

8. Christ, Our Priest (4Q 2013—The Sanctuary)

Biblical material: Ps. 110:1–5; Gen. 14:18–20; Rom. 8:31–34; 1 Tim. 2:4–6; Heb. 7:1–3; 8:6; 2:17, 18; 3:6; 10:1–14; 8:1, 2.

Quotes

- Nothing is more indispensable to true religiosity than a mediator that links us with divinity. *Novalis*
- Priests are only men. *Robert Browning*
- God is sovereign lord of us all... Hence the relationship of man to God is direct, and requires no intermediary; any claim of Church or priest to be a necessary medium must be repelled. *John Wycliffe*
- Not only is there no need of an intermediary through whom He would want you to speak to Him, but He finds His delight in having you treat with Him personally and in all confidence. *Alphonsus Liguori*
- Preach in the name of God. The learned will smile; ask the learned what they have done for their country. The priests will excommunicate you; say to the priests that you know God better than all of them together do, and that between God and His law you have no need of any intermediary. *Giuseppe Mazzini*
- Christ has taken our nature into heaven to represent us, and has left us on earth with his nature to represent him. *John Newton*.

Questions

What is important about identifying Jesus as our high priest? In what way does Jesus act as our high priest, and what is the meaning of what he does? What does Jesus mean when he says he will NOT pray the Father for us? How does this clear statement impact our understanding of his priestly ministry?

Bible summary

Ps. 110 reminds us that the Lord is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, referencing the story in Gen. 14:18-20 that is also cited in Heb. 7:1–3. Rom. 8:34 FBV tells us that “It’s Christ Jesus who died—more importantly, who was raised from the dead—who stands at God’s right-hand, presenting our case.. “Paul tells Timothy: “For there is one God and one mediator of God and mankind—the man Christ Jesus. He gave himself so we could all be won back, demonstrating the evidence at the right time.” 1 Tim. 2:4–6 FBV. Christ’s priestly ministry is better (Heb. 8:6), makes atonement (Heb. 2:17), faithful (Heb. 3:6), serving in the true sanctuary (Heb. 8:1, 2). “That’s why when Christ came into the world he said, ‘You didn’t want sacrifices or offerings, but you did prepare a body for me. Burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin gave you no pleasure.’ Then I said, ‘God, see I’ve come to do what you want me to do, just as it says about me in the book.’ As mentioned above, ‘You didn’t want sacrifices or offerings, and burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin gave you no pleasure,’ (even though they are offered in accordance with the law’s requirements). Then he said, ‘See, I’ve come to do what you want.’ He gets rid of the first agreement so he can set up the second, through which we all are made holy through Jesus Christ offering his body once and for all time.” Heb. 10:5-10 FBV.

Comment

How would you define the primary function of a priest? What is a priestly ministry? The main idea common to all religious ideas of priests is to provide connection to the divine, to be the intermediary between God and man.

But if Jesus is God, how does he be this mediator? Another meaning of the word to mediate is to provide concepts and information, to be the one who supplies answers to questions. Unfortunately mediate all too often means to arbitrate between warring parties. How would such a view fit our relationship with God? And if Jesus is our High Priest, what does this mean in concept and practice?

Much of what we appreciate about Jesus as our High Priest will depend on what role we think he is performing. So it is absolutely essential to grasp what Hebrews is saying about this... Heb. 5:8-10 gives a statement of this high priesthood, what comes subsequently is an explanation. Really one needs to read the chapters 5 through 7 as a whole to see the concept Hebrews is establishing. The main thesis is: "That's why it says, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.' So the previous rule has been set aside because it was powerless and didn't work, ¹(for the law didn't make anything perfect). But now it's been replaced by a better hope by which we can come close to God." Heb 7:17-19 FBV. Entrance to God is the primary perspective. (See also 6: 20 FBV "Jesus went in on our behalf, because he had become a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.")

