verses 17 and 18. Hebrews 2, 17 and 18. When I was a younger man, I got to teach through the book of Hebrews to a bunch of middle schoolers. And every single week when we would get to the book of Hebrews, I would make all of them recite the following. The book of Hebrews is an exhortation in which the heavenly high priestly Ministry of Jesus is the main point. And I would make them recite that every single week. Every single one of those middle schoolers, by the end of the teaching through the book of Hebrews, could tell you that little sentence. I don't know if they could today, but they could 15-ish years ago. But the reason I stress that in that Sunday school class is because Outside of the book of Hebrews, do you know how many times you read explicitly that Jesus is our priest? Zero times.

In fact, Jesus is never explicitly called priest outside of the book of Hebrews. Now, he is clearly set forth as a priest all throughout the Bible, including the Old Testament. However, explicitly, he is only called a priest in this book. And it is for the first time that he is called priest in this book, and therefore in the whole Bible, that we come today in verses 17 and 18 of chapter two.

Now, before you get excited thinking we're going to unpack all of what it means that Jesus is our priest, you should know that we're just gonna scratch the surface today. because this is going to be a theme we'll come back to throughout the entirety of our series through the book of Hebrews.

But with this in mind, let us pray and ask God to help us as we read his holy word. Our Father, pour out thy spirit upon us, for indeed, if you don't, there will be no real positive work in the hearts of the hearers, but by your grace and the pouring out of your spirit, there will be. We plead for that in the name of Jesus, amen. Hebrews 2, verses 17 and 18. This is the word of God. Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. This ends the reading of God's holy word. Would he bless the reading and now the proclamation of it to our lives. Well, there is no salvation outside of Christ's office as priest.

If he ruled you as king and delivered messages to you as prophet, but did not atone for your sins as priest, there could be no salvation for you. What good would it do you this morning to know that Christ rules? What good would it do for you today to be told that he has messages for you as prophet?

If he did nothing to atone for your sins as priests, his rulership could not transform your heart He had to be your priest to die for your sins. His messages in the Bible could not redeem your soul. He had to die and make atonement for your sins as your priest. If you only had Christ as your prophet, and you only had Christ as your priest, you indeed would not have salvation.

And this is one of the aspects of Christianity that is simply different than every other religion. In no other religion do you have a priest who sacrifices himself as the sin offering for his people. As Hank will often pray for the Muslims in our prayer meetings, he will say something like this, Allah would never die for them. And that is just it. The Muslim has no sacrifice to satisfy divine justice.

I used to do a lot of middle school ministry, not that many years ago. And one of the middle schoolers that I would meet with almost every week, this great young man named Ronnie, we would get together and he told me how he was having this debate with a Muslim in his class. And the Muslim, as they've always been and everyone I've interacted with, was very aggressive and coming at him very strongly. And you know what this little middle school boy said? And here I was, as he's telling me this story, thinking, oh, I'm gonna give him all these great arguments. His argument was better than any of my arguments. He looked at the boy, the Muslim boy, and he said to him, if Jesus didn't sacrifice himself for your sins, then who did? That's it. That's the difference.

That cuts right to the heart, just as the prayer that Hank often lists up in our prayer meetings cuts right to the heart. There is no sacrifice for your sins if you do not have Christ as your priest. Now, someone might say this is just technical theological jargon using words like priest. Well, first of all, it's all over the book of Hebrews, but additionally, it's not. It's matters of heaven and hell. It's matters of eternity. It's matters of atonement for sin about which we speak.

So what does our passage teach us about Jesus as priest? It teaches us three things about Jesus as priest. As priest, first, Jesus identifies with us. Second, as priest, Jesus makes propitiation for us. And third, as priest, Jesus helps us, identifies with us, makes propitiation for us, and helps us. So first, as priest, Jesus identifies with us.

Back at the start in verse 17, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a high priest. Jesus had to be made like his brothers so that he could represent his brothers as their priests. A priest, beloved, represents man to God. And he cannot represent man to God if he is not a man.

