

Jesus: Our Priest

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[0 : 00] Will you pray with me?

Lord, now as we come to your word, we pray. When we pray for your help, we pray because we need you this morning. Lord, to illuminate your word to us so that we might understand it rightly. Lord, to apply it to our hearts, that we might respond as you have called us to respond. Lord, I ask for your help this morning.

Lord, that I might speak your words and that you might use my words to speak your truth. Holy Spirit, be with us this morning.

Lord, help us to see the glory and the majesty of Christ. Lord, what we have just sung, Jesus, in our place, what a great, great truth this is for us.

[1 : 18] Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Happy New Year.

It's good to see you all. We just got back yesterday from traveling to see family, and it's good to be here this morning. As if you were here last week, you would know that we're doing a mini-series for these three weeks on the threefold offices of Christ.

Jesus as our prophet, priest, and king. And so this morning, we are going to look at Jesus' high priestly ministry. And as I was thinking about this message, I asked myself this question.

Why is Jesus' high priestly ministry good news for us? It doesn't strike us that this is something that is easily accessible.

I don't walk down the street going to stop and shop thinking, I wish I had a better high priest today. It just doesn't cross our minds. It's not a part of our culture. It's not a part of our world.

[2 : 25] So we're going to explore what a high priest is, and then we're going to look at what Jesus' high priestly ministry is for us this morning. If you're here and you're exploring Christianity, we're going to explore and unfold some of the great truths of who Jesus is for us.

If you've been a Christian for the whole of your life, as long as you can remember, we're going to explore Jesus and who He is. For us. And whether you're just exploring or have seen these truths for a long time, I hope that you will be encouraged this morning.

So first, we're going to look at just what is a high priest. And it's interesting to think about the fact that priests have been a part of human, relating, religious life across the ages and across the times. If you think about cultures far away from our Western culture, they still have priests of some sort. Not always, but often.

Often there are high priests. Why do we have this human impulse to have some kind of priest in our religious structure, regardless of what it is? Well, because I think we have a question of how do we relate to God?

[3 : 45] How is it that we as human beings stand before someone who in some way is greater than us or different than us, who is over us and to whom we have to give some kind of account or some kind of reckoning?

And the fact is that we don't want to stand before God on our own. And so we have priests. We long for a priest to stand before us instinctively.

I think we know our imperfection. We know our weakness. We know our need. And so the idea of a priest has been a part of religious life throughout, I think, human history.

As we turn to the idea of it in the Bible, I want you to turn with me to Hebrews chapter 9. Excuse me.

Hebrews chapter 9. We're going to look at Hebrews chapter 9, verses 1 through 10. To get a New Testament account of what the high priest did, I thought I'd spare you reading chapters and chapters of Leviticus this morning.

[5 : 01] And so we're going to look at a summary in Hebrews chapter 9. I don't have the page number. It's 1,000 and something. And if that'll help. 1,005?

Yeah, there we go. 1,005. Hebrews chapter 9. We're going to read verses 1 through 10 just to see how the Bible describes what the purpose of the high priest in the Old Testament was.

Now, even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the presence.

It is called the holy place. Behind the second curtain was a second section called the most holy place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna and Aaron's staff that budded and the tablets of the covenant.

Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat of these things we cannot now speak in detail. That's simply a description of the temple in Jerusalem where the Jewish people would gather to worship.

[6 : 15] And then it goes on. These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties. But into the second, that is the most holy place.

But into the second, only the high priest goes. And he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

By this, the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing, which is symbolic for the present age.

According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

If you want to understand this, go back on the Trinity website. There are some great sermons on the book of Hebrews from two years ago. It will get you a whole detail into this.

[7 : 23] But basically, what he's describing here is that there was in the temple a special day and a special place where this man, the high priest, would go once a year.

And he would bear sacrifices for his own sin and for the sin of the nation. This is the pinnacle of a system of animal sacrifices in the Old Testament.

And we might think, why would God do that? Isn't this barbaric? Isn't this primitive? This can't have anything to do with us. But I think that, in fact, this whole system was given to point us to a couple of truths.

Pastor Alistair Begg summarized it this way. He said that the whole sacrificial system and the role of the high priest in it meant to show that forgiveness is costly and that the punishment due to sin is death and that without the shedding of blood, that is, without something actually dying, sin cannot be removed.

And so the high priest had this essential role of offering up a sacrifice, an animal sacrifice, each year for the sins of the nation so that their sins might be covered.

[8 : 55] In this, God gave instructions to the people in the Old Testament about how they might approach him because it was God himself who dwelt in that most holy place.

The question that I ask for us today is, with no temple and with no high priest and with no sacrifices, what do we do? How do we live seeking to approach God and seeking to please him?

I posit to you that there are two different ways that we tend to address this question. The first is that, and this is probably the most common, that we seek success in trying to be good enough in our own estimation to be acceptable to God.

