

Title: The Priest
Date: 3/23/25
Subject: Jesus is the Perfect High Priest
Scripture: Hebrews 7:23 – 28 and more

You need a priest. I need a priest. We all need a priest. Not a human priest whose life is marred by sin, imperfections, failings, wrong doings and moral crimes against God. We don't need a person like that to represent us. Since priests and all the humans are imperfect, they can't adequately represent us before God. It's like a corrupted data transfer. Might have the best intentions, but will take down wrong path, get error message.

We need a true high priest, a perfect high priest. Hebrews calls upon us to fix our thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess (3:1).

Read Hebrews 7:23-28.

Alistair Begg provides background: “The sacrificial system was initiated by God. It was a gift from God to his covenant people, so that in the doing of these things they may learn who God is and what he expects of his people, and they in turn might understand the wonder of redemption...that fulfillment, of course, is here outlined for us in the book of Hebrews in the finished and perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ, he who is the Great High Priest and the one who is the perfect sacrifice...So when you read in your Old Testament and you come to those passages where there are sacrifices, remember at least... Number one, this is to show me how costly forgiveness is. Secondly, it is to make clear to me that the punishment for sin is death. And thirdly, that I may be in no doubt that without shedding of blood, there is no remission and forgiveness of sins” (truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/jesus-the-great-high-priest). He encouraged people to read Leviticus 8, 9, 10, 16 for details about OT sacrifices but if braver and bolder to read the whole book.

I. The inadequacy of human priests.

“Those” priests are human priests. They served in the temple according to the regulations given to Moses. What is said of them and their inadequacy is true of any other priest, religious leader or ordinary human.

A. Impermanency. V. 23. Death is a harsh fact of life. All people die unless Jesus returns and interrupts the natural course of human nature. Priests die. Non-priests die. Death brings an end to any possible work. Obviously, a priest could no longer serve if they had died.

The death disqualification included the high priest. The first high priest was Aaron, Moses’ brother. When Aaron died his son became high priest. Then there were people like Eli, Samuel, and Zadok as well as Annas and Caiaphas during Jesus’ time. Each man passed from the scene and was succeeded by a replacement.

B. Imperfection. V. 27. Even if a priest could live and serve forever, they were still sinful sinners. Sacrifices had to be offered first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people. Human priests were spiritually weak and unable to do anything to deliver others, let alone themselves from the stranglehold of sin (7:28, 5:2). They didn’t have what it takes.

C. Unending duties. V. 27. The job was never done. They had to offer sacrifices, the same sacrifices day after day after day after day after day. Imagine the situation of a priest, let's call him Urijah, who sacrifices another sheep, another cow, more birds, and the next day the same with no end in sight. He could draw the conclusion it was useless. There was no final resolution.

Old Testament sacrifices didn't take away sins but merely covered them. This was like what happened during the Exodus when the Israelites put the blood of a lamb on the door frame to protect them from the destroying angel sent by the Lord.

The high priest was unique. While he shared in the duties with other priests, he primarily was the overseer. He was in a class by himself. People viewed him as up there next to God. He was the supreme religious leader. He had special attire consisting of robe, other clothing, hat, and breastplate (Exodus 28). The Lord gave guidance and revealed his will through the high priest.

His most important duty, only one he could perform, was to enter the Holy of Holies to be in God's presence to represent people before God. He was limited to one day and only on one day, the Day of Atonement. If he tried to enter on any other day, he'd die. He always needed to come with the blood of a bull which he offered for himself and the sins of the people.... Then he'd have to do the same thing the next year.

This procedure showed that the way into the Most Holy Place hadn't yet been disclosed (9:7, 8). The sacrifices of animals couldn't cleanse the consciences of the worshippers (9:9). They could only make the ceremonially unclean outwardly clean (9:13) and not settle the issues of the heart. They were dealing with things that were copies of the heavenly things (9:23) and a shadow (8:5, 10:1). Ever try to catch a shadow. It looks like something's there, but can't grab it with your hands. It lacks substance.

READ 7:11.

A longer passage declares: "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins... Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (10:1-4, 11).

