

Jesus Our Priest

Key Passage: Hebrews 10:11–14 (Hebrews 4–9 referenced)

Today begins what the Church has often called Holy Week walking through the last five days of Jesus' earthly life before his crucifixion. For New Testament believers, every week is holy week, every day is holy day, and every minute is a holy minute — they are moments lived **before** holy God — who is a consuming fire — and **for** holy God as living sacrifices. Nevertheless, we understand that the term points to the most pivotal week of human history that has ever been, or ever will be.

So, Palm Sunday: Jesus fulfilled prophecy by entering Jerusalem, the City of Peace, on a donkey. His followers and others celebrated his entrance by waving palm branches and shouting praise that was rooted in Psalm 118. They believed he was coming as the king who would remove the heavy boot of Roman rule from their neck and restore the kingdom of Israel. They hoped for a political king. Jesus is not a political king; He is simply king. The celebrating crowds had some awareness of his authority but did not grasp the fullness of the One who created all things, rules over all things, and holds all things together by the counsel of his will.

Today we look at the sin-conquering, peace-making work of our Great High Priest's sacrificial death. As our memory passage says, it was through his priestly work that his kingdom is populated. We are in this short series looking at the three mediatorial offices that Christ holds for eternity: Prophet, Priest, King. Next week we will look at King Jesus, conqueror of all of our enemies, giver of life. Today, let's read our launching text in Hebrews 10. We'll quickly outline it and then compare the imperfect Old Testament priests against this perfect High Priest and the work that he finished.

Hebrews 10:11–14 — ¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

PRAY — Lord, we hear the hopeful shouts of Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We rejoice that you are King. Today help us to grasp the price you paid to redeem us and make us your children. The cost was your life, and through your death, you completed the office of priest, making final atonement for sin.

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One of the primary themes of the book of Hebrews reveals Jesus, the perfect High Priest, who completes, or fulfills the priesthood in a way that human priests were not able to do. Here is a big summary statement of that theme and the comparison of imperfect humans to the perfect Christ.

Old testament priests were men chosen by God from the tribe of Levi. Their job was a mediatorial office. That's a fancy way of saying they were mediators. If that word is still too fancy, consider that they were reconcilers. They brought together two parties who were hostile toward each other. They stood between Holy God, offended by sin, and his sinful and sinning people. Following God's law, they offered atonement for the peoples' sin through gifts and substitute sacrifices. The sacrificial system was one of continually rehearsing that (1) Holy God has been offended by sin, (2) the wages of sin is death, and (3) here is the substitute death for God's people. God's grace was very much involved in the sacrificial system. Rather than requiring the death of sinners, he prescribed a substitute. The Old Testament details the various substitutes, but the big ones were bulls and goats. The primary job of a priest as it worked out in day-to-day service was that of a slaughterhouse butcher. Animal stand-ins would die in place of people. That system never paid for sin. It was basically a very graphic, brutal, shocking reminder of the price of sin. Can you imagine goat after goat, and bull after bull being brought to an altar and slaughtered in public and seeing how the blood runs and the life goes out of that animal.

So priest Maleck comes home late and is greeted by his wife.

"Dear I was beginning to worry about you. You're so late getting home."

"It was a horrible day at the office today. Apparently the full moon last Saturday gave rise to all manner of horrendous sin, and all the prescribed sacrifices were made today. If I slaughtered one bull I slaughtered 200. The blood was running in rivers off the altar. We had to stop twice just to wash the sidewalks down so people could make their way with their sacrifices.

"Oh honey, I know you complain and I know it's hard work. But it's important work and you'll find strength to do it all again next week."

"Yes I suppose I will. It does cause us to long for when Messiah comes and we won't have to do this anymore."

That's what **v 11** is summarizing. The priest's work was active, standing up work. You don't slaughter bulls from the comfort of a reclining office chair. If sacrifice is needed, standing is required. And note the futility of the work. The human priests repeatedly make the same sacrifices for sin, but the

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sacrifices can never take away sins. So there's the cycle goes round and round. Commit sin, make sacrifices for sin, sacrifices can't take away sin, so more sin is committed requiring more sacrifices. That's the lot of the human priest. But a better day is coming! **1 John 3:5** tells us Jesus has appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. So we see one reason why the need of the sacrificial system does not continue. Sin itself is being taken away, so sacrifices won't be needed. But let's tease that out. We see that the blood of bulls and goats spilled by human priest cannot take away sin, or perfect those who bring the sacrifice. When we see something phrased like that it should cause us to ask the question, well, is there something that will take away sin or perfect us? Answer: Yes! Christ, our Great High Priest, offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins. The sacrifice he made does perfect for all time those who are being sanctified, or conformed to his image in moral purity. So the sacrificial system had a final sacrifice that finally finished and completed all that God intended. It forgave sin, and it perfects the sinner so that the reason for sacrifice is taken away. So that we are not guilty of advancing a false notion of sinless perfection for believers, note the progressive nature of Christ's work: his children are being sanctified. They haven't arrived yet, but he who began the good work will complete it. While believers hate the grievous indwelling sin in their lives, the great hope we have is the sacrifice of Jesus, our Priest, was sufficient to cover past sin, present sin, and future sin. He is God, and as God he knows all our sin accounts, past, present, and future. All sin was paid by Christ on the cross.

