

Jesus the Priest, Part 2

In the New Testament, we see that Jesus is the anti-type of the High Priest. This concept is emphasized most in the book of Hebrews. In the book of Hebrews we see that not only is Jesus a priest, He is *the* new High Priest. Furthermore, His priesthood is greater than that of the Levitical priests. By looking at the priesthood that we studied last week and comparing Jesus to it, we can see why we should be thankful for Him as our High Priest.

The Holiness of Jesus

Here we see two parallels to Jesus. The first is that just as the Levites were considered a sacrifice in Numbers 3:12-13, Jesus was also a sacrifice. This will be explored in detail later in our study. We will look at how Jesus was the Lamb of God. But here it is worth noting that Jesus and the Levites share the appointment in common.

It makes sense then that Jesus would need to have purity just as the Levites did. Part of being a Levite, and particularly a priest, is that you were to have a certain level of cleanliness before you served the Lord. While in the Old Testament this was ceremonial, we see that Jesus was spiritually pure when He completes His tasks as the High Priest. We see that multiple New Testament writers explain to us that Jesus Himself was without sin. Paul, Peter, and John all attest to this part of Jesus' character (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:5).

The Hebrew author emphasizes for us why this was important:

“For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.” (Hebrews 7:26-27)

One of the failings of the Old Testament priests was that even the best of them were sinful. It hindered their work. They had to offer sacrifices for themselves first. Only then could they offer sacrifices on behalf of other people. We also understand that such sacrifices could never purify sins without the death of Jesus.

Jesus' work as a High Priest was not encumbered by such failings. Because He was without sin, we see Him do things that the High Priests could not. His holiness allows Him to go into God's presence on our behalf. It is not the shadow of God's presence, much like the tabernacle and temple were, but instead He is able to go before the true throne of God and make a case on our behalf (Hebrews 9:24). Without His holiness, He could not go to such a place to do His work.

He Represents the People to God

As mentioned above, Jesus is able to go before God on our behalf. He is able to make propitiation for our sin. He pleads on our behalf for forgiveness and offers Himself as the sacrifice. He is able to explain to God what it is like for us to be tempted. In the next lesson we will talk about how truly familiar Jesus is with our struggles and our temptations. He knows how hard it is to be able to resist, because He Himself went through it. The Hebrew author tells us, "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." (Hebrews 4:15)

We see that His holiness, both as priest and sacrifice, also allows Him to accomplish more than could have been ever accomplished in the Old Testament. The purpose of the sacrifices was to cleanse the people of their sins. Yet despite this fact, the uncleanness of the people was constantly before them. It was made clear that only the High Priest could go into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. No one else was worthy. While they did have forgiveness of sins, their lack of access to the tabernacle was a constant reminder that there was still a barrier between them and God.

However, Jesus' sacrificial offering changed all of that. Matthew 27:51 tells us that when Jesus died, the curtain separating the Holy of Holies was torn from the top. This indicated that it was torn by God. It also ushered in a new era. Before, people were separated from God by their sins. Jesus' death changed that.

In Hebrews 10:19 we are told that we are able to enter the holy place with confidence. We know that nothing unholy can come before the presence of God. We also know that our sins have corrupted us and made us unfit to be there. We should be terrified to be in the presence of God. The Hebrew author shows us that because of Jesus' work, we should joyfully and confidently enter into it.

This confidence comes because we do have such a great High Priest. Jesus has done an excellent job representing us to the Father. He has approached God, He has informed God of our weaknesses and showed sympathy on our behalf. He then has offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Because of that we have true forgiveness of sins. We have been made pure and holy ourselves. Our confidence comes not because of what we have done, but because we know what Jesus has done in representing us.

He represents God to the People

John 1:1 tells us that "In the beginning was the Word and Word was with God and the Word was God." In verse 14 we are told the word became flesh. Paul tells us the exact same thing in Philippians 2:6-7. "Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

Jesus was not just a man who lived perfectly, thus making Himself a perfect representative for man. He also was God in the flesh. Using the imagery of the tabernacle from Hebrews, we learn that Jesus was from the beginning in the presence of the Father. He has always been in the Holy of Holies. He left there to come and spend time on earth in the flesh. Once His job on earth was complete He returned back.

This understanding of Jesus allows us to realize that He also represents God to us. In the Old Testament, the High Priests were the extension of the tabernacle to the people. They could not go before God, but the Priest could and would pass along God's message to them. Jesus fits in that same role. His coming to earth allowed Him to perfectly represent God (Hebrews 1:1-3) We are able to better understand our relationship to God because of Jesus' time on earth.

Again, this is discussed in detail in the second half of this study on Jesus. Yet as it fits in regard to the High Priest, there are two examples worth noting. The first is in Matthew 9:9-13. We see that Jesus calls Matthew to be His disciple. Matthew is a tax collector who was reviled among the Jews and considered a thief and traitor. Jesus goes and spends time with Matthew. Many other tax collectors and sinners come to visit and Jesus spends time with all of them.

The Pharisees are aghast that this could happen. Why would a prophet and holy man like Jesus eat with these terrible people? Jesus informs them that these are indeed the exact people He came to heal and help. These sinners are the ones who are desiring to be right with God, even more so than some of the Pharisees. By spending time with them, Jesus, as God's representative, is actually showing their fellowship with God.

Luke 7:36-50 gives us another such example. Jesus is here being tended to by a sinner. Instead of rebuking her and refusing to let her touch Him, Jesus accepts her gift. He understands the repentance that such a gift shows. In verse 48, he tells her that her sins are indeed forgiven.

This is what the High Priest was able to assure the people. When He takes the sacrifice before the Lord, God would send the Priest back out to assure the people that their sins had indeed been forgiven. Jesus allows us to know that we are cleansed. The fact that we have sinned no longer needs to separate us from God. Like this woman, we were lost in sin and did not know our way out. We came to Jesus, hoping to find relief from the bondage that sin had ensnared us in. Jesus lets us know that our pleas have been heard, that He has offered a sacrifice on our behalf and that we can indeed have confidence that our sins have been forgiven.

Questions:

1. What book in the New Testament talks about Jesus' role as priest the most?
2. How was Jesus a sacrifice as well as a priest?
3. List two authors that attest to Jesus as sinless.
4. How was Jesus' holiness different from that of the Old Testament priests?
5. Why can Jesus sympathize with our weaknesses?
6. What did the tearing of the veil in the temple at Jesus' death represent?
7. Why do we have more access to God than the Israelites did?
8. Why was Jesus able to better represent God than the High Priests in the Old Testament?
9. What comfort did Matthew get from letting Jesus eat at his house?
10. What message did Jesus give to the penitent woman in Luke 7?