

Christ as Priest

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] Now we began the last monthly meeting to look at a short mini-series on the function or the office of Christ as prophet and priest and king.

And this will just be a little brief trilogy in that sense. And last month we looked at the subject of Christ as prophet and mentioned how last time, how we might not think, but there's all that many references to Christ as a prophet.

As the text that we took last time in John 5, I think verse 39, it's search the scriptures, but in them you think that you have life. And when we did that and looked through the references to the prophet who was to come and as Christ as the fulfillment of all the prophets, we see that he is indeed prophesied and fulfilling all that function as prophet.

And now we come this evening to that of Christ as priest. And that's what we've been reading about in Hebrews 7 and into the beginning of chapter 8. The likening of Christ to a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

And as most of you will know, Melchizedek is the king priest of Salem, which is thought to have been in the sight of what became Jerusalem.

[1 : 16] And as it says at the beginning there, he is king of righteousness and king of peace. Now the name Melchizedek, it's from the Hebrew melech, meaning king.

So melechai, my king, tzedek or tzaddik is righteousness. And so king of righteousness by means of his name. And king of Salem, that is the place of which he was the king, which is like the Hebrew shalom, meaning peace.

So he's the king of righteousness, king of peace, but he's also the priest, as Genesis 14 tells us, priest of the most high God. And that means that obviously in Abram's day there were those still descended from Shem and Noah.

And remember that Shem is still alive in Abram's lifetime. So there are those of his descendants who, even though they are not of the covenant line, will still be worshipping the God of Noah and the God of Shem, who have, if you like, passed on the knowledge of the one true God to them.

So this Melchizedek is the one who is likened by the psalmist, who is likened by, in the Hebrews here, to the one mentioned by the psalmist who is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

[2 : 37] Psalm 110, verse 4, Now, Melchizedek obviously did not live forever, but we only have this one reference to him in Genesis 14.

And when it says, you know, without father, without mother, without, you know, length of days or end of life or whatever, it means that we are not told about his parentage. We are not told about how old he was.

We're not told when he was born. We're not told when he died. He appears in the story, and he makes such an impression as this king, priest of the Most High God, that Abraham, the patriarch, the one who is chosen of God to be the founding father of many nations, gives tithes of all the spoil that he has gained from the slaughter of the kings that we read about in that chapter.

And he pays tithes, as it were, to this priest of the Most High God. But we don't hear anything more about him other than there in Psalm 110, a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

And because Melchizedek is mentioned only there, he is taken as being unchanging. He's taken as being a symbol of that which never dies and never changes.

[3 : 52] And that's why the psalmist refers to, looking ahead to the Messiah, refers to him as a priest who doesn't change, who doesn't die, a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, whose name means king of righteousness.

So this is what is being referred to here in this chapter. And as we see at the beginning of chapter 8, it says, Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum.

We have such an high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man.

Now if you think back to the Old Testament priesthood, you can think in terms of how the priests would come into the tabernacle area or later on to the temple. They would offer up the sacrifices and the high priest once a year would go into the Holy of Holies with the blood of atonement on the day of atonement.

And what made the Holy of Holies so special? It was the fact that there originally in the tabernacle at any rate, there was the Ark of the Covenant. Now, in terms of furniture, the Ark of the Covenant was just a box made of wood overlaid with gold with the cherubim over the top of it and with the Ten Commandments, the two tablets of stone inside it.

[5 : 11] It wasn't all that spectacular as a piece of furnishing. But what made it so sacred was that the mercy seat over the top of the Ark, the tabernacle, the top of the Ark, was taken as being the symbolic presence of God, that God dwelt there symbolically.

This was where he would meet with his people. And the high priest went into this sacred area and came close up, as it were, to where the symbolic presence of God dwelt.

This is how close he came to the symbolic presence of God. He sprinkled the Ark with blood, the altar with blood. He went in with the incense.

He went into the presence, as it were, of the Lord. And this was his sacred duty. And this was what made him special, is that he could go so close on behalf of the people.

But all of that, of course, was only outward symbol representing an inner truth. And what we have here with Jesus, a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, Well, the argument of the letter to the Hebrews here is that all the old high priests from the line of Aaron and of the tribe of Levi, they kept dying, naturally.

[6 : 35] They would rise up. They would enter into their priesthood. The next generation would be born. They'd serve their time, and then they would die. Then the next generation would come up. And because they inherited their priesthood, there was no oath laid upon them.

