

THE INCARNATION AND CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

Hebrews 2:17-18

Intro: Perhaps for some in our considerations of the incarnation of Christ, there has been an increased understanding of what it meant for Christ to become a Man as well as an enlarged understanding of the reasons for Christ's coming.

With regard to the first of these, I am sure that no expositor has ever had the wisdom to explore the depths of what it meant to Christ to become a Man, a human being -- the Creator becoming a creature, and yet never for a moment ceasing to be what He was when He said, "Let there be light." It was humiliating for our Lord to become a Man, and His humiliation was increased many times over when He not only died, but died the death of the Cross. All through our lives it is to be hoped that the truth of Christ's incarnation will not only be increased in our understanding, but that it also will become more and more that which calls forth true worship and adoration from our hearts.

With regard to the reasons for the coming of Christ into the world., we have seen that it went beyond the provision of salvation for believing sinners. We have seen that Christ came as a Man to complete all that had been done before He was born to reveal God. We have glorious revelations of God in the OT, but never before Christ, and never since Christ came, has anyone ever been able to say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). But He said it. And it was true. He so completely revealed the Father that it would not have been any different if the Father Himself had come to earth as a Man.

Here in Hebrews 2 we have three specific reasons for the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, nothing could be more important for us than the fact that the Lord came to taste death for all of us who are numbered among the sons He is bringing to glory. Christ redeemed us by the shedding of His blood. It is through the death of Christ that our sins have been forgiven. This is the first reason mentioned in Hebrews 2 for the incarnation. See vv. 9-10.

The second reason which is twofold, we considered last Sunday morning. Christ died to put an end to the power of death held by the Devil, and also to deliver us from even the fear of death. You see this in verses 14 and 15. Today I want to take up with you the third reason mentioned in Hebrews 2. Here we are told that through the incarnation our Lord has

become our High Priest. And you find this in vv. 17 and 18. (Read.)

The ministry of our Lord has been often divided into three parts. During His earthly ministry He was a Prophet of God. Beginning at the Cross and continuing on throughout time He is our great High Priest. When He comes again in power and great glory, He will come as King of kings and Lord of lords. So He is our Prophet, our Priest, and our coming King. Today let us focus our attention upon His priesthood as it is described in Heb. 2:17-18.

Let me discuss this verse with you under three headings:

- I. THE OBLIGATION CHRIST WAS UNDER: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.”
- II. WHAT CHRIST NEEDED TO BECOME: “That He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God.”
- III. WHAT CHRIST NEEDED TO DO:
 - A. “To make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”
 - B. “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”

The first point is:

I. THE OBLIGATION CHRIST WAS UNDER: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:17a).

Let me call your attention to the word “behooved.” The spelling of this word is called Middle English -- that is, English that was used from c. 1150 A.D. to 1475. Today we spell it with two o’s; behooved. This is a word which we don’t use very often, and possibly many of us ran across it for the first time here in the word of God. It speaks of an inescapable obligation. It refers to something that is an absolute necessity. It behooves a court, for example, to consider all of the evidence presented to it in a particular case. That is, it is obligated by law not to omit any evidence presented to it. Or we can say that it behooves a President of the United States to fulfill all of the obligations of his office. He has no choice, whether he likes it or doesn’t like it. If you have a driver’s license, it behooves you to obey the traffic laws. That is the responsibility you accept when you are issued a license.

The Lord Jesus Christ was under an inescapable obligation, he was bound by a necessity which He could not ignore, that “in all things” He would

“be made like his brethren.” We could say that it was His duty “to be made like unto his brethren.” What was the Apostle saying here about our Lord? Is He obligated to us? Was it His duty to us that He provide salvation for us?

We have to answer these questions with a no! We know that our salvation is by grace, not by debt. Christ was not indebted to us to do anything about our salvation. To whom then was He obligated? To whom was He obligated to become a human being “in all things”?

The obvious answer is that He was obligated to God. We know that we were chosen for salvation before the foundation of the world. We are told in Ephesians 1 that the Father chose us. And it was at that time that it was determined that Christ would die for us, and also that the Holy Spirit would gather us in -- one by one! This was all according to the decree of God, and the Word of God cannot be broken. Therefore, Christ was obligated to God to become a human being in order that He might by His death assure the salvation of all whom the Father had chosen.

This does not mean that Christ came reluctantly. It was just as much His will that He come as it was His Father’s will, and the will of the Holy Spirit. But the Apostle wanted us to know that when Christ was born of the virgin Mary He was submitting Himself to an obligation He had made with the Father that He would be the Redeemer of those whom the Father had chosen. So the coming of Christ was never in doubt, and it was revealed first to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Even the time was determined by the Father because Paul told the Galatian believers that it was “in the fulness of time” that “God sent forth His Son.

So Christ was not under any obligation to us; His obligation was to God, an obligation that He could not, and would not, fail to fulfill. This ought to give us even greater assurance concerning our salvation.

But what is the next thing that our text tells us?

II. WHAT CHRIST NEEDED TO BECOME: “That he might be a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17m).

I believe that Dr. Griffith Thomas was right when he said that in the two adjectives, “merciful and faithful,” the “merciful” refers to us the sinners who were to be saved, and “faithful” refers to what Christ had to do as a high priest in His responsibility toward God.

Paul, in writing to Titus, had this to say about our salvation:

5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, **but according to his mercy he saved us**, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit;

6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7).

I have told you before, and I believe it is generally agreed upon by devout students of the Greek New Testament, that “grace” has to do with our guilt, and that “mercy” has to do with relieving the misery caused by our sins. It is easy to remember the distinction: Grace -- guilt; mercy -- misery.