It has been said, there is no representation without identification. If he does not identify with us as a true man, he cannot represent us as our high priest. And there is truly no identification with us if there is no incarnation. No incarnation. then there is no identification with us. No identification with us, then there is no representation for us on our behalf. And then there is no priest, and then there is no salvation.

But our text declares that he does identify with us, that he does share in our nature, that he has a nature like ours, like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a high priest. But he's not just any high priest according to verse 17.

He is called merciful and faithful. He is a merciful high priest. This means that his being our high priest is something that he has done willingly. He willingly came into this world to be a high priest on behalf of his people, to intercede for his people, to bring his people as a priest to God the Father. And mercy, beloved, always excludes merit. We did not merit his coming into this world. His mercy brought him into this world. But not only is he merciful, he is also faithful.

He is faithful in that he perfectly executed his mission. He faithfully obeyed the law on behalf of his people. He faithfully came and died on behalf of his people. He faithfully, even now we will see in chapter seven, intercedes on behalf of his people. He is a faithful and merciful high priest.

And why is it that you need a merciful high priest? You need a merciful high priest because you could never merit salvation. If your high priest represented you only when you merited his representing you, then you would have no high priest. Him being merciful is what can give you confidence that he is your high priest this morning. because it's not about your merit, it's not about your performance. If it were, you would have no high priest, because you would have never earned his being your high priest, your representative on your behalf, shedding his blood for your sins.

Your merit, beloved, did not bring Christ to earth, nor will your merit bring you to heaven. Christ's mercy brought him to earth, and it is Christ's mercy that will bring you to heaven. There is more mercy in Christ, as Sibbes said, than there is sin in us.

But not only do you need him to be merciful, you need him to be faithful. You need him to be a high priest who will not give up on you. Your high priest is faithful, not only in his obedience to the law in the past on your behalf, but he is faithful to you today. He doesn't give up on his people. And you need that, because if he gave up on any one of us, then every one of us would be liable to perish.

He makes perfect, perpetual intercession on behalf of you who are in Christ today, because he is not only merciful, he is faithful. Many people are merciful that you know, and at some level, you are merciful. But your mercy fades, you grow weary, your faithfulness ends at some point, but not so with Christ. How merciful is he? Could he be merciful and faithful to you?

Well, consider the words again of Richard Sibbes. He said this, Peter denied him, but he denied not Peter. Peter denied him, but he denied not Peter. Yes, he rebuked Peter in Matthew 16, but he never denied Peter, even though Peter denied him, three times.

So can you trust that he is a merciful and high priest to you who are in Christ today? Can you believe his mercy never runs dry? Can you believe that his mercy and his faithfulness are never ceasing? Can you believe that when you keep on sinning, he keeps on forgiving? Can you trust him while you are so often so unfaithful? Can you trust that he will still be faithful to you?

Well, imagine this. And I don't advise you do this because, well, you'll see in a moment, I'm not very good with cars. But imagine this for a moment. You had car trouble and you said, Mac, I need you to come over at 8 a.m. tomorrow to help me fix my car. Now, I would be willing, but just, again, I wouldn't be a good help. You should ask somebody else. But, say in this analogy, you invite me over to help you fix your car tomorrow morning at 8 a.m.

9 a.m. rolls around, I haven't shown up. 10 a.m. rolls around, I haven't shown up. The whole day passes and I never come over to your house to help you fix your car. Now upon whom does that reflect poorly? That reflects poorly on me. It is my name that is on the line. It is my character that is on the line. And my failure to show up as I told you I would will make me look bad. It will reflect poorly on me because I am not being faithful to my word.

Hebrews 2.17, Jesus, we hear, is a merciful and faithful high priest. How can you believe that, knowing who you really are? You can believe that because if he weren't, it is his name that is on the line. It is his character that is at stake. He is going to be who he says he is. It is not contingent upon your feelings. It is not contingent upon your performance. It is not contingent upon your worthiness or lack thereof. It is contingent upon who he is.

