

Special: Spring 2024 #1

March 17, 2024

Series Title: Behold Our King!

Today's Message: The Priesthood of Jesus Christ; John 18:19-24; Hebrews (many references)

With Resurrection Sunday nearing I want to look at the successful priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Great High Priest. If you and I can grasp even a small portion of what that means, that Jesus is our Great High Priest, I am convinced it will change the way we live! We will be encouraged and strengthened in our faith and our love and our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ!

The Priesthood, as designed by God, is a most beautiful and gracious gift. It is through the priesthood that we can sense God's pity upon His people. The priesthood was a necessary installment in order for sinful people to be able to have relationship with God.

But before we forget, because of the Holiness of God, sinful people could not simply appoint a priest of their own choosing to represent them before God. There are some big questions to answer. Like, what is God like? Why can we not just approach God in any way we want? What separates us from God? Is sin really such a big deal that our deepest heartfelt sincerity is not good enough in order to gain God's favor?

We would not truly know the answers to these questions except that God also graciously provided the gift of the office of prophet in order to understand and appreciate what a gift is the office of priest. God called men to the office of prophet for the purpose of directly speaking to the people. As the prophet speaks or writes he is communicating God's revelation of Himself answering the important questions about God. For instance, one of most important responsibilities of a prophet in the Old Testament was to call people to repentance by turning from their evil ways and turn to God and live! Ezekiel 33:11 says, "Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'" (That is God speaking to the people through the prophet!)

So, whereas the prophet functions directionally from God to man, much like an ambassador is representative of their sovereign. The priest's function is to unite man to God, in faithful obedience to the revelation of God, providing the means for man to be reconciled to God. This glorious interaction between God and man and man to God is described perfectly in 2 Corinthians 5:11-21. We will look at a few verses to give us the idea. In these verses Paul calls himself and the other messengers of the Gospel ambassadors. These ambassadors function on God's behalf to call sinners to repentance and believe the gospel. Paul writes, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

In these verses we can see clearly that Paul, and the other messengers, are serving as ambassadors or prophets, appealing to sinners on God's behalf to be reconciled to God. And, you may have noticed the mention of a mediator, someone who is the agent and cause for reconciliation with God. Did you see? Paul says, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ." Christ serves as a mediator. But, as Paul goes on to say in 2 Corinthians 5:21, Christ serves as the acceptable sacrifice as well: "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." So, in these verses we see Christ Jesus as both priest and sacrifice. He is our great high priest.

In the letter to the Hebrew believers the writer makes a case saying that the old priesthood under the law had become obsolete with coming of Christ. His priesthood is a better priesthood and His standing as our Great High priest is better than that of those under the Old Covenant.

We will look at 1) why the old priesthood was insufficient; 2) Some Biblical examples as to why the priesthood was a failed priesthood; and 3) the glory and blessing of Christ as our Great High Priest.

I) **Why the Old Priesthood was insufficient to meet the needs of people.**

- A) "The best of men are men at best."
- 1) The Levitical priesthood was comprised of men from the line of Kohath from the tribe of Levi.
 - (a) Aaron and his sons were the first priests of Israel to be called by God. (Exodus 28:1-5)
 - (i) They were consecrated, holy to the Lord and were men of excellence; to be holy men.
 - 2) Aaron was appointed to be the High Priest, serving the highest role as representative of the people before God, servicing on behalf of the people before God.
 - (a) He served as mediator between men and God.
 - (i) Offering sacrifices
 - (ii) Offering prayers and petitions day and night, interceding on behalf of the people.
- B) "...men at best."
- 1) These men were sinners too. They fell short of the glory of God, unfit to stand before God.
 - (a) God required the priests to offer sacrifices for themselves before they could mediate on behalf of the people they represented. Specifically, God addressed Aaron's need:
 - (i) Leviticus 16:11-14 describes this and adds, "...so that he will not die."
 - 2) Grave consequences for his sins.
 - (a) Leviticus 4:3: "If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people..."
 - (i) As he goes so goes the nation! Unlike Christ whose holiness provides freedom, renewal and life (John 10:10), the sin of the anointed priest brings oppression, devastation and death, just the opposite of the righteous priesthood of Christ!

