



Personal Priest
Hebrews 7:23-28
October 28, 2018
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This passage is completely clear. Right?

This is a tough passage that doesn't seem to mean much for us today in the 21st century with the use of such old words as priest, law, sins, sacrifices. Perhaps you glazed over at the reading of this passage. Or, it is as clear as mud. In order to understand, it requires knowledge of the Old Testament.

I am going to help you with that today. The book of Hebrews was written to encourage Jews who had become Christians. They were being persecuted for their faith. They may have been wondering if they had made the right decision to follow Jesus, perhaps doubting that Jesus was the Messiah.

Hebrews was written to say to these Christians that "YES!" Jesus is the Messiah. The book of Hebrews does this in a way that these Jewish Christians could understand...by taking a Jewish custom, the priesthood, something they had grown up with their whole lives, and showed them how Jesus fulfilled it (which by the way, is how you talk to people about God and Jesus and church; you start where they are, not where you are...but that is another whole sermon).

I am going to help you understand the priesthood from the OT, so that you can fully understand all who Jesus is, what Jesus has done for you and continues to do for you today. By the time I am finished, I hope you will understand the richness of our faith and the wonder of Jesus.

Ready?

I don't know about you, but I am fully aware when I mess up. When I get angry with others, when I lie to someone; when I covet the abilities, skills and talents God has given to others that I do not have, and I am not content with my own. I am aware when I hurt people. And the list goes on....

We as humans are imperfect people, and we mess up. God, our creator, is fully aware of this little fact. Thus, in the OT, God gave the Jewish people the 10 commandments to keep them from messing up, saying this is how we are going to live together.... How you will live with God and how to live with each other.

God taught his people about living together through images, pictures, visuals. One of those pictures or visuals was the sacrificial system. It showed the seriousness of sin.

By the word sin, I mean "to miss the mark" (or maybe to mess up). We have a "mark" we are to hit or obtain. This is the mark: we're meant to be loving, compassionate, just, merciful, giving, honest. The 10 commandments say we are to love God (the first 4 commandments) and love our neighbor (the last 6 commandments). And if that sounds familiar, Jesus summed up the 10 commandments in that way: love God with your whole being, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Sin (or messing up) is everything that is inconsistent with loving God and neighbor. Most of the world's pain is because we have strayed from that mark. We know that our sins have left us broken and ravaged and unclean and impure, and we desperately desire that someone -- or something -- will restore us to wholeness.

In the OT, God taught his people the seriousness of sin or missing the mark by using the sacrificial system. To show the seriousness of sin, an animal was sacrificed and the blood of that animal represented covering the sin of the people. This was all done by the priest. They were the intercessors between a holy God and sinful people. This process was repeated over and over again by daily and yearly sacrifices.

However, there was a problem with the priests. They were sinful people, too. So not only did they sacrifice an animal for the sins of the people, they had to do it for themselves as well. First, the priest washed his hands and feet. Then he would clothe himself in gleaming white linen.

Servants brought a bull that the priest himself had purchased. Placing his hands on the animal's head, the priest confessed his sin thereby transferring his sins to the bull, which was then killed. The blood of that bull signified the cleansing of the sin. It was a visual of seriousness of sin and the hope of forgiveness. As you can imagine, there were millions of sacrifices year after year in the temple.

Pretty dramatic and serious, isn't it?

Fortunately, we don't do that any more. It is a good thing: being a vegetarian I would be in big trouble if we had to sacrifice animals for the forgiveness of sin.

Why don't we do this anymore? Because, as our passage says, Jesus is our Priest. Our personal priest.

Think about this. Many people in our culture hire people to perform personal jobs for them: a personal trainer, a personal coach, a personal shopper, a personal dog walker, a personal housekeeper. The more money you have, the more of these kind of people you can hire.

Many of our country's presidents had a personal pastor. A favorite was Billy Graham. We as followers of Jesus Christ have our own personal priest. And what this personal priest has to offer is amazing, much better than the priests of the Old Testament.

Remember how the OT priests had to offer their own animal sacrifice for their own sin before offering one for the people? Our passage says in verse 26: We have a high priest who is "holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens." No other priest could say that.

Therefore, since Jesus was sinless, he didn't have to offer sacrifices for himself. Instead Jesus offered up himself as a sacrifice. Look at verse 27 with me: "Unlike the other priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself."

