

"Christ, Our Great High Priest"
(Hebrews 2:17-18)

Introduction: You will recall that we were looking at the offices which Christ possesses as the New Covenant Mediator, namely that of prophet, priest and king. Last week, as we looked specifically at the prophetic office of Christ, we saw that Christ was one who was born in the covenant community, who stood in the holy councils of God Almighty, since He Himself is God, and was called by the Father to be the greatest revelation of God to man. Because Christ is the great prophet sent from God, Peter warned his hearers, the Jews, as they were listening to him, "AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERY SOUL THAT DOES NOT HEED THAT PROPHET SHALL BE UTTERLY DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE" (Acts 3:23). The great touchstone of whether or not an individual is truly born from above is whether or not he will listen to the Word of God made flesh, in all that He commands His people to do. Christ, as the prophet of God, reveals to us the will of God for our salvation, but His searching Word also penetrates into our deepest recesses of our souls and reveals what is truly in our hearts, whether we be His or not.

Tonight, we will want to look at His role as our great high priest.

When we think about the offices of our covenant Mediator, perhaps no one office stands out more than that of priest. The priest was one specifically called by God to be the representative of His people in His presence, in order to stand in the gap between God and man, to plead on their behalf, and to make atonement for their sins by continuous sacrifice. It was important that this one, who would represent the people, himself be a man, so that he could deal gently with those whom he represented. For this reason, the Son of God became man, in order that He might be our Mediator before God. And what the Scriptures are telling us tonight is,

Jesus Christ is our great High Priest, who has reconciled us to God by the offering of Himself, and who continues to keep us reconciled by His intercessory work.

I. First I Want You to See How the Priest Functioned in the Old Testament Economy.

A. A Priest Was a Man Called By God to Mediate Between Himself and Man.

1. No one could approach God on his own merit, but had to come to Him through the mediation which God supplied.

a. Man, in his fallen state, has no direct access to God.

- (i) Not only is he separated from God by an infinite gulf to begin with, so that God, to have a relationship with man, must do so through means of a covenant, but now his problem is compounded by the Fall.
- (ii) Man cannot come directly to God, as he did before the Fall, but now he must come through the mediation, which God supplies.

b. And so God graciously provided that mediation so that man may have access to Him.

- (i) This mediation was first carried on by the heads of families. The father was the high priest of the

family. You will remember that Job constantly interceded for his children in case they might have sinned against the Lord in their feasting, "AND IT CAME ABOUT, WHEN THE DAYS OF FEASTING HAD COMPLETED THEIR CYCLE, THAT JOB WOULD SEND AND CONSECRATE THEM, RISING UP EARLY IN THE MORNING AND OFFERING BURNT OFFERINGS ACCORDING TO THE NUMBER OF THEM ALL; FOR JOB SAID, 'PERHAPS MY SONS HAVE SINNED AND CURSED GOD IN THEIR HEARTS.' THIS JOB DID CONTINUALLY" (Job 1:5).

- (ii) But after the calling of Israel out of Egypt and the setting up of the Mosaic economy, God established the Levitical line, more specifically the line of Aaron to be priests, mediators between God and man.

2. No one took this office upon himself presumptuously, but was called of God to it.

a. The author to the Hebrews wrote, "AND NO ONE TAKES THE HONOR TO HIMSELF, BUT RECEIVES IT WHEN HE IS CALLED BY GOD, EVEN AS AARON WAS" (Heb. 5:4).

b. If one was not in the line of Aaron, they simply could not serve in this capacity.

- (i) One had to prove that he was in Aaron's direct lineage. When the Lord brought the captives back from exile, in the first return under Zerubbabel, there were among them some who could not prove their descent from Aaron and so were excluded from the priesthood, "AND OF THE SONS OF THE PRIESTS: THE SONS OF HABAIAH, THE SONS OF HAKKOZ, THE SONS OF BARZILLAI, WHO TOOK A WIFE FROM THE DAUGHTERS OF BARZILLAI THE GILEADITE, AND HE WAS CALLED BY THEIR THEIR NAME. THESE SEARCHED AMONG THEIR ANCESTRAL REGISTRATION, BUT THEY COULD NOT BE LOCATED; THEREFORE THEY WERE CONSIDERED UNCLEAN AND EXCLUDED FROM THE PRIESTHOOD" (Ezra 2:61-62).
- (ii) Once Korah, Dathan, Abiram and On sought to intrude into the office of the priesthood, and they and their's were destroyed by God.
- (iii) The only mediation that the Lord would accept was that which He had chosen.

2. The way that a priest would mediate was through sacrifices and intercession.

a. The priest offered sacrifices in order to atone for the sins of God's people.

