



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)
Lesson 6.7.2.2 – The Doctrine of Jesus, Son of God, Messiah (Christology)

Jesus as Our High Priest

The Old Testament prophet Zechariah foretold that the coming Messiah-King would also be a priest: **“Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the LORD; Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both”** (Zechariah 6:12-13). Earlier King David had also prophesied the same combination of King and Priest when he recorded the LORD saying to the Messiah: **“Rule in the midst of Your enemies! ...The LORD has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”** (Psalm 110:2-4).

We do not know who wrote the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, but we do know that it was written to prove to the Jews (the Hebrews) that Jesus is the One of whom Zechariah and David wrote. Jesus is the great High Priest who fulfilled all the pictures and promises presented in the Old Testament ceremonies and sacrifices that were commanded by God for His Old Testament people. First of all, in order to be our High Priest representing us before God, Jesus had to be a true human being Himself. For **“every high priest”** among the Jewish people **“can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness”** (Hebrews 5:1-2). Therefore, Jesus as a true man knew human weakness and was tempted to sin like us, but He did not sin. **“In all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted”** (Hebrews 2:17-18). **“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin”** (Hebrews 4:15).

In order to picture the needed restoration between the holy God and the sinful people, the Old Testament high priest and the priests under him had to bring bloody animal sacrifices to God over and over again. **“Those high priests”** had **“to offer up sacrifices”** daily, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people (Hebrews 7:27). **“Every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins”** (Hebrews 10:11). **“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins”** (Hebrews 10:4).

But Jesus, our High Priest, offered no animal blood. Instead He offered Himself with His own blood – the blood of the Son of God – to fully atone for all human sin forever. This was His task as our High Priest: **“to make propitiation for the sins of the people”** (Hebrews 2:17). Jesus had no sins of His own. He is **“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners”** and therefore **“does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself”** (Hebrews 7:26-27). **“For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One (Jesus) also have something to offer”** (Hebrews 8:3).

Jesus truly had something to offer in sacrifice. **“Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption”** (Hebrews 9:12). Just as the Old Testament high priest entered the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies with the blood of an animal, Jesus, our true High Priest, entered into the true Holy of Holies, heaven

itself, ascending to heaven after His sacrifice was complete. **“For 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... Once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”** (Hebrews 9:24-26). **“This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God”** (Hebrews 10:12).

The one who wrote the letter to the Hebrews is not the only one who wrote about Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself as our High Priest. The apostle Paul wrote: **“Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma”** (Ephesians 5:2). In his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, Paul spoke of **“the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”** (Acts 20:28). So also the apostle Peter assured his readers that they were **“redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”** (1 Peter 1:18-19). Jesus **“Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree”** (1 Peter 2:24). John also wrote: **“He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world”** (1 John 2:2).

Sacrifices can be divided into two kinds: propitiatory sacrifices that atone for sin and sacrifices of thanksgiving. The only propitiatory sacrifice that atones for the sin of the world is the sacrifice of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. This sacrifice was made once for all and it does not ever have to be made again. **“Where there is remission of these (sins), there is no longer an offering for sin”** (Hebrews 10:18). Jesus is **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29), as John the Baptist testified. In this way the ceremony of the scapegoat has been fulfilled; Jesus has removed all sins **“as far as the east is from the west”** (Psalm 103:12). In all eternity God’s people will join with the angels in singing praises to the Lamb of God: **“You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation... Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing”** (Revelation 5:9-12).

As our High Priest, Jesus completed His work of atoning for all human sin and then ascended to heaven where He is at present interceding for us, that is, praying for us, even as He prayed for His disciples and for us in the days of His flesh. This was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, who wrote of the Messiah: **“He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors”** (Isaiah 53:12). Jesus’ first words from the cross was a prayer of intercession for those responsible for His crucifixion: **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”** (Luke 23:34). On the night before His death Jesus prayed for His disciples, and even for us who believe in Him: **“I pray...for those whom You have given Me... I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word”** (John 17:9, 20).

These prayers of intercession continue even now. The apostle Paul wrote: **“It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us”** (Romans 8:34). **“He...has an unchangeable priesthood. 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 7:24-25). The apostle John assures us: **“If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”** (1 John 2:1).

God instructed His Old Testament high priest Aaron to bless the people of Israel with the words: **“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace”** (Numbers 6:24-26). Jesus, our High Priest, ascended to heaven with His hands extended in a blessing for us (Luke 24:51), just as the risen Christ greeted His disciples on Easter Sunday evening with the words: **“Peace be with you”** (Luke 24:36).

Psalm 110 says that Jesus is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. As we saw in the last lesson, the account of Melchizedek is given in Genesis 14:18-20. Melchizedek was both king and priest. He visited Abraham and blessed him. Abraham in turn gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of the victory

he had just won. All the other priests in the Old Testament were Levites, descendants of Aaron. But Melchizedek was priest many years before Aaron was even born. Abraham was an ancestor of the Levites, and so, in a sense, Levi was, in Abraham, paying a tenth to Melchizedek, and thus regarding Melchizedek as greater than himself.

And so Jesus as High Priest was greater than the Levitical priests, because He was a **“priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”** (Hebrews 7:17). Just as Melchizedek is presented in Genesis as king and priest of Jerusalem, **“without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life”** (Hebrews 7:3), so also Jesus, **“because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood”** (Hebrews 7:24). The Levitical priests died and their priesthood passed down to their descendants, but Jesus **“remains a priest continually”** (Hebrews 7:3). **“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).

Christ’s work as a Prophet – proclaiming the good news of salvation – was dependent on His work as High Priest. If Christ as High Priest had not atoned completely for the sin of all the world, Christ as a Prophet would not be able to proclaim the good news (Gospel) of total forgiveness of sins and sure salvation.

Questions

1. How do we know that the Messiah was to be a priest as well as king?
2. Why did Jesus have to become a human being in order to be High Priest?
3. In what way was Jesus different from other human beings?
4. What could Jesus do as High Priest that the Old Testament priests could not do?
5. What did Jesus offer up to God as our High Priest?
6. Why did His sacrifice not have to be repeated?
7. What is the true Holy of Holies of which the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle was only a picture?
8. What is a propitiatory sacrifice?
9. What is Jesus doing now as Priest at the right hand of God?
10. What was Jesus doing as He ascended to heaven?
11. Who was Melchizedek, and why is he important?
12. In what ways does Jesus resemble Melchizedek?
13. If there are any religions in your locale that practice animal sacrifice of some kind, please describe them as well as you can.