

For Us

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, July 31, 2016
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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Hebrews 9:23-28

Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. 25not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—26He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

“... now to appear in the presence of God for us.”

These are words unlike any other. They tell us that we have a representative in heaven who is in the very presence of God for us. Now if you were to choose your representative in heaven to stand in your place and advocate for your righteousness, acceptance, and blessing, who would you choose?

Surely none of us would choose the apostles, no matter how much we revere them, they could not stand in our defense because they too depend on the advocacy of another. The Roman Catholic position of praying to the saints is flawed on many points, but here is its biggest problem, that although these dear saints are glorified spirits, they are not in heaven by their own merits. They are there based upon the merits of another. Ten million years in heaven will not have made the case that we deserve to be there. The ages roll on, age after age, but the longer we are in heaven will not make us more fitting. The only basis of our worthiness to call the Celestial City our home is the blood of the Lamb of God.

Why should we pray to saints who stand upon the same advocacy which we stand upon? No! As much as I appreciate and revere the apostles or any of the great saints who have preceded us, I would not choose any of them to represent me in heaven.

Nor should any of us choose an angelic representative. Even if his name is Michael, I would not trust my soul and its everlasting joy to such a creature, no matter how beautiful and mighty he is. How can you trust your representative if he has no understanding of what it means to be human? Why trust a being whose first order is to defend the glory of God against rebels? It is these same

warrior angels who stand ready and at attention, with hand on sword, to destroy all who oppose their King. I don't mind such a being fighting for me, and I am appreciative for all their defense, but I don't want such an advocate at the throne of God, for even the highest angel is mystified by the love that drew salvation's plan.

There is only one logical choice for our heavenly representative. And this is what I want to demonstrate this morning. Jesus is the very best and only proper candidate to be our representative and mediator. There is no one better suited to argue our case before the throne, for He is seated on the throne of Heaven. He is the very God of God, and He is the very bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. He is my Elder Brother and He is my Kinsman Redeemer. He has been tempted in every point as we have, but unlike us, He has not succumbed. He triumphed over every evil enticement. He overcame all opposition and He died our death, He suffered our sin, and He lives our life. There He is "now to appear in the presence of God for us." He is there *for us*.

There are many reasons why Jesus is in heaven, one reason is because He is Creator and part of the Godhead, but the writer of Hebrews singles out, for our encouragement, that He is there *for us*.

This is why the writer of the Hebrews calls Him our High Priest. He stands as our mediator to God and God's mediator to us. He pleads our name to the Father and He pleads the Father's name to our hearts.

What I want to do this morning is show you how great a High Priest you have, here from this text. As you hear about Jesus and what He has done and does on your behalf, I pray your heart would be strengthened, that it will be lifted above the fray, the disorganization, the dismay, the confusion, and difficulties that even now assault your heart. Oh, may you find refuge this morning in this great High Priest, who is now to appear in the presence of God for you and me.

I. Function and Duties of the High Priest

Let's go through these four functions and duties of a high priest and see how Jesus fulfills every one of them.

A. Oversee All the Priests and Levites.

This goes back to the Old Testament and Aaron, the first high priest who was the brother of Moses. Every priest is a Levite but not every Levite is a priest. Only those who were descended from Aaron were the priests of the temple and later the tabernacle there in Jerusalem.

The Levites assignment was to assist the priests in their duties and only one was called and anointed to be the high priest. He would have been the eldest son in the lineage of Aaron. It would be passed father-to-son, father-to-son, generation after generation.

The priests, who were not the high priests, conducted their affairs in the tabernacle and temple, they offered the sacrifices that people brought, that God ordained for the nation of Israel, and they would tend to the table of Showbread, the prayers, and the morning sacrifices. The high priest had oversight over all of their activities. It was on his shoulders that fell the ultimate responsibility to make sure that everything that had to do with the worship of God and the intercession of the people was done.

Well, dear friends, Jesus is our great High Priest. Twenty-five times in the book of Hebrews, He's either referred to or inferred to by that title. He is our High Priest and the Bible says He has made us priests with God and that He is the one who oversees our ministries as priests unto God. The Apostle Peter in his first epistle says it this way, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood."

John the Apostle in the book of Revelation says it is He, Jesus, who has made us kings and priests unto God His Father. For every person in this room who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and followed Him in faith and repentance, God has conferred upon you the title "Priest." You're a royal priest, one who serves in his entirety to the worship of God. That is your calling, that is your work, that is the will of God for you, that you are to offer up your life as a continual sacrifice—the sacrifice of a priest—all under the headship and watchful eye of our High Priest.