That is the singularly stunning characteristic of this new and final priest. He did not simply make the sacrifice for sin, he became the sacrifice for sin. Human priests offered substitutes. Jesus was the substitute. He is the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world. Priests could not offer their own lives for others because their imperfect lives would not meet Holy God's righteous standard. They had to make offerings for their own sins. This final priest offered his life of perfect obedience to God's law and it was accepted as payment for sin. He has purified the sons of Levi, as Malachi 3:3 says, by making an offering in righteousness — the righteousness of his perfect obedient life. Once done, forever accomplished. Paid in full. We see this hopeful truth in **v. 12**: when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. He sat down. If sacrifice is needed, standing is required. But it is no longer needed. He sat down having completed all the work of atonement that the priests with grisly work of slitting the throats of bulls, and goats, and spotless lambs could not do.

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Believer, do you need to be reminded of the totality of our Great High Priest's work on your behalf? I need to be reminded of this as I deal with my own indwelling sin. I suspect all of us are greatly helped by being reminded of this. And it keeps us out of the ditch of futile self-effort. Given what our high priest has done, is there anything that we can do to improve this? Is there any sin that he did not cover? Well, if there is, there is no sacrifice that will cover it. His sinless life was adequate and efficient to cover the sin of those who come to him in faith and repentance. This truth should loosen the cords of sin that entangle us, knowing of both the Savior's great for us, as we explored this morning in prayer meeting, and the great price of our redemption, that we also saw in prayer meeting: God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Christ paid the wages of death for our sin. Shall we continue in sin? God forbid. Christ, who knew no sin became, became sin for us that we might not continue in sin, but that we might become righteousness in God.

Now let's make a 30,000 aerial fly over of some of the truths Hebrews introduces us to in comparing and contrasting our Great High Priest to previous human priests. We'll begin in Hebrews 4 and work through 10. I won't mention everything, but we'll get most of them.

4:14 — Jesus is the Son of God, our Great High Priest, who passed through the heavens. He is not earthly or earth bound.

4:15 — Though he passed through the heavens, the God who came in human form is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.

4:16 — Because of his finished work we cannot approach the throne of God boldly, in the authority of his perfect righteousness that clothes believers.

5:4–10 — Jesus is a superior priest to human priests, who were of the tribe of Levi. Jesus is a new, permanent priest in the order of Melchizedek. He continues in office forever. He does not retire.

6:19–20 — The thick veil that separated God from man has been opened by our Great High Priest.

7:22 — He has become the guarantor of a better covenant.

7:26 — He is the kind of sacrifice we must have: holy, innocent, undefiled, unstained — not just unstained outer garments Levitical priest had to wear, but in inner holiness, purity, and beauty. He does not have to offer sacrifice for his own sins, for he has no sin on his own.

8:1–2 — He sat down, having finished his work, just as we saw in our passage in chapter 10.

8:10 ff — He mediates a new covenant of love for God that changes the heart. The Law regulated outer behavior. The new heart of love the Jesus gives creates a love for God's words and ways.

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9:26–28 — He offers himself as the perfect and perfecting sacrifice for sin, not just a goat that only reminds of sin.

10:7 — He perfectly does the will of God.

10:10 — He sanctifies once for all. There is nothing we can add. There is no need to add anything.

10:18 — Where the sacrifices of human priests reminded of sin, our Great High Priest forgives sin.

In closing, it is important that we think rightly that Jesus offered himself as our sacrifice. In attempting to seek justice for the Savior, we can blame the Jewish religious leaders, or the Roman leaders for murdering Jesus. Both the Romans and the Jews were human agents in the crucifixion of Jesus. To that degree, they did indeed murder Christ. However, we need to understand that the Lamb of God was slain before the foundation of the world. This was the fathers plan. In trying to blame the Romans, we can actually devalue the sacrifice of the son of God. We obviously don't want to do that. We must come to grips with the fact that in **John 10:17–18**, Jesus said, I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." The crucifixion of Jesus was not left to chance at the hand of Romans or religious leaders. The crucifixion of Jesus was exactly on the schedule of the father who had assigned the Son the eternal office High Priest, and Jesus perfectly fulfilled his office when he gave himself as a substitute, a propitiation, to die for our sins. If we blame the Romans or the Jews we undermine a massive truth of our salvation.

It is our human bent to want to fix blame. In our desire to blame someone for the death of Christ, we need to look no further than the mirror. It was from my sin and you were sad that he died. We are the reason the nails were driven. We are the reason the thorns were pressed into the head. We are the reason that he paid the death penalty. It was to pay for my sin so that I wouldn't have to die. It was to pay for your sin so that you don't have to die.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. As we consider this week the enormity of what our High Priest has done, it ought to cause us to hate our sin in greatly increasing measure. The burden and grief for our sin must never cause us to think we can make, or need to make some atonement for our sin to improve the work of our High Priest. Our grief over sin should greatly spur us to holiness, but it is always in the light of **Romans 8:1–4** — There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not

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do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

We live in tension of **Philippians 2:12–13** — ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The High Priest is working in you to bring your present condition into conformity now with your eternal spiritual reality. That is, we are delivered from sin's penalty, power, and presence through his perfect priestly work.

This permanent forgiveness of sin and freedom from sin is available to all who believe in Jesus and come to him in faith. Even you. Believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved through his priestly work. Receive the forgiveness he purchased at his expense.

PRAY

MISSION TRIP PRAYER?