Our friend Urijah would had a bird's eye view. "That's my sin, again. Still guilty. That's Josiah's sin, again. Still guilty. That's Muriel's sin, again. Still guilty." Something needed to happen.

The good news is Jesus Christ happened. The OT sacrificial system pointed to the future and the ultimate sacrifice Jesus Christ would make when he would take away sins. He has the superior ministry (8:6) as he serves in the true sanctuary, the heavenly tabernacle that is perfect as it has been made by God, not human hands (8:2, 9:11, 24).

II. The super adequacy of Jesus as the High Priest

A. Character. READ 7:16. Jesus didn't become a priest because he was from the tribe of Levi. He was from a different tribe. He was from the tribe of Judah. He became a priest because of his indestructible life.

v. 26 - Jesus is holy, blameless, pure and set apart from sinners. He was sinless. Perfect. Always did what was pleasing to God, always thought what was pleasing to God, always used words that were pleasing to God. He never committed a moral crime against God. He was always perfectly aligned with God's will and commands. He always lived in a perfect relationship with the Father.

He is perfection personified. He has been made perfect forever (v. 28) as the result of giving himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins and rising from the dead. Jesus is different from human priests and all humans, vastly different. It's like comparing my basketball ability to Michael Jordan. No contest. Poor Mr. Jordan. Right... His Airness would obliterate, absolutely crush me.

v. 15 tells us Jesus is like Melchizedek. Mel who? He must be important as Hebrews tells us six times Jesus is like Melchizedek (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 15, 17) and devotes a great deal of space to the comparison. What is there about this man?

We could go back to the Biblical historical records, but Melchizedek isn't given an extensive and thorough biography. We wouldn't uncover anything more than what's given in Hebrews. Chapter 7 provides the most info about this man who is shrouded in mystery.

READ 7:1-3.

Some basic facts: he was from the time of Abraham. He was a priest of God Most High before the time the Levitical priesthood was set up under Moses. Abram gave him a tenth of the spoils from defeating the kings who'd captured his nephew Lot and others. The Genesis record adds the reason: Melchizedek blessed Abraham under his old name: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand" (Genesis 14:19, 20).

The names given to Melchizedek - king of righteousness and king of peace - point to Jesus the Messiah. The comparison between the two in v. 3 is Melchizedek is like the Son of God in that he is a priest forever, an unusual status for a human priest. Part of the air of mystery is Melchizedek didn't have father or mother, was without genealogy and without beginning of days or end of life. I take that to mean that none of that is recorded. Obviously, he was a human being who had parents with a beginning and ending to his life.

Melchizedek shows how Christ goes light years beyond merely fulfilling the Levitical system. He wasn't just one more priest in a long line of priests offering more of a long line of sacrifices. He is an eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek (7:17). He was chosen by God to be the Great High Priest (7:21, 22, 28; 5:1-5).

B. His position. Though he was the Son of God, He was made like his brothers (2:17). He was made lower than the angels (2:9) and had the same physical nature as people (2:14). He experienced the joys of living on earth - friendship and attending a wedding (John 2). He encountered the miseries, sorrows and deep anguish of living on earth - the death of friend, death of his human father Joseph. He suffered loss. He encountered hostility and opposition (12:3). He agonized in prayer (5:7). He had opportunities to serve or be served and he

always chose to serve. His human nature was perfected, completed, by the suffering he experienced and through his obedience to the Father (2:10, 5:8). He endured.

It was essential for the Son of God to become human. The OT prophesied, foretold, that he would be a man. The NT showed the fulfillment. As many as 574 OT verses point to the promise, life, ministry and times of the coming Messiah (J. Barton Payne). The general consensus is Jesus fulfilled at least 300 prophecies with many about his coming to earth and his death. If you want an extensive list, you can go to gotquestions.org and search: "How many prophecies did Jesus fulfill?"

Josh McDowell says there are 60 major messianic prophecies with approximately 270 ramifications that Jesus Christ fulfilled (More Than a Carpenter, chapter 9 - Will the Real Messiah Please Stand Up?). He discusses the probability of 48 prophecies being fulfilled in one person. It would be 1 in 10 to the 157th power (1 followed by 157 zeros). He references a book by professor Peter W. Stoner (Science Speaks) who calculated the probability of one person fulfilling 8 prophecies – 1 in 10 to the 17th power - 1 followed by 17 zeros.