- (i) When a person would sin, he would bring before the priest the required sacrifice. The Scripture says, "AND HE SHALL LAY HIS HAND ON THE HEAD OF THE BURNT OFFERING, THAT IT MAY BE ACCEPTED FOR HIM TO MAKE ATONEMENT ON HIS BEHALF. AND HE SHALL SLAY THE YOUNG BULL BEFORE THE LORD; AND AARON'S SONS, THE PRIESTS, SHALL OFFER UP THE BLOOD AND SPRINKLE THE BLOOD AROUND ON THE ALTAR THAT IS AT THE DOORWAY OF THE TENT OF MEETING" (Lev. 1:4-5).
- (ii) The author to the Hebrews wrote, "AND ACCORDING TO THE LAW, ONE MAY ALMOST SAY, ALL THINGS ARE

CLEANSED WITH BLOOD, AND WITHOUT SHEDDING OF BLOOD THERE IS NO FORGIVENESS" (Heb. 9:22).

- (iii) The priest would offer the life of the animal to God, and God would graciously accept it as atonement for their sins, to cover them in His sight so that His justice would be satisfied.
 - b. *The priest also interceded before God on behalf of the people.*
 - (i) Their sacrificing was a kind of intercession on behalf of the people.
 - (ii) But the priest was also called of the Lord to pray for the people, that the Lord might have mercy upon them. In Joel 2:17, the Lord commands the priest through the prophet Joel, "LET THE PRIEST, THE LORD'S MINISTERS, WEEP BETWEEN THE PORCH AND THE ALTAR, AND LET THEM SAY, 'SPARE THY PEOPLE, O LORD, AND DO NOT MAKE THINE INHERITANCE A REPROACH, A BYWORD AMONG THE NATIONS. WHY SHOULD THEY AMONG THE PEOPLES SAY, WHERE IS THEIR GOD?"
 - (iii) You will recall how Moses stood in the breach between God, who was stirred up in His infinite wrath against the people of Israel for their sin of idolatry in the incident of the golden calf, and Israel, who had so quickly turned away from the holy commandment given to them by Moses.
 - (iv) Had Moses not interceded for them -- intercession which the Lord Himself graciously provided -- they surely would all have perished, except those who had remained faithful.
- B. *In Order to Fulfill this Office Mercifully, It Was Important that the One Who Held this Office Be Acquainted with the Weaknesses of the People.*
1. *He must himself have experienced their infirmities.*
 - a. "FOR EVERY HIGH PRIEST TAKEN FROM AMONG MEN IS APPOINTED ON BEHALF OF MEN IN THINGS PERTAINING TO GOD, IN ORDER TO OFFER BOTH GIFTS AND SACRIFICES FOR SINS; HE CAN DEAL GENTLY WITH THE IGNORANT AND MISGUIDED, SINCE HE HIMSELF ALSO IS BESET WITH WEAKNESS" (Heb. 5:1-2).
 - b. No one is better acquainted with the infirmities of men than man himself. And for this reason, the Lord did not ordain the priesthood of angels, nor of any other created being to be the mediator for His people, but one like themselves.
 2. *This was necessary so that he could sympathize with their weaknesses, and deal gently with those who were ignorant and misguided.*
 - a. The punishment for sins committed against full knowledge of the truth was always more severe.
 - b. But for those who sinned in ignorance, or who were misguided, and for those who truly repented of their sins, the priest on behalf of the Lord would deal gently with them.
 - c. Such is the role of the Old Covenant mediators.

They were specifically called apart by God to stand in the gap between the holy God and sinful man, by offering sacrifices and interceding for the people, in order that the Lord would not destroy them in His holy wrath.

