

“THE PROMISED PRIEST.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:23-28

Introduction.

Most of us like to think of ourselves as pretty independent, we are autonomous individuals that don't really need much help from anyone else. That's the American spirit, we are rugged individualist, we pride ourselves on being self-sufficient.

Yet with a few moments reflection I can show us we can't accomplish anything in life without help, without mediators, arbiters, go betweens, intermediates, middlemen, and representatives. We could not function or get anything done or get what we need without mediators or go-betweenes, someone helping us.

We can't get a hamburger at McDonalds without a person standing between us and the cooks making it possible. Lots of people at Safeway stand between us and the farmers and producers. We can't get money from the bank without someone being a mediator or channel between us and the vaults full of money. None of us can buy houses without a go-between, a realtor who stands in for the seller, and a mortgage company, someone stepping in and making available to us someone else's money.

Ticket agents and bus drivers and pilots are between us and where we want to go. Teachers are the mediators between us and the knowledge we need to function in society. Lawyers mediate the law to us and represent us in court, judges stand between us and the justice we seek. Umpires and referees stand between us and the rules of a fair game. Doctors and nurses stand between us and our healing, giving us the knowledge, skill, treatment or medicine we need.

The greater our sense of need, the more we need them, the more we appreciate them, value them and honor them. And as much as we need all these intermediaries in the physical world, we need them even more in the spiritual world, which brings us to the importance of the OT.

What's the Point of the OT and of priest?

One of the purposes of God in everything He did in the OT was to paint a great picture, an illustration written into history of how great our need is for a mediator, a representative. The OT is a shadow that points to a very important reality.

When missionaries go to a tribal village where the people have never heard anything about God and they want to share the good news of Jesus Christ, where do you suppose they start? Do they start with Matthew and the Christmas story? No, they start with the OT and spent weeks and months telling them the stories of the OT. Stories of the fall, stories of Moses and the law, stories about the priests and the sacrifice.

What's up with that? Is all that OT stuff that important? Why not just skip to the NT? If the NT was **all** that was really important, then the God of history would have made history start in the NT. But He must have thought the 4000 years of OT history must have been really important. In fact, it is so important that without it you can't understand Jesus. Jesus is not just a friend, or a mentor, or a great teacher or a coach or a great spiritual leader.

Wise missionaries of the gospel of Jesus Christ understand that in order to understand who Jesus is and why He came and what He did, you have to understand the context in which He came. That context is a context with prophets, priests and kings. Rather than try to make Him fit a contemporary category, we have to go back and understand the categories He used. Our culture will not give us the help we need to understand who Jesus is. For that you have to search the Scriptures.

Why do we need a better priest?

The OT is filled with stories of prophets, priests, and kings. They all serve to show us what kind of help we need, what kind of savior we need. The unfaithful prophets, priests and kings show us how no human can measure up to what we need. The faithful prophets, priests and kings revealed to us a glimpse of what God was one day going to accomplish perfectly.

I sometimes compare prophets and priest in this way. **Prophets** stood before God facing the people of God and spoke on behalf of God, representing the authority and will of God to the people. They were anointed and empowered by God.

Priests stood before God facing God and representing the people of God presented daily sacrifices to God for their own sins and the sins of the people and making daily intercession to God on their own behalf and on behalf of the people. By law a priest was forbidden to come before God on his own or in his own name or by his own merits. By law the only way a priest could approach God on our behalf was with blood.

Among the priests one was set apart as a **High Priest**. He was over and above all the rest. He performed all the duties of a priest but also had some additional responsibilities. The biggest one was once a year on the great Day of Atonement he would enter alone into the inner sanctuary of the temple, the holy of holies with blood and offer a sacrifice

for his sins and the sins of the people. Representing the people of Israel He would atone for the sins of the nation.

When the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the people, he knew that we would have to go back there again next year and the year after that.

By all of this the people got a clear picture that while the priest was an advocate between them and God, he was a very inadequate advocate. First, he was mortal, priests died and had to be replaced. Second, they had to make sacrifices for their own sins as well as for the sins of the people. Third, the sacrifice of the blood of animals wasn't enough, they had to keep doing it. The blood of animals could not completely satisfy God's wrath toward their sins. (See Calvin, *Institutes*, Book II, Chapter 15, 6, page 502).

They desperately needed a better priest and a better sacrifice.

The book of **Hebrews** in the NT is all about showing us very clearly that there has come into the world a far better and far superior sacrifice and priest. Hebrews, especially chapters 7 through 10, give us great clarity how Christ is the better High Priest and why His sacrifice is the better sacrifice.

A better reconciler.

In the OT the priests offered sacrifices every day on behalf of the people for their sins. Christ fulfills the role of priest by offering a sacrifice of everlasting value once for all time.

In the OT the priests offered sacrifices of animals but as Hebrews 10:4 says, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Those sacrifices were just symbols or shadows of what was to come. Jesus' sacrifice was without sin so His sacrifice could once and for all perfectly blot out all our sin and guilt, and fully satisfy the righteous wrath of God.