B. Wear the Urim and Thummin to Discern the Will of God.

The Urim and Thummin were two particular, special stones that were hidden within the breastplate that the high priest wore. When the nation had difficult decisions to make, they would go to the high priest who carried the Urim and Thummin, these two special stones, in order to determine what God's will was.

Often people who had severe choices and needed to know God's direction would go to the high priest and seek his counsel. This was part of his duties. In the Old Testament, you see David consulting the high priest and the Urim and Thummin for decisions and guidance often.

The function of the high priest was to give discernment to God's people. Let's look at Jesus and see how He fares in this department. How well does our High Priest show us what the will of the Father is?

In the tenth chapter of the book of Hebrews, the writer quotes Jesus as saying, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." The mission of Christ Himself was to do the will of the Father and He did it perfectly. Oh, we can make note of the struggle there in the grove of olive trees, we can say He might have faltered a bit, but I tell you He didn't. He ultimately did what His Father sent Him to do, "Nevertheless, not My will but Thy will be done." Jesus Christ executed perfectly the will of God and therefore left us the example and the promise that He would guide us, rendering us able to do what God wills.

Why would He have taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” if that’s not what we’re supposed to do and He was not going to help us to do it. Jesus said on one occasion whoever does the will of God is His brother and sister and mother and friend. Oh my dear friend, this is the commission given to us, to live our lives according to the will of God. But sometimes we don’t know what that will is. Thankfully we have a High Priest who will not leave us to our wits to discern the will of God.

God does not play a game with His will, “Hide and seek and if you’re more fortunate than others you might be able to find it.” No, no, Jesus has promised to lead and to guide us according to the will of God and He will fulfill that promise and to do so He has given us His very Spirit.

Every believer in this room is inhabited by the will of Christ, through His Spirit, who has been given to us to guide us into all truth. When there are moments of indecision, we do not know what the will of the Lord is, we can be assured that our High Priest will answer when we need to know. He will do so by revelation. Revelation. Jesus will reveal the will of the Father to you because He is our High Priest and it is His duty.

He’s already revealed His will to us through written revelation, the Bible. Then, secondly, the Spirit will reveal His will according to the Word of God on how you and I should live. God will not leave you in the lurch. God will not leave you indecisively not knowing what His will is. He wants you to know His will and a prerequisite to doing the Father’s will is to know that will. This is what our High Priest does for us.

C. Perform the Day of Atonement Duties.

This was His most important task. One day a year, in the fall of the year, the high priest performed and oversaw the atonement of the sins of the past year.

He did this, first of all, by offering a sacrifice for his own sins. He had to first atone for his own sins.

Then, having done that, he would then offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Two goats were the sacrifice. One was called a “scapegoat.” The high priest would lay his hands on the head of that animal, symbolizing the transferal of the guilt and sins of the people to that animal, and that animal would be led out of the camp and into the wilderness, never to be seen again. This was emblematic, illustrative of the fact that our sins are taken from us and we never see them again.

The other animal was sacrificed. The goat’s blood was collected and the high priest would take that blood and enter through the holy place, beyond the veil, and into the Holy of Holies, where he would go only this one time a year. There, he would sprinkle the blood on the Ark of the Covenant, which was considered the throne of God on earth, the Mercy Seat, and as he prayed, he would intercede on behalf of the entire nation. He prayed that God would be merciful enough to forgive, remit, all of the sins of the people for the previous year.

This was his responsibility. He would offer the sacrifices, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, and intercede on behalf of the people for their forgiveness.

Let's see how our Lord, our High Priest, has done. Is it a surprise for any of us that our High Priest did it all on one day, never again to be repeated? Our Lord Jesus Christ has performed and finished the work of atonement. It is done. There is nothing left. He completed it. He did it so well, so marvelously, and so completely, that not one more drop of blood is required for the forgiveness of all our sins.

Unlike the high priests in the Old Testament, He had no need for a sacrifice for Himself. He had so perfectly obeyed the will of God that He had never sinned, not one time, never had His soul veered off into darkness. He was light. He was the light of the world, come to light every man that was born, and He showed the way of perfect obedience. He was and is the spotless Lamb of God without stain or blemish. He needed no sacrifice, He was the sacrifice.

On this ultimate Day of Atonement, a day that fulfilled all of the days before, Jesus paid our sin debt. The payment was so satisfying to the Father that the Father has stamped upon your record and mine, "Canceled. Forgiven."