II. Secondly, I Want You to See How Christ Fulfills that Office on Behalf of His People in the New Covenant.

A. Christ Was Called by God to Be the Mediator Between God and Man.

1. To be our Mediator, He had to be so ordained by God.
 - a. As no one can take this office upon Himself unless He is called by God, so Christ was specifically appointed to that office.
 - b. "SO ALSO CHRIST DID NOT GLORIFY HIMSELF SO AS TO BECOME A HIGH PRIEST, BUT HE WHO SAID TO HIM, 'THOU ART MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE'; JUST AS HE SAYS ALSO IN ANOTHER PASSAGE, 'THOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK'" (Heb. 5:5-6).
 - c. Even the Aaronic priesthood which existed in greater numbers were modeled after Christ. Their office corresponded to His.
2. To be our Mediator, He had to offer up an acceptable sacrifice. "HE HAD TO BE MADE LIKE HIS BRETHREN IN ALL THINGS, THAT HE MIGHT BECOME A MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST IN THINGS PERTAINING TO GOD, TO MAKE PROPITIATION FOR THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE."
 - a. Man had sinned against God, and so it was man who owed the debt to Him. First in Adam, and then in every subsequent sin, man is the offending party.
 - b. However, the sacrifices which men brought did not have the power to remove sins.
 - (i) The New Testament tells us that those sacrifices were not able to remove the guilt of the offerer. The author to the Hebrews writes, "FOR THE LAW, SINCE IT HAS ONLY A SHADOW OF THE GOOD THINGS TO COME AND NOT THE VERY FORM OF THINGS, CAN NEVER BY THE SAME SACRIFICES YEAR BY YEAR, WHICH THEY OFFER CONTINUALLY, MAKE PERFECT THOSE WHO DRAW NEAR. OTHERWISE, WOULD THEY NOT HAVE CEASED TO BE OFFERED, BECAUSE THE WORSHIPERS, HAVING ONCE BEEN CLEANSED, WOULD NO LONGER HAVE HAD CONSCIOUSNESS OF SINS? BUT IN THOSE SACRIFICES THERE IS A REMINDER OF SINS YEAR BY YEAR. FOR IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE BLOOD OF BULLS AND GOATS TO TAKE AWAY SINS" (Heb. 10:1-41).
 - (ii) But doesn't the Old Testament clearly tell us that when they were offered according to the Law, the guilty party was forgiven? "THUS THE PRIEST SHALL MAKE ATONEMENT FOR HIM IN REGARD TO HIS SIN, AND HE SHALL BE FORGIVEN" (Lev. 4:26).
 - (iii) It was not because of the animal sacrifices that they were forgiven, but because of what that sacrifice pointed to by faith, an infinitely worthy sacrifice.
 - c. In order to be accepted by God, the sacrifice given

had to be equal to the crime, and since the crime was an infinite one, it had to be infinitely worthy.

- (i) Remember that all sins committed against anyone are more or less serious depending upon the nature of the one they are committed against.
- (ii) To be angry with your next door neighbor and to strike him is one thing, to be angry with and strike the president of the United States is another.
- (iii) But to strike the Lord, the infinitely worthy One by breaking any of His commands is a crime of infinite proportions! To atone for it requires a sacrifice with infinite value.
- (iv) And so the Son of God, became a man that He might offer a sacrifice on behalf of His own.
- (v) He also lived a perfect life in order that He might be worthy to offer that sacrifice.
- (vi) And let us not forget that He Himself is that sacrifice which He offered, perfectly fitted for the task because of His perfect obedience, and because of His divinity, of infinite worth, and of limitless ability to cleanse even the foulest sinner. "FOR IF THE BLOOD OF GOATS AND BULLS AND THE ASHES OF A HEIFER SPRINKLING THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DEFILED, SANCTIFY FOR THE CLEANSING OF THE FLESH, HOW MUCH MORE WILL THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, WHO THROUGH THE ETERNAL SPIRIT OFFERED HIMSELF WITHOUT BLEMISH TO GOD, CLEANSE YOUR CONSCIENCE FROM DEAD WORKS TO SERVE THE LIVING GOD? (Heb. 9:13-14).
- (vii) His sacrifice propitiates, or satisfies, the wrath of God against us, since it offers a sacrifice more than equal to the crime!

c. And since this sacrifice came through a man who was motivated by love for the Father and His people enough to even give up His life, He had to be more than a merely a man, for a man's love would have been utterly destroyed by the torments which Christ underwent, but a divine love could and did endure.

- (i) The first man Adam was unable to endure a test of obedience in order to merit life for his descendants.
- (ii) How then could a mere man undergo such sufferings in bearing the full weight of the wrath of God and maintain his love for God and us?
- (iii) He could not unless the love which motivated Him was divine in nature. Christ endured this infinite wrath of God out of love for Him to repair the damage we had done to His honor, and out of love for us, that He might save us from the wrath due to our sins and receive us as His own people.

3. And this gracious Mediator not only provided the basis for our salvation, but as the Mediators of old, He continues to intercede for us that He might keep us in the grace of God.

- a. He interceded during His time on earth, "IN THE DAYS OF HIS FLESH, HE OFFERED UP BOTH PRAYERS AND SUPPLICATIONS WITH LOUD CRYING AND TEARS TO THE ONE ABLE TO SAVE HIM FROM DEATH, AND HE WAS HEARD BECAUSE OF HIS PIETY" (Heb. 5:7).
- b. He interceded for His own when He was hanging in agony having been crucified on the cross, saying "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING" (Luke 23:34).
- c. And now, being risen and glorified, He continues to intercede for His own to keep them in the grace of God.
 - (i) "MY LITTLE CHILDREN, I AM WRITING THESE THINGS TO YOU THAT YOU MAY NOT SIN. AND IF ANYONE SINS, WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER, JESUS CHRIST THE RIGHTEOUS" (1 John 2:1).
 - (ii) If Adam, who was a perfect human did not continue in obedience to God, how will we whose grace is much smaller than Adam's?
 - (iii) Hence we need the continual intercession of the Son of God to keep us, and that is provided for us through His indestructible life. "AND THE FORMER PRIESTS, ON THE ONE HAND, EXISTED IN GREATER NUMBERS, BECAUSE THEY WERE PREVENTED BY DEATH FROM CONTINUING, BUT HE, ON THE OTHER HAND, BECAUSE HE ABIDES FOREVER, HOLDS HIS PRIESTHOOD PERMANENTLY. HENCE, ALSO, HE IS ABLE TO SAVE FOREVER THOSE WHO DRAW NEAR TO GOD THROUGH HIM, SINCE HE ALWAYS LIVES TO MAKE INTERCESSION FOR THEM" (Heb. 7:24-25).