That, beloved, is how you can know he will be a merciful and faithful high priest to you. But secondly, as our high priest, we've seen he identifies with us, but now, as priests, Jesus makes propitiation for us. Verse 17, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. Now I recall growing up in youth group, my pastor would always ask us, what does propitiation mean? And I would always give some answer about like this. I would say, propitiation means to make atonement for sin.

And every single time he would say, not exactly. And I would get a little bit annoyed because I was like, That's what propitiation means, as far as my 14-year-old brain, or however old I was, understood it. And I was wrong, and he was right. But, here's what it means, and this is why it matters, and the reason I even tell you that little story is to say, you think we're splitting hairs, it matters.

Knowing what propitiation means actually means, not just generally atonement for sin, but what it actually means matters, my pastor was right, and it matters because The word itself is used several times in the Bible. The concept is all over the Bible, even where the word itself is not used, kind of like the idea of priest. But here is what it means.

Propitiation means to remove the wrath of God for sin, to remove the wrath of God for sin. It deals specifically with the wrath of God against sin. It's not generally atonement. That would be perhaps we could say an umbrella but specifically it's addressing the issue of the wrath of God against sin being removed. So to say that Jesus is the propitiation for sin is to say that he is the wrath remover.

It's something that I have said many times in my life, he is the wrath remover. That's what it means in sort of the shortest way I can possibly distill it down. Propitiation means Jesus is the wrath remover. He removes the wrath, he takes it, on himself, and so how exactly does he remove this wrath? He is the wrath remover because he is the wrath absorber. He took it on himself, the wrath of God against us for our sins.

Think about how all priests offer sacrifices to God. You see that in the Old Testament. They're always offering sacrifices, aren't they? That's what they do. But what makes Jesus as priest different You could say many things, but one particular thing about Jesus as priest that is different than all of those Old Testament sacrifices. You see,

those priests in the Old Testament, they made a sacrifice and it was a goat, or it was a lamb, or it was some animal on behalf of the sins of the people, and even on their own, behalf of their own sins. But Jesus is not only the priest, he is also the sacrifice. He is not only the offerer, he is the offering. He sacrifices himself on behalf of the sins of the people as a priest.

As a shield protects you from a sword by taking the damage on itself in your place, keeping you safe on the other side of the shield, so Christ has been a shield for his people, taking the wrath of God on himself and us who are in him are safe as we are behind him. He gave himself up, as our catechism says, Christ executed the office of a priest in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God and in making continual intercession for us. Now someone might hear all this talk about Jesus Christ taking a wrath of God on himself for our sins in our place, and they might think, you might think even here this morning, but I thought God always loved me. I thought that God loved his people.

So how do you reconcile this claim that Christ takes the wrath of God on himself in our place with the other simultaneous and true doctrine that God the Father never began to love his people because he's always loved his people. How do you reconcile these two truths?

But what is it that motivated Christ's coming to remove the wrath of God for our sins. What motivated Christ to come to remove the wrath of God for our sins? It was his unchangeable, the unchangeable eternal love of God that motivated Jesus to take on flesh, the second person in the Trinity, to take on flesh and come and take the wrath of God on himself in our place.

It was the love of the father that sent the son into this world to be a propitiation for our sins. It was God's love that motivated him to send his own son to take upon himself his wrath. That's why Jesus came. Certainly one of the reasons Jesus came for God so loved the world that he sent his only son.

To do what? Well, to make propitiation for our sins. To die in our place for our sins. Murray puts it this way, the wrathful God is not made loving. The wrathful God is loving. And that is why he sent his son into the world to remove his wrath from us for our sins. Again, the wrathful God is not made loving. The wrathful God is loving. If he were merely wrathful and no love, then there would be no propitiation for sins. But he upholds his wrath against sin and upholds his love for his people by sending his son to die for us and for our sins.