Jesus' ministry in the sanctuary should not be seen as contradicting his clearest statement where he says he will "tell you plainly about the Father... I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you." John 16:25, 26 Phillips. His disciples are delighted to hear such truths, and cry out, "Now you are speaking plainly." (v.29).

If the plainest, clearest truth is that Jesus is not pleading for us, what do we do with such ideas that Jesus is pleading with the Father for us? Actually, Hebrews does not say that. It does say (9:24) that he entered heaven "to appear for us." (NIV). But we do not have the image of him begging the Father to be nice to us, trying to persuade God to do anything other than he already intended. To say otherwise would be to split the trinity, to set the Godhead against each other.

In fact the various texts that mention Jesus appearing before the Father "for us" must be seen as advocating on our behalf not to the Father, but to the whole universe as the "jury." Satan is the Accuser, not God, and God already knows the truth. He does not need to be persuaded. So the correct image is of the Son as our advocate, pleading our case before the whole court, refuting the Accuser's claims, and so vindicating the Father, and us also in the process who have chosen to accept God's healing salvation.

The danger of the sanctuary message, misunderstood, is to suggest that Jesus (the good God) has to battle with the Father (the angry and hostile God) in order to achieve our salvation. In this way we reflect the charges of Satan who condemned God for being hostile and unforgiving, an unloving and vengeful Being who took pleasure in vindictive punishment of erring creatures. We would do well to totally reject such a picture. It was not to induce love in the Father's heart that Jesus came and died, but because of the Father's love!

“Since Jesus lives forever, his priesthood is permanent. As a result he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, living always to plead their case on their behalf.” Hebrews 7:24, 25 FBV. See also Romans 8:34.

If God is primarily concerned with answering the issues in the great controversy, as well as saving us, then the whole concept of Jesus achieving atonement by interceding with God needs very careful explanation. In John 16:26 Jesus says he will not plead the Father for us. So who is he pleading with/for? Is this about persuading a reluctant God to do what he would not do otherwise? Surely not!

Right at the heart of Christ’s atoning work we can say wrong things about God. If we see Jesus as our friend who is trying to convince God to be nice to us; if Jesus is the protective barrier that stands between us and an angry God—what are we saying about God the Father? That he doesn’t love us as much as Jesus; that he’s against us; that he has to be persuaded to forgive us and so on...

This is not speaking well of God—in fact this is a pagan view of God, one who demands human sacrifice to appease the terrible gods! Doesn’t God the Father love us as much as God the Son? We need to be very careful what we say about the Sanctuary, for in saying good things about the Son we may be misrepresenting the Father! God is not condemning us. The accusations come from the accuser of the brethren, Satan himself. That’s why Jesus speaks for us—to counter the charges of the devil. And note here that this is part of the wider issues in the great controversy, and this intercession is not trying to persuade God the Father to be good to us. God is always working for us, let’s not split the Trinity! Both Father and Son are equally loving and self-sacrificing, working together for the salvation-healing of humanity. The truth is that in a complete way Jesus fulfils the priest’s function of revealing God to humanity.

Ellen White Comments

Jesus cares for each one as though there were not another individual on the face of the earth. As Deity He exerts mighty power in our behalf, while as our Elder Brother He feels for all our woes. The Majesty of heaven held not Himself aloof from degraded, sinful humanity. We have not a high priest who is so high, so lifted up, that He cannot notice us or sympathize with us, but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. {AG 78}

All who are followers of Christ should deal with one another exactly as we wish the Lord to deal with us in our errors and weaknesses; for we are all erring, and need his pity and forgiveness. Jesus consented to take human nature, that he might know how to pity, and how to plead with his Father in behalf of sinful, erring mortals. He volunteered to become man’s advocate, and he humiliated himself to become acquainted with the temptations wherewith man was beset, that he might succor those who should be tempted, and be a tender and faithful high priest. {GW92 94}

In Christ divinity and humanity were united, and the only way in which man may be an overcomer is through becoming a partaker of the divine nature. . . . Divinity and humanity are blended in him who has the spirit of Christ. The apostle Paul writes, “In all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest.” . . . “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” {SD 24}

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