B. And, in Having Taken Upon Himself Our Nature, and Being Touched with Our Weaknesses, He Was Equipped to Mediate Mercifully and Faithfully.

1. The Son of God had to take upon Himself our nature in order to repair the damage which man had done and to do so faithfully.
2. But He also became a man that He might be touched with our infirmities and deal mercifully with us. "THEREFORE, HE HAD TO BE MADE LIKE HIS BRETHREN IN ALL THINGS, THAT HE MIGHT BECOME A MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST IN THINGS PERTAINING TO GOD."
 - a. To come to one who is able to help you and yet is completely untouched by your cries for mercy will not profit you.
 - b. To come to one who is mercifully inclined toward you but is unfaithful so that you cannot be sure that he will help you would also be without value.
 - c. But when you come to the Mediator whom God supplied, you are coming to One who is mercifully inclined towards you with infinite mercy.
 - (i) You need not fear that He will not receive you, for He is full of mercy toward all who call upon Him in truth.
 - (ii) He wants you to come, He calls upon you to come. "COME TO ME, ALL WHO ARE WEARY AND

HEAVY-LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST. TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU, AND LEARN FROM ME, FOR I AM GENTLE AND HUMBLE IN HEART; AND YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. FOR MY YOKE IS EASY, AND MY LOAD IS LIGHT" (Matt. 11:28-30).

- d. ***When you come to Jesus Christ, you are also coming to One who is faithful to give to you all that He has promised.***
- (i) "FAITHFUL IS HE WHO CALLS YOU, AND HE ALSO WILL BRING IT TO PASS" (1 Thes. 5:24).
 - (ii) "LET US HOLD FAST THE CONFESSION OF OUR HOPE WITHOUT WAVERING, FOR HE WHO PROMISED IS FAITHFUL" (Heb. 10:23).
 - (iii) Christ will not turn you aside, He will not fail you in anything He has promised. He is the immutable One, for it is impossible that He should ever change.
- e. ***And when you come to Christ, you are coming to One who knows your weakness, because He has felt it. "FOR SINCE HE HIMSELF WAS TEMPTED IN THAT WHICH HE HAS SUFFERED, HE IS ABLE TO COME TO THE AID OF THOSE WHO ARE TEMPTED."***
- (i) He was born in the likeness of sinful flesh.
 - (ii) He has shared in your nature.
 - (iii) He underwent everything that you did in life, yet with a very different result: He did not sin.
 - (iv) Knowing this should make you far more willing to come.
 - (v) He knows, He understands, He has felt your very temptations and knows of its effects.
 - (vi) He knows what your weakness is like; He knows how it can affect your service.
 - (vii) He knows what it is like to hunger and thirst and how that can bring about temptations to satisfy it in an ungodly way. The devil tried to get Jesus to satisfy His hunger by sinning against God.
 - (viii) He knows of the allurements of the world, He knows of the temptations to position and power. The devil offered to Him the kingdoms of the world and all their glory, if he would fall down and worship him. But Jesus overcame those things.
 - (ix) Oh, but you might say, "He was God, and God would not be tempted by these things!"
 - (x) But the Bible says He was tempted at all points as we are, yet without sin.
 - (xi) You must never forget for a moment that Jesus was truly man. He was man in every sense of the word as you and I are. Everything that we experience as men, He also experienced.
 - (xii) And because He has, He can deal mercifully and faithfully with you.

- g. People of God, never let the fact that Jesus is the high and exalted God of all the universe ever frighten you into thinking that you cannot come to Him. The Roman Church believes that because of this, they cannot approach Jesus directly, but must go through other mediators, such as the saints, or the greatest saint, the Virgin Mary. But that is not what the Bible says. There is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and He is mercifully, faithfully, and kindly disposed towards you, if you will but come to Him. "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 CANNOT SYMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES, BUT ONE WHO HAS BEEN TEMPTED IN ALL THINGS AS WE ARE, YET WITHOUT SIN. LET US THEREFORE DRAW NEAR WITH CONFIDENCE TO THE THRONE OF GRACE, THAT WE MAY RECEIVE MERCY AND MAY FIND GRACE TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED" (Heb. 4:14-16). Amen.