Notice those words "once for all." Jesus was the final sacrifice. The Jewish temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., 37 years after Jesus' death. It was never rebuilt. Why? Because the sacrificial system is no longer needed. Jesus was the final sacrifice.

I tend to be a maximizer. I use maximizing language, such as:

- You ALWAYS say that.
- You NEVER help me.
- EVERYBODY does that.

Do you ALWAYS do that?

You could say, Jesus is a maximizer. Notice the words used to describe Jesus' work: lives forever, permanent, once for all, save completely, always lives to intercede, perfect forever. These are maximizing words, but this time they are true.

Jesus, our own priest, was the final sacrifice. He did it once, and it was done. Animal sacrifices are no longer needed for the forgiveness of sins because Jesus' ministry is permanent and complete and forever. Jesus did not come to fit into the old system of sacrifices. He came to fulfill it and end it.

And there is more! So to review so far: our passage says Jesus as priest is better than the OT priests because Jesus was perfect and didn't have to make sacrifices for his own sin. Jesus as priest is better than the OT priests because their sacrifices had to be done over and over again, and Jesus' sacrifice was completely complete and final. Therefore, no more animal sacrifices.

Here is another reason why Jesus as priest is the best: he's alive! The priests of the OT didn't live forever. They were human. They died just like every other

human being. Our passage says Jesus is so much better because he lives forever. It is a permanent priesthood.

Can you imagine how this news about the priesthood of Jesus filled those Jewish Christians with joy and encouragement? They had chosen the right Messiah to follow.

What about us today? What does that mean for us? Why do we need to know all this heavy-duty stuff on sin and priests?

A wrecker service for cars has an ad in the yellow pages that says they are available 23 and ½ hours a day. Trouble was no one knew when the ½ hour was.

Jesus is always available because he lives forever. The high priestly work of Jesus is not only in the past; it is also present. His sacrifice saves us completely, once and for all. And he is always on the job for you. Even when you can't pray for yourself, he prays for you. That's what our passage says: "he always lives to intercede."

And his intercession secures for us the grace and mercy we need for our times of need in this bloody world. We had a bloody weekend. Our Great High Priest will always be there for you, full of sympathy, grace and mercy.

As followers of Christ, you have an amazing priest. It is a relationship, an ongoing relationship. You don't have to go to a temple or sanctuary or church as the people of OT had to do. It is a relationship of immediate access.

Therefore, do not hesitate to consult your Personal Priest. Cultivate that relationship often. Interact frequently. If you haven't spoken to your personal priest in a while, it is time to do so.

Even though our Personal Priest knows the absolute worst thing there is to know about us, *he still loves us*. Nothing can separate us from that love, even when you mess up.

Having a personal priest is not a luxury.

It is not something that only the rich and famous can have.

It is not a perk reserved for presidents.

Each of us has a very personal priest, someone who was human like us, was tempted like us and knew what it was like to suffer like us. Someone who understands us. Someone who died for us. This is Jesus our Lord!

Now, let's stand and affirm our faith by saying together The Apostles' Creed. You can find it on page 14 in the hymnal.

Children's message:

Materials: poster of the names of Jesus, easel

Place the poster on the easel.

Explain the poster and have them pick out a name of Jesus they like.

Today we are going to study this name of Jesus: point to High Priest

What does it mean that Jesus is high priest?

It simply means that Jesus forgives us when we mess up. When we admit when we are wrong, Jesus forgives us. Always. Forever. That's pretty amazing.

So, I am going to teach you a Bible verse about Jesus being our High Priest.

Hebrews 4:14

Therefore (Put hands out palm side up.)

Since we (Point to self.)

Have a great (Put hands out in front with palms facing each other and move out to indicate great-ness.)

High priest (Put hand with palm down up high.)

Who has ascended (With one hand "walk" fingers up from waist level to shoulder level.)

Into heaven, (Point to sky.)

Jesus the Son of God, (Make cross with pointer fingers.)

Let us hold firmly (Make fists with hands.)

To the faith (Trace a cross with pointer finger.)

We profess. (Point to heart and then mouth.)

Hang on to your faith for we have someone wonderful who always forgives us.

Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, for always being our high priest. We turn to you always. Amen