I'll never forget the first time I paid off a debt. I saw the banker stamp my document and handed it to me. I went home and looked at it and do you know what it said? It didn't say "Canceled" or "Paid in full," it literally said, "Forgiven." That's what they used to say. That was the terminology used in banks years ago. This was the same concept that we see in the New Testament. To have your debt paid, to have it canceled, is to have it forgiven. Why? Because you owed it! You owed it. No lender is going to absolve without having recouped what created the debt in the first place.

Here, we had a debt we could not pay. We are much like that man in Matthew 25 who owed such an extreme amount of money that He could never have paid it. He goes to the king and pleads for more time but the king doesn't give him more time, he gives him forgiveness. The king cancels the debt and he leaves a forgiven man. We are under the auspices, the leadership, of a High Priest who has done the ultimate Day of Atonement.

In Hebrews 10:11, we read,

"And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins."

These poor men were bound and obligated to a duty that was futile. Their calling was to do a work that could not be done: provide sacrifice for sin, and ultimately none of the blood and the lives of those animals could get rid of one sin. He goes on to say in verse 12,

"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,"

Once on that holy day, the most significant day of all history, when the Lamb of God was slain for our sins, the Father saw the agony of His Son's soul and said, "It's enough. Sufficient. Worthy. Done."

Back to our text in Hebrews 9:25,

"not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages"

Oh, doubting friend, if you lack assurance this morning that you are in favor and right relationship with God, please listen to what this text is saying. It is so easy to base your relationship with God on what you do and what you don't do. I understand how easy it is to slip into that rut of feeling right with God when I'm feeling well and then feeling not right with God when I'm doing not so well. But the writer to the Hebrews said if Jesus' sacrifice wasn't sufficient for all your sins then He would need to do it every year. He would have to come back once a year and, not only that, He should have been coming back from the foundation of the earth, from the beginning of time. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, He should have died then and come back every year, year after year, until here we are today in 2016. But He didn't do that and He never will. He will not come back as a sacrifice again. He will come again, yes, He'll appear unto salvation. What does that mean? It means salvation out of this world—glorification—which is the final stage of our redemption.

What is the true significance of this? Go to the next chapter of Hebrews 10. Look at verses 14 and following and be amazed. I know you know the Gospel. I know you know that Jesus died. This is not anything new but I pray God will give you new eyes.

"For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."

This is one of the most blessed verses in the entire New Testament. It tells me I stand in the sight of my Father complete, lacking nothing. He has perfected us for how long? Until I sin again? No! Forever. Those who have believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the only sacrifice for sin that the Father will accept, you, in one moment, have been perfected, found complete, wanting nothing in the eyes of God. You stand in this position and it does not change.

Look at verse 15. The Holy Spirit knows we have this tendency to begin to doubt the truths of the Gospel. We hear the lies of the Evil One who wants us to base our assurance on us and not on the blood, so the Holy Spirit gives us a witness.

"But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, 16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord:"

Listen, here's the covenant, here's the deal:

“I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” 17 then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” 18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.”

Why is there no more sacrifice of animals? Why does Jesus need not come back again? Because in one act on the true Day of Atonement, God remitted all of our sins now and forever. Your sins have been removed farther than the scapegoat could ever wonder from the camp. They have been tossed as far as the east is from the west. When you and I sin, as we do, we must stand and not veer in any direction. It's almost like trying to stand on a razor's edge, I understand, but you must stand on the truth of the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. There is no other sacrifice, no other penance, no other work will do. It's only by the blood of Jesus Christ.

All of our sins have been paid for. This is important in a day when people are still teaching that all the sins that have been forgiven are the ones that you committed before you were converted and from that moment on there are things that you must do for your own atonement to add to the work of Christ. My dear friends, that's lies, blasphemies, and an insult to the blood of Christ. How many of your sins have been forgiven? All of them. When were they forgiven? As the blood was being shed.

There you were at that cross. There you were kneeling. As His fountain flowed, spewing from His body in gory red and scarlet, it spilt upon you and covered you, washing your sins away. When were you forgiven? You were forgiven as the sacrifice was made. Please listen, this is not hard to understand.

Time is just as anything else that God has made—He transcends it. He is above it all. Time is just another one of the things God made. This idea that God is surprised now and again is just absolutely not in sequence or harmony with the person and attributes of God. Time is a created thing, just like you. That's why He can say He knows the end from the beginning. I can say I know the beginning at the end. I can look back and see the beginning and say, “Hey, that was the day we started this or that,” but none of us can look from the beginning and see the end. God can. Time is a created thing.

In the wise, eternal counsel of God, Jesus was slain before the foundation of the world for His people, for those who He chose before the foundation of the world, and Jesus' sacrifice was essentially done that day. That means your sins were done that day!

