

Christ, Our Priest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 110:1–5; Gen. 14:18–20; Heb. 7:1–3; Rom. 8:31–34; 1 Tim. 2:4–6; Heb. 8:6; Heb. 2:17, 18; Heb. 3:6; Heb. 10:1–14.*

Memory Text: “Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (*Hebrews 8:1, 2, NASB*).

After His resurrection and ascension to the heavenly sanctuary, Christ entered into a new phase of the plan of Redemption (*Heb. 2:17*). With the indispensable requirement of His sacrifice fulfilled, He was inaugurated as Priest and began His priestly ministry in order to mediate His perfect sacrifice in behalf of those covered, by faith, by His blood. His priestly ministry consists of two phases, both foreshadowed in the earthly sanctuary: the daily ministry and the yearly ministry during the Day of Atonement.

This week we will study the work of Jesus during His daily ministry and see some of the practical ramifications that His work has for us. We can, indeed, draw great comfort from knowing that Jesus is now standing in the presence of God, ministering the merits of His sacrifice in our behalf. The sanctuary message offers hope and encouragement to even the weakest of His followers.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 23.*

Our High Priest

The New Testament book that speaks the most about Christ as Priest is Hebrews. The Old Testament backbone of Hebrews consists of two verses quoted from Psalm 110. Verse 1 is cited to confirm that Christ is exalted above all because He sat down at the right hand of God. This is a recurring theme in Hebrews, one that emphasizes Jesus' divinity and Messiahship (*Heb. 1:3, 4:14, 7:26, 8:1, 12:2*). Psalm 110:4 is used to demonstrate that Christ's priesthood has been foreshadowed by Melchizedek (*Heb. 5:6*).

In what ways does Christ fulfill the divinely promised priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek? Compare Gen. 14:18–20, Ps. 110:4, and Heb. 7:1–3.

The Bible does not provide much information regarding Melchizedek. Yet, what it does reveal shows remarkable similarities to Jesus. Melchizedek is the king of the city Salem (Salem means “peace,” so he is the “King of Peace”). His name means “King of Righteousness,” which speaks of his character. He is detached from history, as his familial line is not given. His birth and death are not mentioned. So, it seems as if he had no beginning and no end, and he is “priest of the Most High God.” Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood, because through Abraham, Levi gave tithes to Melchizedek (*Heb. 7:4–10*). Melchizedek, then, is a type of Christ.

But Christ is even more. Aaron was the first high priest in Israel. Hebrews 5:1–4 describes an idealized Aaronic high priestly office: divine appointment, representative of men, mediation before God, compassionate, and offering sacrifices for the people and for himself.

The book of Hebrews portrays Christ as the new High Priest. He is of a better order than even Aaron; not only does He fulfill the requirements of the Aaronite priesthood, He enhances them. Jesus had no sin, was fully obedient, and did not need to bring an offering for Himself. On the contrary, He Himself was the offering—the most perfect offering possible.

Jesus fulfilled both the Aaronite and the Melchizedek high priesthood in a better way than either of those priests, or priesthoods, ever did or could. Both types met their antitype in Christ.

Advocate and Intercessor

Read Romans 8:31–34. What great hope and promise is offered us here?

The background of verses 31–34 is a courtroom scene in which we should visualize ourselves on trial. Questions are asked: Who is against us? Who will bring a charge against us? Who condemns us? Such a situation could easily send shivers down our spines. After all, are we not well aware of our human imperfection and sinfulness?

However, we do not need to fear. The promise that nothing and no one can separate us from God’s love centers on several important points: God is for us (*vs. 31*), God delivered His Son for us (*vs. 32*), God freely gives us all things (*vs. 32*), and God justifies us (*vs. 33*). Jesus Christ is on our side. Jesus is the answer to any fear of condemnation, for He died, was raised, and is now continuously interceding for us in the heavenly sanctuary at the right hand of God (*vs. 34*).

If someone goes so far as to die willingly for us, we should feel confident of His love. The assurance revealed in Romans 8:31–39 is really telling us about the kind of God we believe in. If we understand that our God loves us so much that nothing can thwart His purposes for us (*vss. 35–39*), the divine courtroom becomes a place of joy and jubilation.

This truth becomes even clearer in 1 John 2:1, 2. The Greek *parakletos* designates a legal assistant or advocate, someone who appears in another’s behalf as “intercessor.” Jesus is our Advocate, and He defends us because otherwise we would have no hope.

