

The Priesthood of Christ

Hebrews 4:14 [NIV] *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.”*

Immediately after His ascension Jesus began His role as our great High Priest.

What is a priest?

A priest is a mediator, that is, one who acts as a go-between or peace maker between opposing sides.

Why do we need a priest?

Hebrews 4:15-16 [NIV] *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have **one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.** Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

Jesus understands the weakness of human flesh, He has been there and been tempted more than any other human being, yet without sinning.

1 Timothy 2:5 [NIV] *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...”*

Note:-

Paul refers to Jesus still as *“the man”* after His Ascension to God’s Throne to be our High Priest.

We now have a man at God’s Throne to mediate on our behalf.

Why is this study important?

- a) This study lets us see what Jesus is doing right now at the right hand of God.
- b) This study provides us with the right foundation for our prayers by shedding light on what is meant by praying in Jesus’ name.
- c) This study forces us to go back into the Old Testament and work out our theology just as those in the early church had to do. The concept of a priest in the terms of an official ministry is essentially an Old Testament concept.

The Old Testament roots of the priesthood

Moses and Aaron his brother were both of the tribe of Levi.

Exodus 2:1 [NIV] *“Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman...”*

Aaron led the people into apostasy with the golden calf.

Exodus 32:25 [NIV] *“Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughing-stock to their enemies.”*

The sons of Levi avenged the Lord’s honour by punishing many offenders.

Exodus 32:28 [NIV] *“The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died.”*

God rewarded the tribe of Levi for this response to His command.

Exodus 32:29 [NIV] *“Then Moses said, “You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.”*

As a result of this obedience the tribe of Levi were given the responsibility of ceremonial worship, as God’s priests.

The Levites had no geographic inheritance in the Promised Land of Israel but were sustained by the tithes of the people.

This priesthood formed in the time of Moses was not the original priesthood.

Genesis 14:18-20 [NIV] *“Then **Melchizedek** king of Salem brought out bread and wine. **He was priest of God Most High**, and he blessed Abram, saying, “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.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”*

Salam was the ancient site of the city of Jerusalem. Salam means safe or peace and is often in scripture related to the city of God.

David prophesied of a priesthood that would come *“in the order of Melchizedek”*.

Psalms 110:4 [NIV] *“The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.”*

This order of priesthood would be eternal as a result of God’s Oath and of the lineage of David directly referring to Jesus our Saviour and High Priest.

The New Testament fulfilment of the priesthood of Melchizedek

Jesus is presented in a two-fold manner by the writer of Hebrews.

a) The sacrifice for sin

Hebrews 9:28 [NIV] *“...so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”*

Jesus died on the cross, shedding His blood as a sacrifice for our sins.

John 1:29 [NIV] *“The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

By this death and shedding of blood Jesus became the sacrificial Lamb of God.

b) Our High Priest

Hebrews 9:11-12, 26 [NIV] *“When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.” ... “Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”*

As 100% God as well as 100% man [able to shed blood] the value of the shed blood of Jesus was far beyond the value of all mankind whom He as God has created.

c) Jesus was High Priest of the order of Melchizedek

As Jesus was not of the tribe of Levi, He could not be a priest under that God-given Levitical priesthood.

Hebrews 7:11-21 [NIV] *“If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no-one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. For it is declared: “You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.” The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, **but he became a priest with an oath when God** said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: **‘You are a priest for ever.’”***

The Levitical priesthood like the Mosaic covenant was only temporary, it was without the oath of God that gave it eternal status.

The priestly order of Melchizedek is the only priesthood with eternal status having received the oath of God.

Jesus became our High Priest after His Death, Resurrection and Ascension.

Matthew 27:51 [NIV] *“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.”*

At the time of Jesus’ death, symbolically, preparation was made for Him to fulfil His first duty as High Priest. The pathway to the Holy of Holies, God’s heavenly throne, was made clear, for Jesus to present His own sacrificial blood as an atonement for our sins.

This was foreshadowed by the Levitical priesthood on the Day of Atonement.

John 20:17-18 [NIV] *“Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.”*

Jesus then ascended to the Throne of God as a “living sacrifice”.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

Note:

Out of the great love for His fellow human beings Jesus delayed His ascension to glory to give His disciples the much-needed reassurance.

Hebrews 4:14 [NIV] *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.”*

The ascension of Jesus, to take His seat at God’s right hand, was the fulfilment of **Psalm 110**, He is now for eternity our perfect High Priest.

Jesus’ work as our intercessor

An intercessor is one who steps in with words and actions to bring about reconciliation between two persons.

The assumption is that the one interceding has influence with both parties, the offended and the offending.

1 Timothy 2:5 [NIV] *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...”*

Jesus being both man and God is unique and the perfect being for bringing about reconciliation.