“Does that mean I don't need to confess my sins?” No, that would be contrary to Scripture as well. We must follow the Book not men's inventions and ideas. The Book says if I confess my sins He is faithful and just to forgive my sins and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. There has to be confession, how can I walk and be in agreement with God if I don't agree that what He calls sin is sin?

My conscious needs to be sprinkled, as the writer of Hebrews tells us in the tenth chapter, by His blood, but that doesn't mean that somehow the atonement of Christ is inferior and I need some other sacrifice or some other work of atonement.

Listen, Jesus is not just the High Priest, He's also the sacrifice.

*“He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, **He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.**”*
(Hebrews 9:26)

Just as the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies with that bowl of blood and sprinkle the Mercy Seat and pray and intercede for the people, your High Priest ever lives to make intercession for you.

“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25)

Now at the right hand of the Father He is there, praying and interceding so that you may be able to say today, “It is well with my soul.” If you cannot say it is well with your soul it is simply because you are not believing the sacrifice. What are you going to add to the sacrifice that is going to make up for what you've done? What do you think you can do that's more than what Jesus has done? What payment do you have within your means? How much pain would you have to endure? Tell me. What do you need to neglect or deny yourself that would somehow atone for what you have done? Oh no, He's our High Priest and our sacrifice and it is finished.

D. Oversight of the Daily Morning Sacrifice and Blessing.

The last duty of the high priest was that he was in charge of the daily morning sacrifice of the people. He didn't have to do it all himself, he could have one of the other priests do it, but he had to make sure it was done every morning. Every morning, the high priest was responsible to make sure there was a sacrifice for that day. This was emblematic as it was stating to the people that there were new mercies for that day.

He would then stand in blessing for the people. This was routine. Day in and day out. Seven days a week, 365 days a year. Every morning the people were reminded that God was a God of compassions and those compassions did not fail. They were new everyday.

The most severe day in Jewish history was the day when the Babylonians routed and leveled the city of Jerusalem. Before they did, it had gotten so bad that some women actually took their children and boiled their babies in order to have something to eat. It had gotten so bad as the Babylonians had besieged the city. Here in Lamentations, the weeping prophet, Jeremiah, observes all of this. He sees the invading army destroy the walls, he sees them set fire to the temple and bring down every stone. He sees people slaughtered in the streets and sees all the devastation.

Yet, in the midst of those laments, he says,

“This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. 22 Through the LORD’S mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:21-23)

How can you have hope in such a bleak and dismal time? Through the Lord’s mercies! It’s only because of them we are not consumed. His compassions fail not, they’re new every morning! Every morning the priests would remind the people of this, as he would offer another sacrifice, God’s new mercies were there for that day.

Then he would pray a blessing for that day. You know what that blessing was? You have it in your Bibles in Numbers 6. This is what he would pray as a blessing over the people every day:

“Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, “This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: 24 ‘The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; 26 The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.’ 27 So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”” (Numbers 6:23-27)

This is the prayer of blessing the priests prayed every morning. I want you to look at six different things in this blessing and let’s see how Jesus fares, shall we?

In verse 24 we see the first part of the blessing:

1. The Lord bless you and keep you.

This is what the high priests would pray. “The Lord bless you and keep you.” What is our blessing today? Is it not the Lamb of God? Isn’t our greatest blessing to know Jesus Christ and to walk with Him, to talk with Him, communion and fellowship with Him?

Who keeps us? Every single believer in this room is kept by the power of God. You are here today and you have persevered through your own stumbling and failures, you have persevered through trials and temptations, you have overcome destruction and many difficulties, for one reason only: your High Priest has been on the job and He has not forsaken you. Your High Priest has kept you in the palms of His hands and preserved you until this very moment. We know this, that He who has begun a good work in you shall finish it.

2. The Lord make His face shine upon you.

This is reminiscent of Moses having been in the presence of God for 40 days. After he received the 10 Commandments, he came down the second time and the Bible says his face glowed with the residue and countenance of the glory of God. The face of Moses was so brilliant and bright

that they made him put a veil over his face when he went to talk to the people. What this blessing means is that God's countenance is smiling upon you. That is your favor.

God's face is looking down on us, creatures below, and that He would grant us His favor, or His graciousness. In fact, that is the very next statement here, is it not?

3. ...And be gracious to you.

The psalmist prayed this, "Lord, cause Your face to shine and we shall be saved" (Psalm 67). It's the countenance of God looking down upon you that is your hope, your blessing, and your favor with God. It's God Himself.

