

**BORN TO BE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST**

Hebrews 2:17-18

**Intro:** Anyone who read the Bible knows that from Aaron and the tribe of Levi early in Israel's history, there have been hundreds of priests. Aaron was the first of the high priests, and there have been many of them although not as many as were the ordinary priests who worked under and with the high priests. However, there has only been one "great high priest," and He is our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

There were three major positions in Israel under the Law. There was the prophet, the priest, and the king. The king, of course, was to rule over the nation. He was the last of the three offices to be instituted. The prophet received his message from the Lord, and delivered it to the people. The priest ministered in the opposite direction: he represented the people to God. He received sacrifices from the people, and presented them to God on behalf of the people who brought the sacrifices. So the prophet ministered from God to man; the priest ministered from man to God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is to occupy all three offices. His earthly ministry was largely the ministry of a prophet both in His Person and as He delivered the words of the Father to the people of His day. We can benefit from those messages by reading the four Gospels. But in His early ministry He also was a priest. We see this in His life, His prayers, and in His death on the Cross where He was both the priest and the sacrifice. We know that the Lord is sovereign over all the affairs of men now, but the day is coming when He will reign on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. So we can say that while there have been many priests, and many high priests, and many prophets of God, and many kings, yet in all of these offices we see that the way was being prepared for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We can say that our Lord's ministry as a prophet, is completed. I say that because the Bible is now complete, and has been completed since the New Testament was completed. Our Lord's ministry as a King, is yet future when He comes to the earth to set up His kingdom. But His ministry as a Priest is past, present, and future. We are going to be learning about our Lord's high priestly ministry as we study the book of Hebrews in our Sunday School lessons beginning next Sunday. There we learn that when He died on the Cross He was acting as our Priest, but we also learn from a verses like Hebrews 7:25 that our Lord is acting as our

great high priest at the Father's right hand. That verse tells us this:

25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:25).

But where is He living. Well, as God, our Lord is omnipresent. He lives in us and with us, but in His body He is seated at the right hand of the Father. And we are told this four times in the book of Hebrews:

1) First, in Heb. 1:3, speaking of our Lord,

3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

2) Second, in Heb. 8:1:

1 Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

3) Third, in Heb. 10:12, reading verse 11 with it:

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:  
12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.

4) And fourth, in Heb. 12:2:

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Only once is the title, "great high priest," used in the Bible. And it is not in my text, but in Hebrews 4:14. And we should not be surprised that it is used of our Lord, "Jesus, the Son of God." In fact, the last three verses of Hebrews 4 are very similar to the last two verses of Hebrews 2. The difference is that in chapter 2 we are looking at His first coming, and in Hebrews 4, His present glory in heaven. But both have to do with His ministry for us as our "merciful and faithful high priest" and as our "great high priest."

So I am borrowing my subject this morning from Hebrews 4:14, but I want to discuss our Lord as our great High Priest from Hebrews 2:17 and 18. It should go without saying, and yet it needs to be said, *although there were many good high priests in Israel (and many who were not so good), yet there were none so good or so great as He was, and still is!* Our Lord is the greatest of them all!

Before we look in some detail at Hebrews 2:17 and 18, I want to point out to you a very interesting characteristic of Hebrews 2 which you may have already discovered from your own reading. This chapter, Hebrews 2, is a chapter which, in a very obvious way, is devoted to the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that the word *incarnation* has to do with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, that He became like we are, a human being, with one major exception. He was “without sin.” And we are told that in Hebrews 4:15. And He was without sin because He was the Son of God. And so we believe in the true humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, but we also believe in His absolute Deity. He was, and is, both God and man. Remember that the OT sacrifices had to be “without blemish,” that is, without any physical defect. So the Apostle Peter described our Lord as “a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19).

But look at the references to the incarnation here in Hebrews 2:

- 1) Heb. 2:9.
- 2) Heb. 2:14-15.
- 3) Our text for today: Heb. 2:17-18.

Books have been written about the greatness and the glory of God’s Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And I am sure that you feel like I do, that it is a shame that more people do not know how great He is, but what makes it even more tragic is the fact that they don’t want to know Him. If they knew Who He is, they would not treat Him the way they do. Even those who are not hostile to Him, withhold from Him the recognition and the glory of which He alone is worthy. But, in pointing out His greatness, the first thing that needs to be said is that:

## **I. OUR LORD IS GREAT BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS.**

Scripture tells far greater than I can, His greatness, and so let me call your attention to verses 2 and 3 of the first chapter of this book of Hebrews.

I spoke a few moments ago about our Lord’s prophetic ministry. That is what the writer of this epistle was talking about in Hebrews 1:2 and 3. (Read.) God has spoken unto us by His Son. The greatest of all priests came to earth as the greatest of all prophets. There have been many great prophets. Some wrote books of the Bible; others did not. But they all had a message from God. But when Jesus Christ was born God was speaking unto us, unto all who were given ears to hear. Prophets were to speak not

only by the words of their mouths, but by the kind of men that they were. But that was supremely true of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God spoke by One Who was exactly like He is. He spoke through not only the Creator of the world, but the Creator of the ages of time. He was what no other man had ever been, “the brightness of God’s glory, and the express image of His Person.” He was exactly like God in every way. He was also the Controller and the Sustainer of the universe. He was “upholding all things by the word of His power.” We can never fully comprehend the meaning of all of these terms, but they do express how great our Lord was, and is, *in His Person*. No other human being could ever be a fitting representation of the Son of God.