They weren't specially ordained or set apart. They just inherited. They just carried on the job. And they kept being born, and they kept living, and they kept dying. But this particular high priest, whom the psalmist looks toward, is clearly intended to be the Messiah.

The priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Now, the things which we have spoken, this is the sum. This is what it all amounts to. We have such an high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens.

Now, remember we said the high priest went into the symbolic presence of God in the tabernacle, where the Ark of the Covenant was. This isn't the symbolic presence of God.

Now, this is the actual presence of God into which our true high priest enters. This is the function of Christ as priest, which he fulfills on behalf of his people.

[7 : 50] A minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. Now, of course, God specified all the details of how the tabernacle was to be made, and all the details of its dimensions and furnishings and so on, just as he did for the temple.

But these were to be recorded so precisely because they were coming from God to describe or to reflect a little of the ultimate glory in heaven itself.

And it is into that true glory that our high priest has entered. Now, how does a priest differ from a prophet? Well, of course, a prophet receives the word of God and he speaks forth the word of God. He is meant to proclaim what God has given to him to declare. A priest, however, his function is to act as an intermediary between God and man.

He is to represent man to God, and he is to represent God to man. He brings, as it were, the petitions, the sacrifices of the people to the deity, to the God who is being worshipped.

[9 : 00] And likewise, as he comes back again to the people, he represents the holiness of God to them. He is an intermediary in that sense. A priest, then, must go between God and man.

And at the same time, he must also, by definition, be one who offers sacrifice. If you don't have sacrifice, you don't have a priesthood.

Because if you don't have sacrifice, you don't have an altar. And this is one of these things that now, under the Reformation, this is one of the things that when the church went back again to the Bible and started saying, you know, well, what is it that God has revealed in his church?

What does God say about how he wants his church to be? And they discovered that the priesthood, as it had been, as it had grown up in the medieval church, was simply reinstating again all effectively the Old Testament Aaronic priesthood, offering up sacrifice, not lambs and goats anymore, but re-presenting time and time again the sacrifice of the Mass, which it was taught was the body and blood and soul and divinity of the Lord Jesus there in the bread, in the way for itself, which was offered up upon the altar.

And an altar is by definition a place of sacrifice. Now, if you don't have need of a priesthood anymore, you don't have an altar. You don't have a place of sacrifice.

[10:31] And this is what the New Testament is teaching us. That we don't need now to multiply priests as they did before. The reason they didn't need to keep going with the Aaronic priesthood is because the ultimate priest had come.

The ultimate high priest had fulfilled all that the old priesthood was a symbol of. Just as heaven itself, the throne room of God, is the fulfillment of all that the old temple and the old tabernacle were pointing to.

So likewise, all the old priesthood, which yes, God did institute, but its time came to be fulfilled, to be surpassed. You know, and this is what we read in verses 17 and 18.

So, yes, thou art a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, for there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness they are.

For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh unto God. So there is a change in the priesthood.

[11:41] Verse 12. Now, the law isn't being changed in the sense of, well, that's not a very good law.

Let's write a new one. The law is being changed in the sense of it being fulfilled and superseded. Because now that it is fulfilled, there's no longer a need for it.

It's rather like if, you know, if you can think back, some of you do, perhaps, when the Scalpin Bridge was being built and there might have been a special roadwork sign saying, you know, you're not allowed to be in a bridge because it's dangerous and anybody working there, they have to, anybody coming up to the bridge have to wear hard hats and protective clothing and they have to make sure all health and safety, everything is covered and so on.

And you wouldn't be allowed near the site unless all these things were in place, unless you're just safety harness and your hard hat and all your health and safety regulations and so on. And all of that would have the force of law.

And anybody who was mucking about with the works or trespassing or whatever could be prosecuted, no doubt. But once the bridge is complete and once the work is done, the men in hard hats and protective clothing, they're all done, they go away, they go home, they go on to the next project or whatever and there's the bridge complete.

[12:56] And now you drive up to it, you drive over it, nobody stops and says, oh, wait a minute, you can't go over this without your special protective clothing and your hard hat and all your health and safety regulations. You'll say, why not?

And say, well, because I was here 20 years ago and I remember seeing these laws and all the things and all the people that weren't allowed over here, there was all these bits of girders sticking out and everything, concrete being poured and no, no, no, no, you're not allowed over here without fulfilling all these regulations.

You say, well, where's all the stuff now? Oh, just because you can't see it doesn't mean it's there.