This is the blessing—now we have a High Priest who looks down on us with grace and favor and smiles at us.

4. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you.

It sounds almost like He's repeating the second blessing that His face should shine upon you, but it's completely different. It sounds like He's just repeating the same thing, but this is completely different. In verse 25 the metaphor is that God is looking down upon us with favor, smiling over us, but that's not what this verse said, is it? Verse 26 is saying lift *up* His countenance.

What's the imagery and word picture God wants to create in the minds of His people? It's simple. It's a father and a child. The father and the child have their hands clasped, one with the other, walking along and all of the sudden the father leans down and picks up the child, lifting him up above his head and then pulls him into his chest and says, "I love you so much."

The blessing is that God loves His children. "May the Lord lift up His countenance," may He lift up His countenance as He picks you up and holds you close. Know that God loves you're than you can even define. You are never without the love of God.

Day after day after day this priest would pray that prayer, that the Lord's countenance is upon you because you are loved much by Him. Our High Priest, the Shepherd of our souls, has picked us up out of the dank, dyer darkness of our sins and He has lifted us out of the mire and He has taken us to Himself, He's lifted up His countenance and He's said, "I love you," and He has brought us near to Himself.

5. And give you peace.

To know that I am loved by God like this, that He would lift me up and by His own Son's sacrifice receive me and never reject me, is the means by which I experience the peace of God. Now I have peace with God I can now have peace with you.

6. So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.

This isn't so much a blessing but more of an explanation about what this whole prayer of blessing is about. You see, all of this act of blessing was God putting His name on the people. Beloved, God has put His name on each one of you that are His. What is His name? Yahweh, I Am that I Am, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, Everlasting Father. All those names of God which depicts His attributes has been written upon us and our hearts. God is for you.

How do you know that He has given you His name? How do you know? Once again, for those of you who are struggling this morning and wondering if you're really His, how can you know you're really His?

The Bible says you can know His name is upon you because He's given you His Spirit.

"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God," (Romans 8:15-16)

The moment somebody professes faith and really commits their life to Christ, believing His sacrifice is sufficient and sufficient alone, the Bible says He gives them His Holy Spirit. He calls this Holy Spirit the Spirit of adoption. Something is implanted in the human heart of a believer that causes him or her to sense that they are related to God.

Even those of you who may have had a difficult and strained relationship with your earthly father, even you who may find it difficult to relate to God as Father, implanted within your heart is something that makes you to know and feel that you are rightly related to God and you never get rid of that. Yes, at times, it seems like that voice is gone, that testimony is not being born within and you're not for sure, but listen, even when you feel estranged from God, tell me, is it not true that there is still not this sense that God and you have some sort of kinship? That's how you know you have been given the name of God—by His Spirit. He continually cries out in your heart so you can cry out, "Abba Father."

Three years ago a 15-year-old boy named Davian Only dressed in a suit with a borrowed tie, walked into the St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church in St. Petersburg, Florida. He stood before the congregation and said, "I'll take anyone. Old or young, dad or mom, black, white, purple. I don't care. And I would be really appreciative. The best I could be." The boy wanted to be adopted. Davian was born in prison, placed in foster care and while searching for his mother, discovered her obituary in a library. She had died a few weeks earlier.

He said that he'd cried in the library, but had decided then and there that his family's history wouldn't define him. He decided to take matters into his own hands and seek out a lifelong family.

He went on to tell the church that morning, “I’m praying and still hoping. I know God hasn’t given up and I’m not either.”

You too were born in a kind of prison and your family history, your own history has defined you. But you don’t want to be defined by that history anymore. Unlike Davian, you don’t have to take matters into your own hands. Jesus has already taken matters into His hands—each hand received a long rusty spike. The Family of Heaven, Father and the Son, have been looking for you long before you thought there might be a possibility of adoption. God hasn’t given up on you either.

This morning, don’t you want to be brought into the family of God? I’ve told you what you must do. You must come to the Father and accept His love. There is nothing left to do. Come! Be like that Davian and come, take that chance on God—you will not be disappointed. Any man that casts himself on God will not be cast away.

Let me tell you something, you will not stand alone before the throne of God. You’re not going to be there by yourself. If you come, you will not be alone. There is one who will speak for you, plead for you, and defend your right to be there. For Jesus is there now to appear in the presence of God for you.

He is there now, waiting in the Father’s presence to plead your case and your right to come. What right do you have to come today? The blood of the Lamb gives you that right. There He is, at the right hand of the Father, waiting to be your advocate, to be your attorney, and to plead your case before a Father who is looking to adopt. Amen.