature he is the high priest and he's the sacrifice too he's all of that combined in himself he offered himself and the catechism again is wonderfully accurate if you cast your mind back to what it says how does Christ execute the office of a priest he does so in his wants offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice to reconcile us to God once why just once well because that was enough everything in this offering of himself was so perfect so satisfactory to God so completely in answer and satisfaction of God's demands in his justice and otherwise that there's no need of any sacrifice but this one it doesn't need to be repeated it doesn't need to be added to and you know that's important because you'll find some kinds of theology that tell you unless you carry out certain steps yourself you're not going to be acceptable to

God now there are certain things that are required of us in our life as Christians but that has to be kept very very distinct from the thing that makes you acceptable to God and what makes you acceptable to God is not your own creation it is Christ's work Christ's atonement his once offering up this complete and perfect and sufficient sacrifice that he is in himself I'm saying that to myself and I'm saying it to our young people especially because they're constantly engaging with different varieties of thinking and of theological perspectives and I know that this is one of them where there's a temptation to suggest somehow or other that you need this and you need that and you need to do this otherwise God will not fully accept you or you won't have reached that level of acceptance with God that God requires you have that level of acceptance with

God which is always going to remain as far as God is concerned a level of perfect acceptance with him because you have it in Jesus it's there in him there are things you need to do in relation to that but not instead of that not in addition to that to make you acceptable with God so it's once it's to satisfy God's demands and as the catech said to reconcile us to God so it's he represents his people he offered himself as a sacrifice and thirdly he carries out all the necessary functions of it by making intercession for his people again if you flick forward to chapter 7 verse 25 verse 23 there the former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office but 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 now what does it mean to make intercession intercession in half a minute let's see basically it means that you keep entering in a case or an argument in favor of somebody and what

Jesus is doing is constantly making intercession for his people he is constantly their representative even now in heaven and in heaven he is constantly entering in a case for their acceptance with God he is entering in an argument with God a reasoned case if you like just keeping it in kind of legal terms you can imagine in your mind that this is what Jesus is doing as your high priest in heaven before God he is representing you he has already died for you and now he is presenting a case in your favor that will always keep you in a right relationship with God so what is his case what is his argument himself that's it his own death and the resurrection with which he actually arose from the grave but particularly the death he died as an atonement for sin and we're indebted to the apostle

[39 : 06] John for bringing both of these issues together and that great statement in 1st John chapter 2 and at the beginning of the chapter my little children I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin that's his purpose in writing to actually guide people away from sin and from sinning but of course John knows however much guidance he's going to give them however much preaching they're going to hear however much the preacher himself might study the word both he and they are still going to sin while they're in this life so what do we do John says well if anyone does sin we have an advocate we have a representative legally with God Jesus Christ the righteous the perfect representative and he is the propitiation for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world he's the propitiation in other words he is himself in his death the whole reason why

God no longer holds us guilty those who've come to know God and come to trust in Jesus they're before God in the intercession of Jesus they are represented by him and in him and his argument on their behalf is I died a perfect death for these people therefore their sin is not held against him and as long as Jesus is their advocate as long as Jesus remains qualified as long as Jesus intercession focuses on his perfect atonement they are going to be completely acceptable to God and how long is that for eternity forever that's the quality of the death he died and that's the quality of the high priest you have that he ensures your full acceptance with God as a redeemed sinner that's his case that's one of the great benefits we receive we'll see more of them this evening he possesses all the required qualifications he carries out all the necessary functions what is there then to stop any of us to discourage any of us from trusting ourselves fully and absolutely to him let's pray

Lord our God we give thanks that we're able to sing your praises as one who has provided for us this great high priest we thank you Lord as the high priest of your people that when we sing your praises in these great words of scripture that we acknowledge you as our high priest and that though you now reign as our king in heaven you also exercise the office of priest on behalf of your people help us we pray to take encouragement from these great truths help us never to doubt you help us always to know you as true to your promises grant that you would strengthen our faith our resolve our commitment to you we pray all this in Jesus name amen you