Our Advocate is “righteous,” which gives us the assurance that the Father will hear Christ’s intercession, for Christ could do nothing that His righteous Father would reject. Christ intercedes for those who have sinned, presenting Himself—the One who has not sinned—as the Righteous One who stands in their stead.

How can you better experience the marvelous truth that nothing will separate you from God’s love? How can you use this assurance as a motivation to live as God would have you live, as opposed, perhaps, to how you are living now?

Mediator

“Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:4–6, NKJV). How do these verses help us to understand just what Christ is doing for us in heaven?

Christ is called the one Mediator between God and man. There is no one else because, in fact, no one else is necessary. Through Christ’s position as Mediator, salvation and knowledge of truth are universally available (1 Tim. 2:4). The crucial question for us all is whether or not we will take advantage of what Christ has offered to each of us, regardless of our status, race, character, or past deeds.

Mediator is a term from the ancient Greek commercial and legal world. It describes someone who negotiates or acts as arbitrator between two parties in order to remove a disagreement or to reach a common goal in order to inaugurate a contract or covenant.

In Hebrews, Christ as Mediator is connected to the new covenant (Heb. 8:6, 9:15, 12:24). He has made reconciliation. Though sin had destroyed the close communion between humanity and God and would have led to the destruction of the race, Christ came and restored the connection. This is reconciliation. He alone is the link between God and humanity, and through this link we can enjoy a full covenant relationship with the Lord.

Paul’s reference to Him as the “man Christ Jesus” expresses His unique quality of being both human and divine (1 Tim. 2:5). Salvation and mediation are anchored precisely in Jesus’ humanity and His voluntary self-offering. By being both God and human, Jesus is able to link heaven and earth with ties that can never be broken.

“Jesus Christ came that He might link finite man with the infinite God, and connect earth that has been divorced by sin and transgression from heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1, p. 253.

Think: there is a human being in heaven right now, mediating in your behalf. What should this tell you about your importance in the eyes of God? How should this truth influence how you live and how you treat others?

Great High Priest

What do the following texts reveal about Christ’s ministry as High Priest? *Heb. 2:17, 18; 3:6; 4:14, 15; 7:24–28; 8:1–3.*

Jesus is the “great High Priest” (*Heb. 4:14, NKJV*). He is superior to all high priests and rulers of earth. Jesus is the true and only High Priest. The Bible assigns a number of qualities to Jesus as great High Priest:

Merciful and faithful. The two characteristics of merciful and faithful (*Heb. 2:17*) fit Christ’s role as Mediator, for He bestows His gifts on us (is “merciful”) and is loyal to His Father and to us (is “faithful”).

With us. Jesus can sympathize with us (*Heb. 2:18; 5:2, 7*). Because He has lived as a human, we can trust that He is a compassionate and perfect Helper. Yet, He is not in the same situation as we are, because He is “without sin” (*Heb. 4:15*).

Over us. Jesus as High Priest is not in the community of believers as Moses was; He is over us, like a son presides over the house of his father (*Heb. 3:6*). Christ enjoys full authority among the saints.

As we are. Jesus’ divine origin did not give Him any exclusive rights. He was tempted just as we are (*Heb. 4:15*). The selected temptations in the Judean desert show that He was tempted in the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions (*Matt. 4:1–11*).

For us. Christ appears in the heavenly sanctuary in the presence of God “for us” (*Heb. 9:24*), and He also is making intercession for us (*Heb. 7:25*). Thank God that we have a Divine Representative to appear in the judgment in our place.

Jesus is in heaven “for us.” What does that mean? How can you draw some assurance and security from this wonderful truth?

The One Sacrifice

As we have seen, a crucial purpose of the earthly sanctuary service was to reveal—in symbols, in types, in mini-prophecies—the death and high priestly ministry of Jesus. Sin is something too terrible to be solved merely by the death of animals (as sad and unfortunate as those deaths are). Instead, all of that spilled blood was to point to the only solution for sin, and that was the death of Jesus Himself. That it took His death, the death of the One who was equal to God (*Phil. 2:6*), in order to atone for sin, shows just how bad sin really is.

Read Hebrews 10:1–14. How does this passage contrast the function and work of the earthly sanctuary service with the death and high priestly ministry of Jesus?