We figure that we can actually be a good enough person somehow, that God ought to accept us.

That seems right to us. It builds in us a self-confidence. I'm good enough, don't you think? But surprisingly, this attempt, which seems like a very common and not that hard to accomplish, right?

[10 : 16] But in fact, it has this dark underside, doesn't it? Because seeking to be good enough is a terrible prison for us, isn't it? Because it makes us live with an unending fear of failure.

If we try to be good enough, we always wonder, what if we blow it? How badly do we have to blow it? If we blow it in this way, what happens to us then?

And we live our lives driven to be good enough somehow. Some of this may look like the more uglier sides of getting ahead first at all costs, not caring about anything, but trying to be successful in the eyes of whatever your subculture is and however it measures it.

Climbing the corporate ladder, having enough money, having power in your society, whatever it is. But I think that most of us see those and we think, well, that's kind of crass and ugly and an attempt to be good and successful.

How about the more socially acceptable ways that we pursue this? I'm going to love my child better than anyone else.

[11:40] I'm going to be the best volunteer this nonprofit has ever had. I'm going to be the most zealous employee in this company, not out of self-promotion, but just so they'll see what a good hard worker I am.

I'm going to be the straight-A student who's going to succeed. Even our best impulses to be good can be driven by this desire to be acceptable before God and make ourselves good enough.

And in doing so, we create a prison of our own success. Because one of the things that it does is it means we can't ever admit that we failed. We can't ever say, I couldn't do it.

We can't ever admit a weakness, let alone just a blatant sin. I was selfish. I did it because I wanted to hurt that person.

Or whatever it is that we do. Now, some of us have tried this hamster wheel of trying to be good enough, long enough to know that it doesn't work very well, does it?

[12:59] We don't want to live in that prison, but we think, what do we do? Where do we go? And often, I think, we respond with hopelessness and despair.

We know we can't measure up. There's nothing we can do about it. And so we give up. Not only have we failed, but we have become a failure in this world.

And then we just live trying to survive. But we have stopped seeking God. We have stopped seeking to approach Him boldly and confidently.

We have stopped seeking to relate to Him at all because we know what He thinks of us. We're a loser. Friends, this may be true in our culture.

It's actually true, in fact, as well, even in our church. Isn't it? It's so easy for us to put a religious, a Christian veneer over this same impulse and to think, well, if I know my Bible well enough, if I've memorized enough verses, if I'm active in enough activities, if I'm there at all the work days, if whatever it is, you pick your standard, if I can do it well enough, wouldn't that be great?

[14:20] Look at what a good church member I am. Or we feel like a failure. We think, what am I doing here? Why do I keep coming?

It's just an exercise in hypocrisy. These people don't know what I'm really like, and if they did, they'd kick me out. That's how we often approach church, isn't it? We hide.

We can't admit what's really going on. We hide. We can't admit our failure. Friends, this shouldn't be surprising. Isn't this what we see even back in the Garden of Eden?

When Adam and Eve fall into sin, what do they do? They hide. They blame shift. They run away rather than admitting, confessing, revealing their sin and their neediness.

I spent all this time exploring this because I hope you see that we in fact do need help in standing before God.

[15:27] We don't know how to approach God on our own. And instinctively, deep down, we know that we need someone to stand in our place. Friends, this is where Jesus' high priestly ministry steps in.

It is God's glorious provision for us. And the book of Hebrews is the place to go in the New Testament to see the richness and the depth of Jesus' high priestly ministry for us and how He stands before God on our behalf.

If you want a full account of this, go read Hebrews 2, chapter 2 through 9. It's about seven chapters. It's rich. It's deep. As I said, there's a great series of sermons that some other guys preached on it that I highly recommend and on our website.

But what we're going to see is that Jesus' high priestly ministry does two things for us. First, we're going to look at chapter 4 and see that Jesus, in His high priestly ministry, He stands with us in our humanity.

And then secondly, we're going to see from chapter 9 that He stands for us before God. So let's look first at Jesus, our high priest, standing with us.

[16:55] Turn with me to Hebrews chapter 4, just a few pages back. Hebrews chapter 4, verse 14 through 16.

Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. Let us hold fast our confession, for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Friends, one of the glorious truths of Jesus' high priestly ministry is that He stands with us in sympathy with our weakness and our humanity.

The writer of the Hebrews has developed the argument about Jesus and His uniqueness as being both the God, as being both God and man in His role that He comes to be our Redeemer and our Savior.

[18 : 24] And He comes to this point and He says, Jesus has identified by becoming human, He has identified with us in such a way that He knows, He knows what our life is really like.

God is not a distant, sovereign dictator who is unacquainted and unfamiliar with the realities of life in a broken world.

world. But as it says in verse 15, He is one who sympathizes with our weaknesses. That is, He feels with us what we feel.