Well, what is the ground of your propitiation here this morning? What is the ground, in other words, I could put it this way, of your salvation? Well, you can't beat yourself up enough to merit propitiation for your sins. You can't flog yourself enough to deserve forgiveness for your sins. You can't do enough good deeds to deserve salvation from your sins. The ground of salvation, the ground of propitiation is Christ and his cross alone.

Do you look at how bad you are and you say, I can't receive propitiation for my sins, I'm so bad. Or do you look at how good you are and you say, I can receive propitiation for my sins because I'm so good. Well, if this is how you ground your relationship with God, in either case, whether you're saying, I'm so bad, I cannot receive

propitiation for my sins, or I'm so good, I can receive propitiation for my sins. In either one of these cases, you are grounding your relationship with God in the wrong place. And why is that? Because both of these types of people begin the grounding of their salvation with the letter I. I'm so bad, I cannot receive propitiation for my sins. I'm so good, I can receive propitiation for my sins. Neither of them are anchored in Jesus Christ and his cross alone for the saving work that is necessary for your salvation. Do you remember the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18? The Pharisee Do you remember what he focuses on? He focuses on what he has done. How does he begin?

I thank you, I'm not like other men. And the tax collector focuses instead not upon what he has done, but upon what God alone can do. God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Yes, he does acknowledge that he is a sinner, but the emphasis where he is, resting where he is directing his gaze is on God, who is merciful, not on me, a sinner. His focus is on God, the merciful, not me, the sinner. And no way does he deny his sin, but his focus, his emphasis is God, the merciful.

When it comes to your salvation, the assurance of your salvation here this morning, you're unsure, you're riddled with doubt, Well, perhaps it is simply this. Perhaps it is simply this. You're saying, I'm so bad, I can't receive Jesus as my priest. Or maybe you're riddled with doubt because you're saying, I'm so good, I can receive Jesus as my priest, as my propitiation.

In either case, I urge you, spend less time thinking about I and spend more time considering Jesus, which is exactly what he will do in chapter three. Consider Jesus, he will say, chapter three, verse one. We will preach that sermon, Lord willing, next week. This is the way of salvation, and it is a great remedy to lack of assurance, is considering Jesus. Well, thirdly, as priest, Jesus helps us. As priest, Jesus helps us. You see this in Let's just read it again. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Have you ever asked someone for help and it became really apparent, really quickly, that they could not relate to you at all? That they really could not understand or didn't seem to understand what you were trying to explain. weren't helpful. I heard a story one time, not my wife, I heard a story one time about a pastor, he moves to a new place and his wife is very lonely and she just feels totally isolated and she picks up the phone, she decides she's gonna call a woman in the church and just share her heart.

She calls up the girl in the church and says, I'm just really feeling lonely, I don't really have any friends, I'm just super sad. Would you be willing to start a friendship with me? And the lady responded, I just have so many friends. I can't bear to add another friend into my life right now. I just don't have time. I've got so many friends already.

Can you imagine how horrible the pastor's wife felt at that time? Well, this is not like Christ. Christ helps his people. Thomas Watson said this, Christ has left his passion but he has not left his compassion. While Christ's sufferings for our sin is finished, his compassion for you is never finished. Again, Watson, he is touched by the feeling of our infirmity.

Every bruise of the soul goes to his heart. Are you bruised? A bruised reed he will not break, a faintly burning wick he will not put out. Are your soul bruised with sin and iniquity? He has beams of majesty, but he also has bowels of mercy, as the Puritans would have said.

Now, I can hear the objection already. How well can Christ really get my sufferings and temptations when he never sinned? He can't relate to me. Now, I'm not going to answer that objection entirely in this sermon. Try to answer him more fully in the later sermon at the end of chapter four of Hebrews, because this issue comes up again there. But the objection is, how can he really relate to my suffering and my temptation? After all, he never even sinned. Well, let me just say a few words about that objection now.