Many crucial truths ring out of these texts, one of the most important being that the deaths of all those animals was not sufficient to deal with the sin problem. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (*Heb. 10:4, NKJV*). They merely point to the solution; they were not the solution themselves. The solution was Jesus, His death, and then His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf.

Notice another crucial point in these texts: the complete sufficiency of Christ’s one death. Though the animal sacrifices had to be repeated time and time again, day after day, year after year, Jesus’ single sacrifice was sufficient (after all, look at who was sacrificed!) to cover the sins of all humanity. God powerfully revealed this crucial truth when the inner veil of the earthly sanctuary was torn supernaturally after the death of Jesus (*Matt. 27:51*).

Look around at the world, look at the damage that sin has caused: the pain, the loss, the fear, the hopelessness. How can we learn day by day, moment by moment, to cling to Jesus as the only solution to the sin problem in our own lives?

Further Study: “The Atonement, Part II—High-Priestly Application of Atoning Sacrifice,” pp. 476–488, in Appendix C of *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A.

“Step away from Satan’s voice and from acting his will, and stand by the side of Jesus, possessing his attributes, the possessor of keen and tender sensibilities, who can make the cause of afflicted, suffering ones his own. The man who has had much forgiven will love much. Jesus is a compassionate intercessor, a merciful and faithful high priest. He, the Majesty of heaven—the King of glory—can look upon finite man, subject to the temptations of Satan, knowing that he has felt the power of Satan’s wiles.”—Ellen G. White, *Christian Education*, p. 160.

“The conscience can be freed from condemnation. Through faith in His blood, all may be made perfect in Christ Jesus. Thank God that we are not dealing with impossibilities. We may claim sanctification. We may enjoy the favor of God. We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 32, 33.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read Hebrews 2:17. Why was it necessary for Jesus to become human and to suffer before He could become our High Priest?
- ❷ Dwell on the second Ellen G. White statement listed above. Look especially at the line: “We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute.” How does this help us to understand what comes before, when she talks earlier about being “made perfect in Christ Jesus”?
- ❸ Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, is the Surety of our salvation, and He administers the effects and benefits of His sacrifice and blood. With Him on our side, we have nothing to fear. How can we take these wonderful truths, so powerfully expressed in the book of Hebrews, and apply them to ourselves, especially at times of great temptation?
- ❹ The book of Hebrews is very clear that Jesus’ once-and-for-all sacrifice was all that was needed for dealing with sin. What should that tell us about any religious practice that claims to repeat this sacrifice as a necessity for the forgiveness of sins?

On Jesus' Side

Mee Mee comes from a poor family living in a small village in Myanmar (Burma). Her family had to sell their land to feed their children. Her parents couldn't afford to send her to school, so she went to work in the rice paddies when she was 13.

When Mee Mee was 18, she learned that a Christian family in another town needed a house helper. Her parents let her go, but they warned her, "Don't let these people make you become a Christian." Her friend had told her that the Christian family was kind, but still she was afraid.

Mee Mee was surprised that her new employers treated her as part of the family. She refused their invitation to join them for worship, but she listened from the next room as the family sang songs and prayed. A few days later she shyly joined the family for worship. *How can Christians be so evil that my parents don't want me to worship with them?* she wondered.

On Friday Mee Mee and her host mother worked hard to clean the house and prepare food for Saturday, which she called "Sabbath." Mee Mee declined the invitation to worship in the church that met upstairs in the family's home. Then her host father asked her to take Grandma up the stairs and help her during worship. Mee Mee felt awkward, but the worshipers were so kind that soon she became more comfortable.

When Mee Mee's father called to check on her, she told him about how loving her host family was. He was glad, but he repeated his warning, "Remember, don't become a Christian."

Mee Mee continued joining the family for worship. Little by little God's love seeped through the barriers of her heart. Her host mother gave her a Bible, and she took turns reading it during worship. Something in her heart stirred, and she felt drawn to Jesus.

Mee Mee knows that her parents will be angry when she tells them that she wants to become a Christian. But she's convinced that Jesus is the true God. She feels torn between respect for her family and their traditions and God's call.

"I know that I must stand on Jesus' side," Mee Mee says. "I'm praying for courage to stand true. Please pray for me."

Becoming a Christian in Myanmar isn't easy. Please pray for those like Mee Mee who have discovered the truth and want to follow Christ. And remember that your mission offering helps make evangelism in this largely Buddhist country possible.