"He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26). His sacrifice is so effective it never has to be offered again, and in fact, to be offered again would be to demean it and rob it of its glory. He is the Lamb of God who is sacrificed for us to take away our sins.

By law the OT priest could not enter the Holy of Holies, but once a year and not without blood which he offered for himself and for the people (Hebrew 9:7). Christ "entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12).

In the OT there were many priests because they kept dying and new ones had to replace them “but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood” (Hebrews 7:24).

Christ continually brings us nearer to God and into His presence. It is absolutely significant that the veil in the temple was torn in two when Christ died for us. The one thing that separated us from the holy God was now atoned for, our sins were died for in Christ’s death, and He made it possible for us to enter into the Holy of Holies.

This is summed up for us in the powerful words of Hebrews 10:19-21: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.”

Jesus as our great high priest not only enters into God’s presence on our behalf (Hebrews 9:24), but brings us with Him into God’s very presence and without fear, but with confidence and assurance of faith, with boldness to that place where we find mercy and compassion.

As both our high priest and our sacrifice Jesus tears down the temple and in three days raised up a new temple, a new global meeting place. Geographical limitations are gone, physical restraints are removed, the curtain is torn in two, the dividing wall is broken down. Jerusalem is no longer the center. Jesus is. We can do something even the High Priest of Israel couldn’t do, we can enter the Holy of Holies every day and without blood. And we have access into the holy of holies by faith in Jesus.

Christ’s priesthood has no benefit for us if we are not in Christ, for as we have already seen there is no other access to the throne of mercy and no other mediator between us and God but Christ.

But what does Christ as our perfect and great high priest do for us now? If He was our priest and our sacrifice and if His perfect sacrifice has now been offered, once and for all, what is there left for Him to do as a Priest?

A better intercessor.

Jesus ever lives seated on the great throne at the right hand of the Father to make intercession for us, praying on our behalf to the Father.

Romans 8:34 Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Hebrews 7:25 Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.

Jesus' prayers for us are not at all like ours. You know, "God bless so and so and be with so and so." Jesus continually lives in the presence of God to make specific requests and to bring specific petitions before God on our behalf. He prays like a mother for a sick child, with feeling, with passion and compassion for our needs and infirmities.

His praying is superior because He is always heard by the Father for those for whom He prays and because He is an everlasting intercessor. Let me give you a real example of the power of Jesus' prayers. It is seen in the contrast between the fate of Judas and Peter.

Both men were disciples and both men betrayed Jesus on the night before His death just as Jesus predicted both would. In His prediction about Judas Jesus simply says, "What you do, do quickly" (John 13:27).

But when predicting Peter's betrayal Jesus says, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-23).

Notice the confidence of Jesus. Yes, Peter would deny Him, but His faith would not fail. He would break and repent and return.

Jesus is constantly in the presence of the Father by virtue of His office as High Priest requesting and offering up in constant prayer His love, care and desires for the welfare, supply, deliverance and salvation of the church (see John Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, Vol. 5, p. 541). His prayers are always heard and they are always answered. He has never lost a cause that he has pleaded before the Father's throne.

Dear friends, does this not raise your confidence in prayer and comfort your hearts? We are the center of His attention and affection. Our salvation is secure because His priesthood is indestructible and His prayers are eternal.

Jesus is the perfect man, continually glorifying God in continuous prayer. And He is fully God in being able to hear all the prayers of all believers. Jesus is the perfect reality that all the shadows in the OT anticipated and prepared the way for.

Implications and Applications.

How are we to be priests?

As much as we all hate to admit it, we need help, we need intermediaries, mediators, those who stand in for us and enable us to get what we most need.

But because our spiritual needs are in fact our greatest needs and because all of eternity is at stake and because the glory of God is involved, we should treasure and value and esteem above all others that One Person who above all others represents us and reconciles us and intercedes on our behalf as our only advocate, Christ our great High Priest.

Like Christ we are called to be priests.

I Peter 2:5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

We are called to be priests or mediators for others, reconciling others to God, speaking of the hope of the Gospel and of its power to forgive our sins and restore our broken relationship with God (text from Marshall). We are called to be intercessors for others, to hold up their greatest needs before the Father's throne. We come into the holy of holies on behalf of others.

Hebrews 13:15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. **16** Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Worship your great High Priest, show your love for Him. Be willing to sacrifice and suffer anything and everything for Him who sacrificed and suffered everything for you.

Worship Him who rescued your life from the pit of hell and destruction. Your sin and guilt is atoned for and washed away. Christ labors day in and day out, night and day, making intercession for you and me. Be comforted and helped by your great High Priest.

Let your heart be filled with peace and joy knowing that we are the center of His attention. We glorify God by making Christ the center of our lives, of all that we say, think, feel and do. Make Him the center of your attention this season and always.