He does not come to us and berate us. He does not come to condemn us in the face of our temptations.

why are you so weak? Buck up! Get on with it! What's wrong with you? This is what we hear often, whether from others or in the self-talk in our own mind.

[19 : 35] When we face temptations, when we face trials, we feel the weight of condemnation so easily. just for feeling our weakness, not for the sin.

Jesus comes and He says, I understand. I have been there. I remember once, I had a coach in high school, played lacrosse, and He, one of the things that He did with us is that He never made us do a running drill, an exercise that He wouldn't do with us.

So He'd be like, all right, boys, this is what we're doing today, right? And then we'd line up, and He'd do it with us every time. And I can't tell you how much authority that gave Him to encourage us, because He wasn't just sitting there in His lounge chair, sipping His lemonade, or His Diet Coke, or whatever, saying, all right, boys, go, go, you go work, and I'm going to sit here and watch you do it, like many coaches do.

He said, I'm going to do this with you. And in doing that, His encouragement and His exhortation for us to keep going and not give up, had so much weight, because He knew what it would cost to do what He'd ask us to do.

this is what Jesus does for us. Jesus, by becoming a human being and identifying with us, by taking on human flesh and walking in this world, He knows our trials.

[21 : 25] Now, some of you may be sitting there thinking, yeah, but you know what? Jesus never saw internet pornography. Jesus never felt the power of the boardroom and the seat.

He never had two small children and two careers and tried to juggle that schedule. I had a professor in seminary who helped me understand this this way.

For temptation to be real, it actually has to have the force to grab our attention. Right? So, I might be tempted. say I'm trying to eat well, I might be tempted by a donut.

Right? But you know what? If I don't like donuts, there's no temptation there. I just walk right by it. It doesn't matter. Right? So, temptation only has power when there's an actual attraction to doing the thing that you're being tempted to do.

Now, Jesus was rarely tempted to do many of the things that we do. it seems. But interestingly, in Matthew 4, when the devil comes to tempt Jesus, what does he tempt him with?

[22 : 41] He tempts him with the very thing that Jesus would most care about. Show the glory of God in these spectacular ways. Shortcut to the glory of your kingdom without the cross.

Jesus knows temptation greater than we have ever faced. If the temptations we feel are like the waves that push a pebble up and down the beach, the temptations that Jesus faced were like the thundering breakers breaking on a rock on the main coast, world, Jesus really does understand. And he sympathizes with our weakness. He knew hunger and thirst, tiredness, the rejection of family, the betrayal of friends. He knew the sufferings of beatings and of nails piercing his hand. And he knew death, the very thing that we fear the most. He knew death for us. So he does understand how hard it can be to approach God.

And he says, stop hiding, don't give in to despair, but because I understand, hold fast. Hold fast to the confession of your faith.

[24 : 15] Don't give up when it gets hard. Don't give up when it feels like you can't do it anymore. Don't give up when you fail.

Draw near. Draw near to the throne of God to find help and grace. Undeserved, unearned. Grace that will help you in your time of trial. Come in the midst of all the trials that you face. Come and sit in his presence in the depth of your pain. Come and rage against him in your anger. Come confess your weakness and despair.

Come and receive from this high priest all that you need. God because he understands and he sympathizes with you. But you know, friends, maybe you've had a friend who's really good at sympathizing with you.

[25 : 29] Oh, I know that's really hard. Oh, yeah, that's very hard. Yes, it's very hard. And then at the end you walk away and you think, well, at least he gets it that it's hard. But my life hasn't been changed, has it?

That's not been very much help. Thankfully, Jesus is not a friend like this. Because Jesus has done more than just identify with us and stand with us in weakness.

But Jesus stands for us before God. And in doing that, he accomplishes something glorious and wonderful for us. Turn back with me to chapter 9 of Hebrews.

Hebrews chapter 9, we're going to pick up in verse 11.

We're going to read 11 through 14. Remember, we read the beginning of this chapter about the high priest going in once a year. Here we see starting in verse 11.

[26 : 39] But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands that is not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and of calves, by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Jesus stands for us. In this amazing image, Jesus pulls together two different threads in the Old Testament imagery because he is in this image both the high priest and the sacrifice.

And in case you ever wondered about this, this is part of the beauty and the complexity of seeing how the Old Testament points to the new. It's not a clean one-to-one correlation or correspondence.

It's this rich tapestry of interwoven themes that point to Jesus. Jesus is also the temple, surprisingly.

[28 : 13] So, when you look at it, it's this beautiful picture. But here in these verses particularly, Jesus is both the high priest and the sacrifice.

He offers not the blood of someone or something else, but he offers his very own blood, that is his very own life. Remember when we talked about the Old Testament sacrificial system and what it pointed to?

