

Jesus the Priest, Part 3

While normally we only spend two lessons on each role, it seemed important to take a third lesson to talk about the role of Priest. One of the things that we see about Jesus is that the Hebrew author tells us that He was tempted in all ways as we are (Hebrews 4:14-5:10). This teaches us some valuable lessons, both about Christ and about ourselves.

One of the things that makes this study difficult is that we do not understand how Jesus can be both fully God and fully man. Part of our inability to understand is that we truly do not know fully our own nature, how we are both flesh and soul and how those two natures interact. Yet we know that God tells us that we are both and we believe Him. In the same way, we trust that Jesus is both fully God and fully man. As we go through this study we will be focusing on the physical nature of Jesus. In no way are we denying His divinity. Nor do we completely understand how it works. But we will look at the scriptures and see what they tell us and see what we can learn from them.

Jesus needed to learn and grow

We do not know much about the childhood of Jesus. However, Luke 2:41-52 does provide us some insight into it. When Jesus was 12 years old He and His family went up to Jerusalem for the passover. As His family returns home, they realize that Jesus is not with them.

When they come back to Jerusalem they find young Jesus in the Temple. He was sitting among the teachers and He was listening to them and asking questions. And while they were impressed with Jesus' knowledge and ability, it is worth noting that Jesus was in fact sitting at their feet. He was learning from them. We do not see Jesus preaching to them and explaining to them the scriptures as we do later in His life. Instead we see Jesus still listening to others.

This idea is cemented at the end of the chapter. Here we see Jesus increased in wisdom(Luke 2:52). We might expect that God in the flesh had no need to ask any questions or would already have complete wisdom. Yet Luke here shows us the humanity of Jesus in that He still had some learning, some growing that could be accomplished.

Jesus needed to spend time in prayer

It is a hallmark of Jesus' life that He dedicated so much of it to prayer. We might expect that Jesus would not need to talk to the Father as we do. Or at least not as much as we do because He too was God. Yet the scriptures show a very different story. One of our first encounters of Jesus in Mark 1:35 shows that Jesus woke up early to make time for prayer.

If anyone would have had an excuse to not pray in this instance it was Jesus. Again, He was God in the flesh. Furthermore, it was not as if He had spent the night wasting the hours away. He had spent the whole night healing and teaching others. He had been a servant to those

around Him. Yet Jesus understood the power of prayer and so he dedicated Himself to it. We always see Jesus making time for it.

This is no more evident than in the Garden of Gethsemane. The night before the crucifixion Jesus goes to the garden and He prays to His Father. He warns Peter in Matthew 26:40-42 that prayer is necessary to help Peter overcome the temptation he is about to face. He knows that Peter wants to remain faithful and that Peter's spirit is willing. But He also knows that the flesh is weak. He is encouraging Peter to pray so that Peter's spirit can overcome the temptation of the flesh.

This warning to Peter helps us better understand Jesus' own actions. Despite the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, His own flesh was weak. He knew that He was going to be tempted the next day. He knew that it would not be easy to endure the pain and still refrain from sinning. Jesus' telling Peter to pray helps us better understand that Jesus was not praying as just an example. In fact Jesus was praying to bolster His own flesh, because it too was weak.

Jesus was tempted as we are

Sometimes we may look at the temptation account in Matthew 4 and think that Jesus was only tempted this one time and then Satan gave up trying to trap Him. The scriptures clearly indicate that Jesus was in fact tempted throughout His whole life, just as we are (Luke 4:13). We can actually see the temptations that Satan puts in front of Jesus in the desert are put in front of Jesus again at the cross. We will take a look at the three temptations and their parallels during the crucifixion.

Use Miraculous Powers for Selfish Gain

Jesus had been fasting for forty days and forty nights. Surely He was incredibly hungry. Satan comes and tempts Him on this front first, asking Him to command the stones to become loaves of bread (Matthew 4:3). We know that there was nothing inherently sinful about Jesus creating food. In John 6 we see how Jesus is able to transform 5 loaves and two fishes into a meal for 5000 people and still had leftovers for 12 baskets. This was neither something impossible or inherently wrong that Satan was asking Jesus to do.

Yet it would have been wrong for Jesus to use the power for His benefit instead of for the glorification of God. His miracles were to serve a purpose, not be something used for selfish gain. We can see how this temptation would have been ever present at the cross. Jesus had power over sickness and health, over life and death. Was it not easily in His powers to heal His wounds? Or to make it to where He felt no pain? The amount of punishment that Jesus' body would have gone through in the crucifixion and leading up to it would have been incredible (Matthew 27:27-35). Jesus had to resist the temptation to ease the pain on Himself, even though He had the power to do so.

Use Miraculous Powers in a Display of Pride

The second temptation that Satan offers Jesus is proof that He is the one of prophecy by calling angels to save Him (Matthew 4:6). There is great temptation when people who mock or oppose us challenge us to prove our strength and ability. Many people have been tricked into foolish tasks by the taunt, "You can't do that." It would have been natural for the earthly part of Jesus to want to put Satan in his place and prove that the angels would indeed protect Him from any danger.

We see this exact temptation on the cross as well. In Matthew 27:41-42, we see Jesus taunted by the Jews because He saved others but now He was apparently unable to save Himself. We know in fact that Jesus could have sent down legions of angels, destroyed the Romans and Jews alike and been taken down from the cross (Matthew 26:53). Yet Jesus does not give in to this temptation at the cross either.

Become King without Having to Die

In Matthew 4:8-9, Satan makes an offer to Jesus that at first seems absurd. He is offering Him the kingdoms of the world. Jesus knows that He will be made King, but to do so comes at a very high cost. Jesus will have to die and suffer on the cross. There is a way to avoid this: follow Satan's plan instead of the Father's. We know that this temptation was ever present because of how hard the Father's plan was. Even the night before the crucifixion Jesus was praying that there be some way that God's plan could be accomplished without having to go through all that He was about to go through (Matthew 26:38-39). Yet Jesus bore all of the pain on the cross and followed the Father's plan to completion.

Application:

We are not alone in temptation

Sometimes we doubt that Jesus truly was tempted in all ways. Yet a clearer understanding of Jesus' life shows that Jesus has been tempted. He has been in grief and agony, asking for God to release Him from the burdens brought on by the flesh. He was sorrowful about the things He would give up. Jesus knows the pain of obedience, the pull of temptation. He has been there and He sympathizes with our weakness.

We can overcome temptation

Jesus' ability to overcome temptation gives us confidence that we can too. Despite the fact that He was God, He also came in the flesh. His flesh was weak as well. Yet He found a way to overcome (Hebrews 5:7-10). Because Jesus was able to live sinless, we know that it is possible

for us to move forward and to overcome temptation ourselves. It proves the promise that God has given us: there is always a way to escape any temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Questions:

1. What does it mean that Jesus was tempted as we are?
2. Why was prayer so important to Jesus?
3. Does it surprise you that prayer was important to Jesus? Why or why not?
4. How did Satan tempt Jesus to use His powers for His benefit in the desert?
5. How was Jesus tempted to use His powers for His benefit on the cross?
6. How did Satan appeal to Jesus' pride in the desert?
7. How did the Jewish crowds appeal to Jesus' pride on the cross?
8. How did Satan tempt Jesus with the kingdoms of the world?
9. Why would that temptation have been effective on the cross?
10. What applications can we learn from the temptation of Christ?