II) **Some Biblical Examples of the failed priesthood.**

- A) 1 Samuel: Eli the priest and his two sons and a failed priesthood.
- 1) The period of the Judges
 - (a) No mention of priestly intercession or mediation. Dark times in Israel's history.
 - 2) Eli's interaction with Hannah: As she prayed fervently, rather than serving as her advocate he accused her of being drunk. (1 Samuel 1:14)
 - (a) Eli's wicked sons Hophni and Phinehas (1 Samuel 2:12-25). Eli did little to intervene.
 - (i) Misused sacrifices and offerings, which the people brought to the Tabernacle.
 - (ii) Abused and misused the women who came to the Tabernacle.
- B) Ezekiel the prophet prophesied against the priest (shepherds) of Israel (Ezekiel 34:1-10)
- 1) They abused God's people by treating them harshly, extorting money, and abandoning them.
- C) The Gospels reveal a failed priesthood.
- 1) Mark 6:34: "When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. And He began to teach them many things."
 - 2) John 2:13-17: The high priest and the chief priests failed to keep order in the House of God preventing the people from worshipping. The chief priests were responsible to keep order.
 - 3) John 11:50; 18:13,19-24: Annas and Caiaphas were wicked high priests.
 - (a) John 11:50: Caiaphas addressed the Sanhedrin giving permission to hunt and kill Jesus.
 - (b) John 18:19-24: Annas the former high priest revealed his ignorance as to the message of Jesus. Jesus explained that He daily taught openly in both synagogues and the temple, yet Annas knew nothing of what Jesus taught.
 - (i) He lived in a palace as did Caiaphas. They were out of touch with the people.
 - (ii) The high priest was appointed by Roman governors. Probably political appointees.
 - 4) These priests are described as unholy, full of blame, stained and impure, selfish.

- D) Key Point to remember: The priesthood was designed by God to provide an advocate for the people. This advocate was to connect with the people, sympathize with the people, stand before God on behalf of the people, and connect the people to God. These priests did none of the above!
- 1) The prescription was this: “Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself was subject to weakness.” (Hebrews 5:1-2). But they failed to do this!
- E) But God...! But God provided a perfect High Priest to meet our needs!
- 1) Hebrews 7:26: “For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest [to meet our needs who is] holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.”

III) The Glory and Blessing of Christ our High Priest.

- A) His priesthood is a superior priesthood!
- 1) Jesus Christ is mediator of a better covenant than the old order of priests (**Hebrews 8:6**)
 - 2) He is priest by oath of God and of a better and eternal covenant!
 - (a) Read **Hebrews 7:20-22** He became a priest by an oath from God! As opposed to governors.
 - 3) His priesthood is permanent, eternal!
 - (a) Hebrews 7:23-24: “Now there have been many priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood.”
 - 4) His priesthood is without blemish.
 - (a) Hebrews 7:26: “For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest [to meet our needs who is] holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.”
 - 5) He continually intercedes for His people, continually applying His finished work on their behalf!
 - (a) Hebrews 7:25: “Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him (the mediator), because He always lives to intercede for them.”
 - 6) He is superior because He did not have to offer sacrifice for Himself. He was without sin!
 - (a) Read **Hebrews 4:14-15**
 - 7) He is a sympathetic high priest.
 - (a) Hebrews 4:15: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”
 - 8) His priesthood is perfect and complete because He Himself became the sacrifice, satisfying the righteous requirements of God **for us! On our behalf! (2 Corinthians 5:21)**
 - (a) Under the old covenant the priests were imperfect and needed a substitutionary sacrifice for themselves. But Jesus not only serves as high priest but mediates as the sacrifice for our sins; a sacrifice offered once for all!
 - (i) The old priesthood had to offer sacrifices annually, and even daily. They could not cleanse the conscience of a sense of guilt (Hebrews 10:1-4).
 - (ii) But Jesus is our great high priest and it says, “But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God.” (Hebrews 10:12)
 - 9) His priesthood sanctifies His people perfectly forever!
 - (a) Hebrews 10:14: “because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”
- B) Jesus is our perfect mediator!
- 1) He mediates on our behalf through His own blood as we have seen by the above verses!
 - 2) He also mediates on behalf before the Father by His intercessory prayer, advocating for us!
 - (a) Romans 8:34 (interceding); 1 John 2:1 (our advocate with the Father); Hebrews 7:25