But, you know, the law was in place, all these laws, all these rules. Oh, yeah, but they've gone now. They've gone because the bridge is finished, because the work is complete.

Now the purpose for which it was all there is done. You drive straight across. And now the purpose for which all the laws were in place and all the priesthood was in place, it's not that it, oh, that was a rubbish law, let's do away with it.

It's fulfilled. It's purpose. Like marriage fulfills, betroth and engagement. Nobody wants to go back to being engaged if they're happily married.

[14:01] Nobody wants to go back to having their provisional license if they've passed their test and can drive for themselves. Nobody wants to go back to girders and poured concrete and hard hats and safety rules and so on, and to dismantle the bridge if we've had it now for 20 years and can just drive backwards and forwards over it, because it's fulfilled.

The purpose for which it was intended. All these laws. The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh to God.

That bridge which crosses a divide, you know. Christ is our great bridge. Christ is our high priest that enables us to pass through to God, to have access to God the Father in a way we did not before, because he is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens.

This is the sum of all the things that the previous chapter has been talking about. We have such a high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens.

And because we have such a priest, we have this intermediary, this one who bridges the divide between God and man. Because there is a divide, there would be a divide between God and man.

[15 : 22] That's what sin did. It's separated between God and man. But now that gap is closed by one who is both God and man, bringing the two together in this one person.

Nobody else has been holy God and holy man. Nobody else has united in one person the Godhead and the manhood, the divinity and the humanity.

It doesn't matter what other religion one may mention in the world, or what other philosophy one may adhere to. Nobody else has done this. Ergo, nobody else can bring us to God.

Because nobody else is God, personified. Thus, our high priest is so much greater and more powerful than all the priests that have gone before, because he brings us actually to God.

We mentioned that, sir, however, how a priest is not only an intermediary, a go-between in that sense, not only representing man to God, which he does in his person, and representing God to man, which again he does in his person.

[16 : 33] But a priest must also be one who offers sacrifice. If we were to carry on at verse 3 in chapter 8, we would read, Now, what is the sacrifice which Christ offers, of course?

Well, we know it to be himself, the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world. This is what is offered up to God the Father, and to satisfy his perfect justice.

Because when Adam sinned, and all his posterity thereafter were born and conceived in sin, and the human race became a fallen race, at enmity with God, born and conceived in sin, and committing plenty of their own in their own lifetimes too, God's wrath against sin is absolute.

It is total. He doesn't just, oh, not like it very much. He absolutely loathes, detests, and abhors sin to the point where it must be destroyed.

And in his presence, it cannot be allowed to exist. It must be completely destroyed. The wages of sin is death. Sin must be put to death. God abhors, loathes, hates sin, pours out his wrath upon it.

[18 : 01] And this is what the once and for all sacrifice bears. When this Lamb of God, the once and for all sacrifice, bears the sin of his people upon himself, God, as it were, turns his wrath righteously on where that sin is found.

And if there has been that glorious exchange, we might say, whereby he takes our sin upon himself and he gives his righteousness to us, then as the Father's all-seeing gaze turns toward the sin to destroy it, it lands upon that sin which is being borne by his only begotten Son upon the cross. And the wrath of God is poured out against sin and it is put to death utterly and completely and forever.

Every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices. Wherefore, it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.

And this is what he offers. This is what we read in chapter 9. Read at verse 11. Christ being come and high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made of hands, that is to say, not of this building, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

[19 : 40] For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of the heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctify to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offer himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

And then in verse 16, for where a testament is, there must also necessity be the death of the testator. This is the testament that is given.

This is the witness that is given. A little further down at chapter 9, you'll notice how it talks about Moses sprinkling the blood of sacrifice. It says, for neither without, verse 18, neither without, the first testament was dedicated without blood, for when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats with water and scarlet wool and

hyssop and sprinkled both the book and all the people, saying, this is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.

And this is what we read, that Christ has become the minister of a better testament, of a fuller testament, the purifying of ourselves by his precious blood.

Now, this reference to Moses sprinkling the people, remember, if he's sprinkling the book, that is the record of God's laws and teachings and commandments. That, we might say, represents God.

[21 : 18] And he also sprinkles the people and they represent, obviously, themselves. He also, if we go back to where this is originally happening, he also sprinkles the altar that has been set up.

But something that's important here is that where this is originally happening, it's in Exodus 24. And at this point, the Aaronic priesthood has not yet been set up.

And yet, here we read, Exodus 24, verse 5, he sent young men and the children of Israel which offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar, the place of sacrifice, the place that represented God and the sacrifice given to him.