Who understands the power of the current of a river more fully, the man who is perpetually swimming against the current, or the man who is perpetually simply going with the flow of the current? Well, surely it is the man who is perpetually trying to swim against the current. He understands how powerful it is. He experiences something of how ferocious it is.

But the man who is just going with the flow doesn't really appreciate the full power of the current. And so it is with temptation to sin. The man who is perpetually routinely fighting against his sin knows temptation better than the man who's perpetually giving in. And nobody has fought sin like Christ. Additionally, are you going to suggest that Christ, when he was under 40 days of not eating, Are you gonna suggest that he didn't know the temptation to give in to his desires in a way that he shouldn't have at that time?

Imagine he had the ability to at any moment, if he just gave in for a split second and willed it, just a quick slip, he could have just willed himself a steak supper. At any moment, he could have just done it. Just a quick blip, blink of an eye. I'm just gonna give it, boom, steak supper. He never did it. Can you imagine if you could change the temperature around you. Just a couple degrees, or as many degrees as you wanted, at any point, because you're just too hot, or it's just not supposed to be raining right now, or you'd want it to be a little colder.

You're gonna tell me that he doesn't understand temptation? He sweated, he got cold, and he never just willed it because he wanted it for himself. There is no one, there is absolutely no human being who understands temptation like Christ. You don't understand temptation like Jesus did. He knows the power of temptation in a depth that you and I have never known. But he still resisted, and he fought it, and he knows it, and he is able to help you as you go through your temptations.

Now what sort of temptations might these particular Christians have been facing? We know because of some things said in chapter 10, that again, their property had been confiscated and they're tempted to look away from Jesus, to lose sight of him and to just give up.

It's been hard, their circumstances are difficult and they wanna give in to sin because circumstances are tough. Well, you're probably not having your property confiscated, but you know what it's like to have tough circumstances and just say, I'm just gonna sin. I just don't care anymore. I'm just gonna give in because my

circumstances are inconvenient and it's difficult and I just want an easy way out. That was the type of thing that they were experiencing.

You don't get enough sleep because your baby wakes up and immediately you're tempted to sin. You don't get your way when you're playing with your friends in the playground and immediately, kids, you're tempted to sin. You face health difficulties. immediately you're tempted to sin. Fill in the blank. Anytime anything inconveniences you, you're tempted to sin. And oftentimes even the Christian gives in to those temptations in heart, if not in action.

And how did Jesus do it? Well, back in chapter Through verse 13, we read of him, I will put my trust in him. He continually entrusted himself to his father in heaven while doing good. So when you are tempted to sin, remember you have a powerful, compassionate, merciful high priest, Jesus Christ, to help you in the midst of your temptation. He who sacrificed himself for you also sympathizes with you.

Well, today we have seen Jesus, our priest, identifies with us, makes propitiation for us, and helps us. Do you know this Jesus of which you have just heard preached? Do you know him that was just preached? If you don't know this priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, I want to ask you this question.

For what good thing that he does do you want to reject him? Do you want to reject him because he's too merciful? You want to reject him because you don't like how faithful he is? Do you want to reject him because you don't like that he makes propitiation for your sins and he helps you who can't help yourself? These are the qualities of this priest. For what good thing that he does would you want to reject him? There is no better priest. There is no better sacrifice. There is no better way. He is a priest the likes of which none greater can be conceived. Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we praise you even now that we can come right into your throne room, into your ear, because Christ is our high priest. And he has paved the way with his blood and his righteousness. And we thank you for him and all he has done for us. Oh Lord God, every man, woman, and child in this room is sin-beaten and battered because they are sinners and because they live in a sin-cursed and fallen world.

But Christ is our righteousness. Christ is our priest. Christ is the one who has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. Lord God, I pray for every single one of us that we would take seriously the Jesus of the Bible and what he has done, and we would take less seriously how bad we think we are, how good we think we are, and simply delight ourselves all the more in Christ and Him crucified. He is the Savior of sinners. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.