

12. The Efficacy of His Priestly Ministry (2Q 2008—The Wonder of Jesus)

Biblical material: Exod. 25:8; Matt. 27:50, 51; Acts 7:54-56; Heb. 6:19, 20; 7:23-28; 8:1, 2; 9.

Quotes

- As you walk through the valley of the unknown, you will find the footprints of Jesus both in front of you and beside you. *Charles Stanley*
- The most pressing question on the problem of faith is whether a man as a civilized being can believe in the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, for therein rests the whole of our faith. *Fyodor Dostoevski*
- Christianity is not a doctrine, not truth as truth, but the knowledge of a Person; it is knowing the Lord Jesus. You cannot be educated into being a Christian. *T. Austin-Sparks*
- We are punished by our sins, not for them. *Elbert Hubbard*

Questions

How would you define the primary function of a priest? What is a priestly ministry? How does Jesus fit into this role? In what way does Jesus act as our high priest, and what is the meaning of what he does? What does Jesus mean when he says he will NOT pray the Father for us?

Discussion

The main idea common to all religious ideas of priests is to provide connection to the divine, to be the intermediary between God and man.

But if Jesus is God, how is he a ‘mediator’? Another meaning of the word to mediate is to provide concepts and information, to be the one who supplies answers to questions. Unfortunately mediate all too often means to arbitrate between warring parties. How would such a view fit our relationship with God? And if Jesus is our High Priest, what does this mean in concept and practice?

Much of what we appreciate about Jesus as our High Priest will depend on what role we think he is performing. So it’s absolutely essential to grasp what Hebrews is saying about this. However Paul notes that his statement (Heb. 5:8-10) is hard to explain—and what comes subsequently is his explanation. In fact he is hard on his hearers, commenting on their dullness, and wishing they would not endlessly go over the same simple matters of basic Christianity and move towards a better and larger understanding. Really one needs to read the chapters 5 through 7 as a whole to see the concept Paul is establishing. The main thesis is: ‘For it is declared: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.’ The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.’ Heb 7:17-19 NIV. Entrance to God is the primary perspective. (See also 6:19, 20 “Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.”) Paul in Hebrews is trying to use the old imagery and make it relevant and applicable. What he is saying is that the old methods were not wrong, just misunderstood and now superseded. Even the sacrificial system did not achieve what God had intended, because it

was so often seen as some routine ritual by which the problem of sin was taken care of. That is why God through the later prophets actually speaks against the system, because it had become meaningless. This is a vital aspect of Hebrews, and which is still applicable today: our worship systems must make an impact, must make us think. If there is no thought, then worship becomes just a form, a ceremony, with no real content. Paul is actually saying through Hebrews that the old ways really didn't work, and only make sense in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus—and since Jesus is God then we have direct access to God himself—the priesthood as a system is also gone.

Jesus' ministry in the sanctuary should not be seen as contradicting his clearest statement where he says he will "tell you plainly about the Father... I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you." John 16:25, 26 Phillips. His disciples are delighted to hear such truths, and cry out, "Now you are speaking plainly." (v.29).

If the plainest, clearest truth is that Jesus is not pleading for us, what do we do with such ideas that Jesus is pleading with the Father for us? Actually, Hebrews does not say that. It does say (9:24) that he entered heaven "to appear for us." (NIV). But we do not have the image of him begging the Father to be nice to us, trying to persuade God to do anything other than he already intended. To say otherwise would be to split the trinity, to set the Godhead against each other.

The danger of the sanctuary message, misunderstood, is to suggest that Jesus (the good God) has to battle with the Father (the angry and hostile God) in order to achieve our salvation. In this way we reflect the charges of Satan who condemned God for being hostile and unforgiving, an unloving and vengeful Being who took pleasure in vindictive punishment of erring creatures. We would do well to totally reject such a picture. It was not to induce love in the Father's heart that Jesus came and died, but because of the Father's love!

Comment

"The Jews pacified Jehovah with the blood of animals, and according to the Christian system, the blood of Jesus softened the heart of God a little, and rendered possible the salvation of a fortunate few. It is hard to conceive how the human mind can give assent to such terrible ideas, or how any sane man can read the Bible and still believe in the doctrine of inspiration." Robert Ingersoll, *The Gods*, 1872. How would you seek to respond to this statement?

Ellen White Comments

Jesus now had but a short time in which to comfort and instruct his little band of followers. His farewell counsel was rich in sympathy and truth. Exceeding precious to his disciples were those last moments passed with their beloved Master. Like a consecrated high priest he now poured forth the burden of his soul to his Father in a petition for his church such as the angels had never before heard. This prayer was deep and full, broad as the earth, and reaching high Heaven. With his human arm he encircled the children of Adam in a firm embrace; and with his strong divine arm he grasped the throne of the Infinite, thus uniting earth to Heaven, and finite man to the infinite God. {3SP 93}