So a merciful High Priest is one who is merciful toward us because of our sins. This is an amazing characteristic of God when you realize that He is absolutely perfect, never has sinned, and never will sin. He is the eternally sinless One. And this applies equally to Christ and to the Holy Spirit. God is compassionate toward us when we are deserving of His harshest judgment. He has chosen to save us, and to forgive us, and to change our lives, rather than to cast us forever from His presence (which He has every right to do). He would not only save us from the penalty of our sins, but from the present misery which sin always causes. Look at society today, and you see illustration after illustration of the fact that sinners are miserable. A man may be the wealthiest man in the world, but his riches don't bring him happiness. Some of the most miserable people in the world are the richest people. And yet the misery of sin can be seen in the lowest as well as in the highest. Visit our prisons and see the miserable results of sin. What man needs is a Savior Who will extend mercy, and we have such a Savior in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But in exercising mercy toward us, our Lord did not forget what it would take to satisfy the wrath of God toward guilty sinners. And so He had to be “faithful” -- faithful to God. God had declared that sin brings death. The soul that sins shall die. The wages of sin is death. Therefore, if Christ is going to be faithful to God, He must die in the place of all of those who are to be forgiven. If the death of Christ had not satisfied the righteousness of God, none of us could possibly have been saved. This is why I say so often that the major requirement of Christ's death was that it satisfy God. He must be satisfied if we are to be justified.

So Christ became a Man in order that He might both manifest God's mercy to us, and at the same time satisfy the righteous requirement of a holy God. And we can thank God that He did both -- as our text goes on to say.

Now let us move on to the third point:

III. WHAT CHRIST NEEDED TO DO (Heb. 2:17b, 18).

As our High Priest He needed to do two things. The first was:

A. "To make reconciliation (propitiation) for the sins of the people" (v. 17b).

The Greek says propitiation, not "reconciliation." He, of course, has reconciled us to God, but propitiation tells how He has done it. Christ's death has satisfied God that the full penalty for our sins has been paid. Nothing remains for you and me to do. This is what our Lord meant when He said from the Cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

One commentator has described propitiation with these words:

It means "that which makes it consistent for God to pardon... His justice could not overlook sin and His love could not be indifferent to the sinner, and so what His righteousness demanded, His love provided" (Griffith Thomas, pp. 36, 37).

Please notice that in this passage the Apostle was speaking of a particular redemption. In verse 9 we read that he tasted death for every man. The Greek says, for all. Who was he referring to? When you go on into verse 10 you see that he meant those "many sons" he was "bringing...unto glory." In verse 17 Christ is said to have been "made like unto his brethren." Who are they? See v. 11. And it is for the sins of these "people" (v. 17b) that Christ has made propitiation. The whole passage points to the salvation of God's elect people.

God is never satisfied with any work we might do, any promise we might make, any gift we might give, for our salvation. No person is good enough for heaven, no one can do enough to wipe out past sins nor to care for future sins. Only in Christ is there salvation. Sinners must come to God depending upon Christ, or they will be forever under the judgment of God. No one can possibly come to God except through Christ.

What is the other work that we need?

B. “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (v. 18).

This is one of the grandest of all truths found in the Bible for each of us as the people of God.

Our trials are not over when we are saved. Nor are our struggles with sin over when we come to Christ. Our trials continue, and in most respects increase. The struggle with sin becomes stronger than ever. But the same High Priest Who went to the Cross to purchase our redemption, is the One Who sympathizes with us in our trials, because He suffered in every way that we do --but with this difference: He never was guilty of sin. And so He is able to “succour” us. The word means not only that he will help us, but that He will deliver us. In His death He was victorious over our sins. In His death He was victorious over our Enemy, the Devil. And in His death, because of all that He experienced here on earth, He gives us victory in our trials and victory over our sins. How we need to be like the Apostle Paul who continually gloried, not in the Cross of the Christ, but in the Christ of the Cross. Cf. Gal. 6:14.

(Read also Heb. 4:14-16.)

Here again we come to great and wonderful truths which we cannot fully appreciate because we cannot fully understand all that our Lord endured as a Man while He was here on earth. But let us believe it. Let us come with confidence to the Throne of Grace. It is there, and there only, that we can find mercy and grace to help and deliver us in our times of need.

Concl: Our great High Priest lives to make intercession for us. He is “the same yesterday, today, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8). And our need for God’s grace, mercy, and peace never changes. And it seems that the older we get to be in the Lord, the greater our needs are, or at least we see our needs more clearly. The word “come” in Heb. 4:16 is in the present tense meaning that we need to come now, come this afternoon, come tonight, come tomorrow, and keep coming to our great High Priest as long as we live. Christ is sufficient for every need we have, and He is the only One Who can make things right and keep thing right in our relationship with the Lord.

Yesterday at our men’s prayer meeting I spoke to the men about Psa.

34:6,

This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

Our trials, like David's, are designed to show us how much we need the Lord. And it is the recognition of our needs that keeps us coming to the Lord. It is easy to blame others for our troubles, but the Lord wants us to see that He is concerned about our needs, and that we come to Him, not for what someone else needs, but for what we need. Job, according to what God said about him, was the godliest man on earth in the time that he lived. But he had needs which the Lord wanted him to see, and so his trials came. They were not to destroy him, but to make him see more clearly his own need so that he would abhor himself, repent in dust and ashes, and seek the Lord as He had never sought Him before. When that happened, then God's blessing was restored.

It may be that many of us are waiting for God's blessing upon our lives in some special way. But we are waiting for God to change our circumstances, or to change some of the people we have to do deal with, when what the Lord is waiting for is that we, you and I, might see that we are the ones who need to change, we are the ones who need the Lord, we need His mercy and His grace. When we get to that place, we will be amazed to see how gracious and merciful God can be, and will be, as we look only to Him.

Closing verses: Phil. 4:6, 7.