

## **CHRIST THE PRIEST**

Series: Advent 2017 - Jesus: Prophet Priest, and King

12/17/2017 - Stonebrook Church - Matt Heerema

### **INTRO: ADVENT**

It is the time of the year when we focus in on the arrival of Christ into the world; God's greatest gift to mankind. We call this the "Advent Season," the four weeks before Christmas time; a time to reflect on our condition before Christmas and what his arrival means for us.

But what exactly was the intention, the purpose of God's gift of Jesus to us? I think most of us in this room could give the right Sunday school answer, something about God showing us love and forgiveness. But how is his gift to us affecting your life right now?

Ask yourself, am I living day-by-day with a conscious awareness of the difference Jesus makes in my world, in my heart, in my situation? When was the last time I sat and took stock of the things happening around me, in my life, in my mind, in my family, at work, and gave serious thought to how God's gift of Jesus changes everything?

That's what we're going to look at today.

### **REVIEW: CHRIST THE PROPHET**

Our three-week Advent series is focusing on three different aspects of this gift: of Jesus's ministry. One classic formulation of Jesus's ministry as that he is a prophet, priest, and king.

Last week we talked about Jesus the prophet, the proclaimer of God's message to God's people. We also saw that not only was Jesus the Prophet, but He was also the message! Jesus is the focus and the fulfillment of all the Old Testament writings, and we see he is the center and the focus of the New Testament writings.

The Bible is about Him. Not about a set of rules or instructions on how to be a good person. Rather, realizing who Jesus is and what He does impacts the way we understand ourselves and therefore the way we treat others.

Next week we are going to wrap up by talking about Jesus the King: the ruler of the universe who commands and defends truth, who is to be obeyed and followed as Lord and master, and who will one day execute perfect justice and right every wrong as king over all things.

# JESUS THE PRIEST

Today we are going to discuss Jesus's ministry as The Great High Priest.

First, what is a priest? If we look at the old testament, in God's law, a priest is someone who "mediated" between God and man. Someone who interacted with God on behalf of the people. The priest offered atoning sacrifices to pay for the sins of the people, usually in the form of livestock or grain or wine, the economic produce and measure of the wealth of the people at the time.

The priest also prayed for the people. We use the word intercession or acting on behalf of people. The priests asked God for forgiveness on behalf of the whole nation.

## **And we do need a priest.**

The Old Testament narrative shows us our need for forgiveness. It shows us our nature as rebels against a loving creator. It also shows our need for a mediator.

In the story of Job, which was written before the nation of Israel existed, with its laws and priest system, we find Job pleading to God in the midst of great suffering. He, like us, cannot see or hear God, and so he says, "I need an advocate, a mediator..." (essentially, a lawyer!) "...to argue my case for me!" (See Job 9:32-33).

God gave His people the priests to sacrifice and pray on behalf of and to teach the people about God and His ways. But there was a problem: very often these priests, because they were mere men like us, were corrupt, sometimes very much so. And in 1 Samuel we find God rebuking one such corrupt priest: Eli, and promising a coming, future priest who would be faithful and carry out all God's will, forever.

### **1 Samuel 2:35 (ESV)**

"And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever."

That is an extraordinary kind of priest, one who lasts forever! God is prophesying Christ, who will be the priest AND anointed ("Messiah!")-king at the same time.

## **A NEW KIND OF PRIEST**

Jesus was a very special kind of priest indeed. Turn with me to Hebrews chapter 4.

This theme, Christ as The Great High Priest, is one of the central focuses of the whole sermon that is the book of Hebrews, and because I want to highlight just a few major points for you, we are going to skip around in Hebrews a bit. I apologize in advance for all the back and forth.

Hebrews 4:14-16 (ESV)

"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 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. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Jesus is:

- The Great High Priest
- Who sympathizes with our weakness (understands us!)
- Suffered as we do
- So: hold fast to the faith
- Draw near God's throne with confidence!

And this is a basic outline of Jesus's priestly ministry, and the effect it ought to have on us! So, how do these things connect? How does Jesus' role as The Great High Priest mean that we can approach God with confidence?

## **WHERE CHRISTMAS GETS ITS MEANING:**

First, every single one of us must acknowledge that 1) we have broken God's law and 2) that He is angry about that, and that 3) payment in blood (the death sentence) is required for it.