Stoner said this could be illustrated taking 10 to the 17th power silver dollars and cover the state of Texas two feet deep. Mark one of the silver dollars and stir the whole pile thoroughly. They say that everything's bigger in Texas, but that would be some stirring stick. Blindfold a man and tell him he can pick one silver dollar to find the marked one. The chance of him getting the correct silver dollar would be the same as eight prophecies being fulfilled in one person.

Stoner's conclusion: "Now these prophecies were either given by inspiration of God or the prophets just wrote them as they thought they should be. In such a case the prophets had just one chance in 10 to the 17th power of having them come true in any man, but they all came true in Christ. This means that the fulfillment of these 8 prophecies alone proves that God inspired the writing of those prophecies to a definiteness which lacks only one chance in 10 to the 17th power of being absolute" (In More Than a Carpenter from Science Speaks, pp. 106-112).

The first prophecy that points to Jesus' coming is in the first book of the Bible and the third chapter. It's after Adam and Eve sinned and God pronounced a curse on the serpent, creation and people. He tells the devil who is operating through the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her; He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15). This foretells the victory Christ would provide over the devil. He has been exalted above the heavens.

C. A permanent priesthood. Everything about Jesus is eternal. He rose from the dead, ascended to the Father in heaven and lives forever (7:24). He serves without interruption and without ending. He is the source of eternal salvation (5:9). He has no successor who will carry on the office as he always lives to intercede for those who come to God through him (7:25).

III. Christ's activity

He isn't a figurehead priest. He's active.

A. Jesus saves completely (7:25). It's not a partial salvation. It's not something where we need to add a little bit more to it to make sure what he did was enough. It's complete, full, entire. There's nothing left that anybody else can do. The indication that he completed his work is that he sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven (8:1, 10:12).

Human priests sat down when they were done with their duties. It was temporary as they had rise and do more sacrifices later in the day or the next day and the next day and the next day. Jesus is done sacrificing. He doesn't need to offer sacrifices Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday for himself before he can do so for others.

The reason Jesus is done with sacrificing is he gave a full and complete offering - once for all by his own blood (9:12). It was the only sufficient and acceptable sacrifice that would bring eternal redemption (9:12).

Only one who was a human could pay the penalty humans acquired for their sins. Only one who was God could be a sufficient sacrifice to pay penalty for people's sins. He perfectly meets our need for a perfect High Priest. He alone can save completely. There's no sin that is so big that he is unable to take it away and remove its penalty.

More? Want something more? Think we need something more? There's something more.

B. He acts in the lives of his followers because he's merciful and faithful (2:17). Out of him flows love, love for the hurting, love for those who've made a mess out of their lives, love for those who are his brothers and sisters.

He's faithful. He isn't two-faced like some people who are fair weather friends – here today when things are nice but gone tomorrow at the slightest hint of a storm. Jesus stands beside us forever.

He helps those who are being tempted because he himself suffered when he was tempted (2:18). We mainly think about the time when he was tempted by the devil for 40 days in the wilderness. That temptation was a battle and so were all the rest he faced. Through all the temptation, He didn't sin.

Since he knows what it's like to face all kinds of temptations, He empathizes with our weaknesses (4:15). Anybody here been tempted? This morning? The past hour? Right now?

He doesn't say, "That's okay. I know it's hard. Go ahead and sin....." It was expected human priests would deal gently with people because they were subject to weakness (5:1-2).

Thomas Hewitt wrote about how this quality is to play out (Tyndale New Testament Commentary on Hebrews, p. 96 on 5:2), "It is necessary for him to avoid undue severity, for he is under the same condemnation; yet, as God's representative, he cannot be too lenient, for God never overlooks sin."

This attitude even more so describes Jesus. He is able to deal gently with people. Jesus helps us find the way out so we don't give in to sin. When we do sin, he's there to forgive and guide back to the right path. He helps us overcome.

Because of what Jesus faced and conquered we are able to confidently approach the throne of grace in our time of need to receive the help we need. What time? Time of need. How often? Any time.

Trust in God's Word and rest in the full and finished work of Jesus.