That forgiveness is costly, that the penalty of sin is death, and a death must occur for sin to be forgiven? Friends, this is the kind of high priest that we have, because he has paid that cost for us. In Leviticus 16, the day of atonement, this offering, the human high priest would walk in with this offering. He had two offerings, one for himself, and then one for the people.

And tradition has it that they would tie bells to the bottom of his garments and tie a rope around his ankle because if his sins, if his sacrifices were not acceptable and his sin before God was real and uncovered, it would result in his death.

[29 : 31] And if the bells stopped jingling, they would pull the body out with the rope. I'm not sure that ever actually happened, but it's the tradition that we hear about that helps us understand the severity of what happens.

And when Jesus comes in, when Jesus says, I am the high priest that will stand before God for you on your behalf, and I will offer a superior sacrifice of my very own life for you.

Jesus is no longer simply sympathizing with us in our weakness, but he is solving the question that we started with, which is how can a man stand before God?

God. If we stand before God in our sin, it is our death that's required, and there's no performance, no service, no good work that can save us from that.

There's no guilty feelings, no religious penance, not even our religious despair can save us. Jesus comes and he says, I can do what you cannot do.

[30 : 46] I will be the high priest to offer what you need. Jesus offers his perfect life of obedience.

He was, as we saw in chapter four, without sin, and so he did not stand under the curse of death and the judgment of death that we all do.

Because he was without sin, he had a perfect life to offer, which meant that he did not have to die for his own sin, so he could die for ours.

In his humanity, it meant that he could actually stand in our place. Bulls and goats can only cover temporarily, can only provide, as it says, the purification of the flesh.

But Jesus in his humanity identifies with us so that the sacrifice of his life is an even, an a fair, and a just substitute.

[31 : 49] That a life of a man was taken for the life of a man. His death is taken on our behalf.

And so the judgment of God on our sin falls upon him. And so Jesus stands to intercede for us.

As Hebrews 7, 25 says, 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.

What is that intercession that he makes? He stands before God, and when we come to God, Jesus says, I suffered for his sin.

I suffered for her sin. sin. They are taken away. I have done that. I have done it once for all so that I never have to go back in again.

[32 : 52] I have done all that is needed for those sins to be forgiven. And I have risen from the dead to defeat the power of sin and death and now stand to eternally intercede for you so that the redemption of those who are in Christ will never fail because he will never die and his sacrifice is enough.

And so we have such a great high priest who has gone and offered what we could not offer to give us what we could not attain on our own.

Acceptance from God, forgiveness, life, freedom of living with him, and as we saw in 914, both the purity of our consciences and the freedom from dead works to serve the living God.

We no longer have to live on the hamster wheel of performance, trying desperately, to be good enough. We can spend all of our energy instead joyfully serving God because he has saved us.

What great work that is. Reminds me of the hymn Charles Wesley. Arise, my soul, arise.

[34 : 31] Shake off thy guilty fears, thy bleeding sacrifice, and my behalf appears. Before the throne, my Savior stands.

My name is written on his hands. He ever lives above for me to intercede. With his redeeming love, his precious blood to plead, his blood was spilt for all our race and sprinkles now the throne of grace.

Five bleeding wounds he bears, received on Calvary. They pour effectual prayers. They strongly speak for me. Forgive him.

Oh, forgive, they cry. Nor let that ransom sinner die. Friends, the priestly office of Jesus has achieved our salvation.

He stands not only with us, but for us before God so that we can know him. I pray, I pray for our church regularly that we would be a church that in light of this would be able to be free, free to confess our sins and our failures, free to forsake a life of performing and looking good on the outside, free to come together as a community with a high priest who sympathizes with our weakness, and to take hold of this salvation that we have in Christ, so that we might love one another, so that we might serve the living God together, not hiding, not despairing, but worshiping and rejoicing, resting in

[36 : 30] Jesus, our great high priest. Let's pray. Father, we do pray with thanksgiving for the offering you have made of your son, Lord, that he willingly gave himself up for us, and Lord, we thank you that even today he ever lives to intercede for us, that his blood speaks and covers our sin.

For all who have placed their faith in Christ, this is great news. God, I pray this morning if there's anyone here who has not placed their faith in Jesus Christ, has not taken hold of this high priest to be theirs, has not trusted in this sacrifice that he offered of his own life.

Lord, I pray that they would repent, repent of their performance and their good works, repent and believe in this Jesus, and know the joy of his salvation.

Lord, I pray for us as a church community that you might make us a community that does not need to run or hide, but Lord, can rest in the finished work of Christ for us, that all has been done for us, and now we may live, Lord, a new and a different life for you.

Lord, not hiding our weaknesses, but confessing our sin to one another, and knowing that in Christ we have the joyful forgiveness and the cleansing of our consciences that we need so desperately.

[38 : 22] We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you.