And he took the book of the covenant and read in the audience of the people. They said, all the Lord hath said we will do, we'll be obedient. Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words.

And he sprinkled it on them. He sprinkled the book, he sprinkled the people. And the Lord then summoned up Moses and Aaron and made Abed and Abed here.

[22 : 31] He sprinkled it on them. He united them. He bound them together, if you like, having done this. Bound them together with the blood of the sacrifice, the people, symbolically the people and symbolically the representation of God are bound together in that one blood.

And that is what we have in Christ. We are bound together by his one blood. You could argue that's what the scarlet wool was symbolising. That which would bind people together to God but of course was not of any great strength in itself.

It's a symbolic binding. Scarlet no doubt symbolising the blood as well. But we have such a high priest who goes before us and who cleanses our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Such a high priest became us who is holy, harmless and undefiled, separate from sinners and made higher than the heavens. This is what Jesus himself says when he prays to his father for his disciples.

Now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self for the glory which I have with thee before the world was. Before ever anything was created, before anything was made, he was already glorified with the Father.

[23 : 52] This is how glorious he was. And this is the state to which now he is exalted. He is made. Back into that state.

Back into that state of purity and of glory. This is the blood of the testament which unites the Lord and his people.

We have such a high priest. He goes in before us. He enters in. He intercedes for us. We read, of course, here again, he ever liveth to make intercession for the people.

However, he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him. Verse 25 of chapter 7. Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. And because he ever lives, a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek, you can know that that intercession is never going to fail.

If you were being interceded for by a human priest, that human priest would eventually die. Then there's nobody to intercede for you. But if you're being interceded for by an ever-living, divine priest going before us to the throne of God's majesty, you will know that intercession is always going to be there.

[25 : 06] He will always be the high priest. He will always be the one interceding for us. Nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. That's what Paul writes at the end of Romans. I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We cannot now be separated from the love of the Lord because he has bound us together by the blood of his sacrifice.

Because he has done that, because he is our great high priest, we have that intercession, we have that sacrifice, we know that the price has been paid.

God's wrath against sin is absolute but he has already turned that wrath against the once and for all substitute. If you think about when a lamb was offered up, that was the sacrifice, what did they do? They didn't just take any old thing. Ah, well, this one's only got three legs, this one's blemished, this one's dying anyway, let's just use this one. No, it had to be a stopless lamb. It had to be checked over by the priests, it had to be pronounced clean, it had to be pronounced perfect and without blemish.

[26 : 29] And only when it was an unblemished sacrifice was it fit to be offered upon the altar. So, likewise, the unblemished, spotless, sinless lamb of God was alone worthy to offer himself the sacrifice for sin.

Of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum. We have such an high priest who is set on the right hand at the throne of the majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched a lot, man, for every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices.

Whereof it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. And this is what he offers himself. himself.

And this is what he has done, given himself. And this is how he has done it by means of his own priesthood. You can see then, after you've had such a priest and since we have such an ongoing priesthood, it is positively in something to the Lord to say, yes, but let's have a few more.

You know, let's gild the lily a bit. Let's multiply some more priests like we used to have before. Let's make some more sacrifices. Let's offer up other sacrifices and other altars as though somehow this one was not sufficient.

[28 : 00] Looking ahead, when we finally seek to complete the trilogy and look at Christ as king, when we think about when Israel asked for a king for themselves, what was the thing that Samuel criticized them for?

He said in 1 Samuel 12, he said, when he saw that Nahash, the king of the children of Ammon, came against you, he said unto me, Nah, but a king shall ring over us, when the Lord your God was your king.

And it's as if men would say, oh, we want priests to go before us, when the Lord your saviour is your priest. You can only add insult to the Lord by requiring men to add to or to sort of improve upon what Christ has already done one once and for all of the sum of the things which we have spoken this is not.

We have such a high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens. The fulfilment of all the sacrifices, the fulfilment of all the priesthood, the one who was offered up on behalf of the whole nation, that the whole nation should not perish as than Caiaphas himself, the last of the old high priests, we might say, of the Old Testament dispensation.

High priests was given to prophesy that one man should die for the nation and not all should perish, that one sacrifice should die for all of his people, the second Adam, to redeem those who would trust in him, who were fallen by the guilt of the first Adam on their own guilt, to stand in their place, to take the price of their sin, to be their ultimate and only high and true priesthood God.

[29 : 54] Let us pray.