

Jesus Our High Priest  
Hebrews 2:9-18

Last week, we looked at the first of Jesus' three offices – that of a prophet. We found that Jesus came to speak a true word from God for us. But He not only came to speak the truth, for He is the truth. In His Person, in the essence of His Being, He reveals all the fullness of what it means to be God. As He said, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father."

Well, if a prophet speaks to man a word from God, what does a priest do? One of a priest's main jobs in the Old Testament was to offer up sacrifices on behalf of the people. That's what our passage means in verse 17 when it says that Jesus made reconciliation for the sins of the people – it means He offered up something to the Father to turn the Father's anger away from those who have committed sins against Him.

Remember, as we learned last week, God always tells the truth. He never lies, and He never goes back on His word. And one of the things God had said, even in the days when Adam was alive, was that the wages, the penalty for sin is death. When someone sins, when someone goes against God's Will, when someone thus commits treason against the Sovereign Lord of the Universe, that someone has to die. Only death can turn God's anger away from sin.

And so, because of His great love for sinners like us, God provided substitutes for His people. In the Old Testament times, God told the people to let priests sacrifice animals on their behalf. When the animal died, the sinner would be reminded of the penalty his sin deserved. And at the same time, the sacrifice would turn away God's anger.

But an animal sacrifice isn't really worth the same as a human life. This isn't because animals aren't wonderful creatures – they are just as amazing in their own way as we are. No, the reason that we human beings are worth more than animals isn't because of our intellect or our language or our emotions or our ability to use tools. No, we are special because we were made in the image of God, because God breathed His own breath into Adam in order that Adam might become a living soul.

And so, all those animal sacrifices in the Old Testament days were really just symbols, signs of a greater sacrifice that would need to come one day. And as today's passage tells us, that sacrifice would be Jesus Christ Himself. Paul agrees in our responsive reading: Christ died for us. We are justified, made righteous in the sight of God by His blood.

And Christ's sacrifice to save us makes perfect sense. After all, Jesus is the Son of God, fully divine. Of course His death is worth as much as all the sinners who ever lived in all the world. But on the other hand, if Jesus was only God, He couldn't really die in our place, could He? It wouldn't be exactly the same sort of payment – if a man must die for the sin of a man, then how can God die in man's place?

Our passage today tells us: in order that Jesus might be our great High Priest, offering Himself up for the sins of the world, He not only had to be truly God – He also had to be truly man. Verse 14 says that Jesus partook of flesh and blood, and it was that flesh-and-blood Jesus that truly died on the cross, for sinners like you and me.

And what did the death of Christ accomplish? It not only satisfied God's justice. It not only, as Paul says, gave us peace with God, restoring us to a right relationship with the God against whom we have rebelled. No, Christ's death also destroyed the very power of death itself. Think about that – there is no reason for any of Jesus' people to be afraid of dying anymore. And if we don't need to be afraid of death, we also don't need to be afraid of Satan, because Jesus has also defeated him, destroying his power.

All this Jesus accomplishes for us as our Great High Priest, offering up a perfect sacrifice on our behalf, dying so that we might have eternal life with God forever, dying so that we might have abundant life now, life that is fearless and free.

But even that isn't all that our High Priest does for us. For a Priest isn't just someone who offers up sacrifices on behalf of the people. Like a Prophet, a priest is someone who speaks truth. But where a prophet speaks God's truths to men, a priest speaks man's truths to God. A priest prays for his people.

But in order for a priest to do this job well, he has to understand what's really going on in the lives of his people. He has to understand what really makes them tick. He needs to know their doubts and their dreams, what makes them hurt and what makes them happy. The better he knows them, the more pointed his prayers can be on their behalf.

This is another reason that Jesus came to Earth, not in a cloud of thunder and lightning, but in the form of a man, a human being just like us. He came to share deeply in the human experience. Verse 18 says that He suffered and that He was tempted. In fact Hebrews chapter 4 says that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are.

Think about that. That means that Jesus, the Son of God, has truly experienced what you experience. He truly understands everything that you are going through. That's exactly why when you pray to Jesus, you can know not only that He hears you but that He understands what you are saying. And verse 18 says that because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted – people like you and me.

In fact, even though Jesus is God Almighty, He is so truly human that He considers us to be His brothers and sisters. That's true – that's exactly what verse 11 says. Verse 13 uses another image, perhaps even more intimate – here Jesus calls us His children.

It all sounds wonderful, doesn't it? But how can we know it's all true? How can we know that Jesus really understands us? How can we know that Jesus really cares? In those times

when our hurts are deepest and our confusion is greatest, how can we be sure that Jesus really hears our prayers?

The good news is that we know Jesus will hear us and we know Jesus will help us for the same reason that He became a man and went to the cross – because of His great love for us. That's what Paul tells us in our responsive reading: God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

And our passage from Hebrews agrees. Look at verse 9. Here we see again the marvelous truth that Christ tasted death for everyone. Here we are reminded that the death of the cross was a death of incredible agony and suffering. But here we are also reminded of why Jesus did all this: because of God's grace.

What exactly does that mean, grace? Grace really has two sides to it. In the first place, grace means receiving something that we couldn't earn. If we earned it, after all, it would be payment, not grace. Grace is always a free gift.

But grace is also given to someone that doesn't deserve it. That also makes sense – if we deserve a gift, it really isn't free is it? If we deserve something, there's a sense of being owed, a sense of payback.

No, when we look at the cross, there is no room for anything but grace. For when we look at the cross, we see exactly what our sin, what our rebellion against God deserves, the agony, the suffering, the death. But at the same time, we know that we can't possibly pay that debt – we can't die and go on living at the same time.

But that's precisely what God so desperately desires for us. He wants us to go on living with Him forever, so that He might have a real relationship with those whom He created in His image for that very purpose. It was because of God's great desire for us that He gave us what we couldn't earn, and what we would never deserve – the Father gave the Son to be truly one of us, and to die in our place.

No, when we look at the cross, there is no room to doubt God's love. When we look at the cross there is no reason to doubt God's love. Our Great High Priest has done all that is necessary to reconcile us to God, offering up Himself in our place. And He is praying right now for all His people, that none of us might be lost but that we might all come to true repentance, to true faith, to a saving knowledge of Him, to become His brothers, to become His children, to live with Him forever. This is the love the Father has for you. This is the love Jesus Christ has for you. And so, no matter what happens this is a love you can trust.