

Jesus - Our Ascended High Priest

One of the most significant events in history occurred 40 days after Jesus of Nazareth was resurrected from the dead. *So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them (his disciples), was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.* Mark 16:19 and Peter asserts that Jesus is the one *Who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him* (1 Peter 3:22). And Hebrews 1:3 asserts, *After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

Jesus went up to the Father in all his glory as the unique Son of God. As the Ascended Lord he is our Prophet, King and Priest. A whole book of the New Testament named Hebrews is devoted to explaining Jesus as our ascended high priest. In Hebrews 8:1 we read: *Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord.*

Priesthood is about access to God. Scripture teaches that since we are sinful, we all need a priest to approach the holy God. But human priests even under the Mosaic law were imperfect - sinners who needed a priest themselves. Their service was only a foreshadow underscoring man's need. Moreover, the sacrifices of animals that are continually offered could never take away sin or cleanse the conscience of the worshippers.

Jesus Christ is the perfect priest appointed by God to be the only Mediator. He does this perfectly because he in his person is both true God, and true and perfect man. Thus in his dual nature he is the perfect priest that can reconcile the holy God and sinful humans.

Jesus began his priestly work while on earth. He was made like us in all respects and suffered the temptations we face, and in this way, "...he learned obedience by what he suffered. After he was perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation. He was tested, found and declared perfect, innocent, sinless and thus could be [qualified to be] our substitute. As the perfect priest he then offered the perfect and all sufficient sacrifice of himself as the propitiation [or atoning sacrifice] for our sins. Jesus Christ is

perfect priest and perfect sacrifice. He offered the final sacrifice to atone for sins. We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ...¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified' (Hebrews 10:10-14). Jesus' sacrifice is of infinite value because of his natures - human and divine. Having made the sacrifice, the resurrected Man Christ Jesus ascended into heaven itself to present his blood to the Father and he bears on his heart the names of his own people. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3). He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing eternal redemption for his people (Hebrews 9:14). Jesus himself is our final sacrifice and because of the value of his sacrifice he can actually bring true and lasting forgiveness.

In the words of Isaac Watts:

Jesus, my great High Priest,
offered his blood and died;
my guilty conscience seeks
no sacrifice beside:
his pow'rful blood did once atone
and now it pleads before the throne.

Jesus now ministers in heaven itself, the true tabernacle, the very holy of holies. *We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain* (Hebrews 6:19). Jesus entered the very throne room of God - there he ministers on our behalf in the power of his indestructible life. On earth Jesus acted as the high priest in offering the perfect sacrifice of his own body on the cross. When he ascended on high he presented the blood already sacrificed.

In the words of Charles Wesley:

Arise, my soul, arise,
shake off your guilty fears;
the bleeding Sacrifice
in my behalf appears:
before the throne my Surety stands,
my name is written on his hands.

Five bleeding wounds he bears,
received on Calvary;

they pour effectual prayers,
they strongly plead for me.
"Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
"nor let that ransomed sinner die."

Christ's ascension not only involves his priestly presentation of his once-for-all sacrifice; it also involves his priestly intercession on our behalf - Hebrews 7:24f: *he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.* ²⁵ *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*

Paul asked in Romans 8:34, *Who is to condemn? 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.*

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong, a perfect plea,
a great high priest, whose name is love,
who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is written on his hands,
my name is hidden in his heart;
I know that while in heaven he stands
no power can force me to depart,
no power can force me to depart.

by

Charitie Bancroft

It is the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven as our high priest that guarantees our eternal salvation and gives us assurance and great confidence that we will one day stand before God complete and glorified. In his resurrected human flesh Jesus has entered as our forerunner. Hebrews 6:19, "We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, i.e., of an endless life. Kevin DeYoung writes in his book *The Good News We Almost Forgot: Christ's flesh in heaven is a guarantee that ours will be there too someday. Our hope is not an eternity as disembodied souls but real, resurrected, material human bodies in God's presence forever. Christ's body is the first one there, but not the last.*

Hebrews 4:14 exhorts us: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let’s hold firmly to our confession.”

Christ as our high priest in heaven is the basis and ground of assurance that our prayers are received and that he will give mercy and grace in our times of trial and failure. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

He always prays for us and he takes our prayers and offers them to the Father in his own name and merit.

In addition, our high priest is both our worship leader and the one who is worshipped.

Hebrews 2:14-15 relates: the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² saying:

I will proclaim Your name to My brothers;
I will sing hymns to You in the congregation.

Jesus takes our worship, wraps it in his own worship and presents it to the Father. “You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood...”

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:22-24,28).

When He (Jesus, the Lamb) took the scroll, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song:

You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because You were slaughtered,
and You redeemed people
for God by Your blood
from every tribe and language

and people and nation.
¹⁰ You made them a kingdom
and priests to our God,
and they will reign on the earth.

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!” Amen.

Praise be forever to the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest in heaven. Look to him!

Wayne Conrad
Dallas, TX 75228
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