Revelation 5:3-5 [NIV] *“But no-one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no-one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”*

No other person only Jesus could ever qualify for this task.

John 14:6 [NIV] *“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”*

1 Peter 2:24 [NIV] *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”*

Only through Jesus do we have access to the Father.

Hebrews 2:17-18 [NIV] *“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”*

Only Jesus can identify with our problem, sin.

Only Jesus understands our feelings and nature.

Hebrews 4:15 [NIV] *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.”*

Only Jesus knows what it is like to be tempted when in a physically weak state.

What exactly does Jesus do now?

Jesus carries out the Will of God the Father

The ancient high priest in the Levitical priesthood had to follow an inflexible plan of work laid out for him by God.

John 5:19 [NIV] *“Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”*

When Jesus was on earth He was not “his own man” as it were.

John 5:30 [NIV] *“By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”*

This same obedience continues, Jesus has not changed in His new position. He still carries out God the Father’s Will.

Jesus prays for those given to Him by the Father

John 6:37 [NIV] *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”*

Those given to the Son at this time, God’s present elect, are the object of Christ’s intercessory prayers.

John 17:9 [NIV] *“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.”*

The reason that anyone believes has its sole explanation in Christ’s intercession.

Ephesians 2:1 [NIV] *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...”*

We were all born “spiritually dead” in our sinful nature.

John 14:15-19 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.”*

The coming of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father at the request of the Son [Jesus] bring to us spiritual life. We are “born again” this time spiritually to eternal life.

Jesus applies what He did for us on the cross

Hebrews 9:11-12, 24 [NIV] *“When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; **but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.**” ... “For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.”*

Jesus shed His blood for all to observe just as the Levitical sacrifices, foreshadowing His death were killed on the altar outside the Holy of Holies of the earthly tabernacle.

Jesus' intercession on our behalf with His own blood at the Throne of God was done in secret. Just as the Levitical high priest entered the Holy of Holies of the earthly tabernacle alone and offered the blood sacrifice in secret on the Day of Atonement.

Atonement only takes place when the sacrificial shed blood is applied.

Jesus died for all people, but not all people are saved by that sacrificial blood.

Only those who believe in that sacrifice.

How does this happen?

- a) **Jesus prays for those who have been chosen at this time.**
- b) **The Holy Spirit sent by the Father in answer to Jesus' prayer creates faith in those who are elected by God.**
- c) **Those who yield to the Holy Spirit and seek not to grieve Him believe.**
- d) **Once a person believes in this way the blood sacrifice of Jesus is applied.**

The death of Jesus provides salvation.

The intercession of Jesus our High Priest applies salvation.

No-one is saved "automatically" by Jesus' death, that is why we need Him as our Great High Priest.

Jesus upholds His people by His continuous intercession

John 17:11-12 [NIV] *"I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled."*

Jesus' prayer is that none will ever be lost, fail to receive eternal life.

John 3:34 [NIV] *"For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit."*

Jesus prays with perfect faith knowing the very Will of the Father.

Galatians 2:20 [NIV] *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

Paul lived not by his own limited faith, but the perfect faith "of"¹ the Son of God.

How did Paul do this?

Only through the intercessory prayers that Jesus made for Paul, and the work of the Holy Spirit in response to those prayers.

¹ The Authorised version translated "of" is a nearer translation of the Greek "rov".

Our eternal security is guaranteed by Jesus' intercession

Romans 8:34 [NIV] *“Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died, more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”*

Hebrews 7:25 [NIV] *“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”*

John 6:37 [NIV] *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”*

Jesus' intercession will always be according to the Father's Will.

Jesus will never intercede outside the Will of the Father.

Therefore we must always seek to pray within the Will of the Father.

1 John 5:14-15 [NIV] *“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him.”*

How do we know if we are praying in the Will of the Father?

God's Will is found in His Testament both Old and New Testaments [His Will and Testament].

The more we study and meditate on God's Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to prompt our thoughts as we meditate, the more we will come to know the Will of God the Father.

There is no way we can twist the arm of God to get Him to change His Will for He is Sovereign over all His creation.

But as we come to know God, our thoughts will become more like His, away from self and out of others to share our blessings with them.

Our prayers will then follow our thoughts and we will find them being answered as they will be within the Will of the Father.

Conclusion:

Jesus alone is our High Priest, and He is a very sympathetic mediator.

Jesus is a High Priest who knows our needs and our weaknesses and will often “*filter*” our requests, and pass on to the Father only those that are acceptable to Him.

The one prayer we know for sure is answered is that we will never be lost if we constantly go to God in prayer.

Hebrews 7:25 [NIV] *“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”*

We need to thank God the Father daily for what He has done for us through Jesus our Saviour and what He continues to do daily through Jesus our High Priest.