The Christmas message of God's gift to the world is going to ultimately be impotent and meaningless if these things are not understood and acknowledge because this is the problem that Jesus, our Great High Priest was given to the world to solve.

And the world's system loves to argue with every single one of these fundamental points. We want to say somehow that sin is not sin, that it doesn't require repentance; that sometimes it is a genetic or

chemical disorder that we can't help. We try and blunt the reality of God's anger toward sinners. We try to convince ourselves that we can pay the debt ourselves by being good enough people.

**Hebrews 1:8b-9a (ESV)**

"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,  
the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.  
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness..."

**Hebrews 2:1-3b (ESV)**

"Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

Sin is sin. God hates wickedness. A just retribution is coming for every transgression and disobedience. And there will be no escape for us, apart from Christ.

This is the context of Christmas. This sets the stage for the amazingness of God's gift. It tells us who we are, apart from Christ: rebels against a Holy God. This is what we mean when we talk about sin.

But Jesus solves our sin problem, and he solves it completely. He doesn't simply pay our debt; He removes our sin completely. He ransoms us back from our slavery to it. He satisfies and ends God's anger toward us. He reconciles us with God so that we now have peace with God. And he restores us to, not just a blank slate, but to actual righteousness. And He continually prays for us to God the Father.

Let's take those all one at a time.

## **FORGIVENESS: SIN CANCELLED (JUSTIFICATION)**

**Hebrews 10:17-18 (ESV)**

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

## **SIN REMOVED (EXPIATION)**

**Hebrews 9:26-28 (ESV)**

"...he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."

Christ took our sins and put them away! You no longer have them! We need notice something else important here. Just as Jesus is the prophet *and* the message, Jesus is the priest *and* the sacrifice!

## **FREED FROM SLAVERY (REDEMPTION)**

### **Hebrews 2:14-15 (ESV)**

"...he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."

We are no longer bound to sin, and have nothing to fear from Satan at all! We do not have to listen to his accusations because the things he is accusing us of have been canceled and removed from us.

## **ENDED GOD'S ANGER & RESTORED RELATIONSHIP (PROPITIATION & RECONCILIATION)**

### **Hebrews 2:17 (ESV)**

"17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

Some translators render the word "propitiation" as "atonement" - "At-one-ment." This is the same idea expressed in Romans 5 as "Peace with God."

## **RESTORED TO RIGHTEOUSNESS (SANCTIFICATION)**

### **Hebrews 10:14 (ESV)**

14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

We have been forgiven, restored, and are being perfected because of Christ's once-for-all-time sacrifice. The apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:21 talks about what we call "The Great Exchange."

## **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

## **PRAYS FOR US CONTINUALLY (INTERCESSION)**

And finally, one of the most presently comforting aspects of Jesus's priestly ministry:

### **Hebrews 7:21-26 (ESV)**

"...but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:

"The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.' "

This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens."

We have the perfect priest who accomplished all these things for us, praying for us continually to God. We have immediate access to God the father because of Christ! [Illustration of "immediate" and "media" - "intermediary" - "mediator" - something between you and the actual thing, like watching a sporting event from your home through the "medium" of television.]. We don't need a human priest to interact with God for us! We don't need to pray to saints so that they can talk to God for us. We have direct access to God the Father himself through Jesus's priestly ministry.

## **SO APPROACH WITH CONFIDENCE**

What a gift! Christ cancelled and removed our sin. He freed us from our slavery to it. He removed God's wrath toward us because of it, and restored our relationship with God. He restores us to an actual position of righteousness in God's eyes! AND he is currently praying for us! What more can we possibly ask!?

I love the application that whoever wrote Hebrews makes because of all that.

## **Hebrews 10:19-25 (ESV)**

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

So, brothers and sisters:

- Approach God with confidence
- Hold on to your confidence in and practice of your faith
- Stir each other up to love and good deeds
- Keep meeting together and reminding each other of these things!
- Forgive as you have been forgiven. Love as you have been loved.
- Rejoice in your freedom before God. Don't let the devil hold you back because of shame or fear of punishment.

[Pray]

Benediction: Hebrews 13:20-21

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Do make it habit to take time in your day to reflect on God's gift of love toward you through Jesus?

When you do, what impact does it have on your perspective for the day?

If you don't, how do you think it might change your outlook on the world, your life, and your situation?

How can we use the Advent season to build in time to focus on Jesus and how his coming into the world changes everything about our life?