But our text points out another way in which our Lord demonstrated His greatness.

## **II. OUR LORD IS GREAT BECAUSE OF WHAT HE BECAME.**

Our Lord’s humanity is described in this way: “It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.” This means that He was obligated to become a human being; it was a moral necessity that He become a man. This was unheard of. No creature would even have entertained such a thought, that the eternal Son of God would ever become like one of His creatures, and that there would then be creatures who would be greater than He would be. I am speaking of the angels.

But we know that our Lord was motivated by two things. The first was His love for the Father. The second was His love for those of us who had been given to Him by the Father. It is all so amazing that I would not even dare to speak of these things if it were not all in the Bible. Evidently in the counsels of the Members of the Godhead before creation, it was determined that the Son would become the Savior, and it was known that He could not become the Savior of men without becoming a Man Himself. But the Son agreed to be the Savior, and so He knew that this meant that He would have to become a Man to die for sinful men. It also meant that He would have to become a Man in order for men to be capable of understanding the very nature of God.

So He became a baby, dependent upon his mother Mary and her husband Joseph to take care of Him. He had to grow and mature as a human being. He learned what it meant to be tired, and hungry. He learned how

human beings could hate each other, and He Himself was hated. He was born as a human being, but He was also to experience the awfulness of physical death, but a death in which He was “made sin for us.”

How could any of us ever find words to express what it meant to our Lord to become like us, except for our sin. And then to have our sin placed upon Him was the worst of it all, and the lowest point to which our dear Lord had to go.

But let us look a little deeper into our text when we think of what He became. And I’ll confess to you that I don’t really understand this next point, but I am so thankful for it all.

I am speaking now of those word, “that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things . . . to God (lit.).

The verb “be” is the Greek verb γίνομαι which really means *to become*. This seems to suggest that the Lord in His humanity became what He had not been before. We know that God is immutable, that is, that He does not change. He can’t get better because He is already perfect. He can’t get worse because there is nothing bad in Him. I can only think that this means that in His humanity the Lord became merciful and faithful beyond what had ever been seen in humanity before.

Think back over the people that we read about in Scripture, the people who knew the Lord and walked with Him, the redeemed people. We have to say that there were many, both women as well as men, who to a great degree manifested these two characteristics, “merciful and faithful.” But let me ask you, as you think back over the past, would you trade any of them for our Lord? In this same wonderful book of Hebrews it is said of our Lord that He “learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8). How could the Son of God Who is infinite in wisdom, need to learn anything? You see, there are many things which we do not understand, and probably cannot understand, about our Lord, but what we need to do even when we cannot understand is to believe all that we are told about Him.

I am so thankful that the Lord has been “merciful and faithful” to me time and time again. And I am sure that He will need to be “merciful and faithful” to me many times more before He takes me to heaven. Can’t you say the same. He is merciful toward our miseries just as He has been

gracious toward our guilt. And “faithful” . . . How can we say enough about His faithfulness to us? It makes a miraculous case history for every one of us. Paul told Timothy, “Even if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful” (2 Tim. 2:13). That means that even when we don’t obey Him, or we don’t trust Him, He is going to be faithful to us anyway.

I could go on and on with this subject, but I must move to my next point.

### **III. OUR LORD IS GREAT BECAUSE OF WHAT HE DID.**

What did He do? Our text says that He made “reconciliation for the sins of the people,” that is, the people of God. The NKJV and the NASB translate the Greek word, *propitiation*, which is a more accurate translation, although the idea of reconciliation is in the word propitiation. But what does it mean?

It means that the Lord did for us, “the people,” what neither we, nor anyone else, could have done for us. By the Lord’s sacrifice of Himself, He completely atoned for our sins in God’s sight. The Lord did by His one sacrifice of Himself what the OT priests could not do with the millions of sacrifices that they made. Christ put away our sins. They are forgiven. Christ paid our debt. The case against us in heaven has been closed, and we have been reconciled to God. Since it took the atoning death of Christ for even one sinner to be forgiven, how foolish it is for us to think that we could in any way contribute to our own salvation. As we learned last Sunday, Christ is our Mediator. There is no other way to find acceptance with God except through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how we are justified before God, and it is the only way.

But our text tells us one more thing, and this is a message of great encouragement:

### **IV. OUR LORD IS GREAT BECAUSE OF WHAT HE CONTINUES TO DO.**

To say that our Lord maintained His full Deity in becoming man, means, of course, that He could not sin. But that does not mean that He could not be tempted. He was tempted by Satan as He began His earthly ministry. Satan would not have known how our Lord’s humanity might have affected His Deity, and that is what He wanted to know. We know, too, that the Lord was tempted when He was on the Cross as the crowd yelled at

Him, “If you be the Son of God, come down from the Cross,” or, “If you be the King of Israel, come down from the Cross, and we will believe you.” All of this caused Him great personal suffering, a suffering which we sinners cannot understand. But even with us, the temptation to sin causes us great distress, but it was even more so with our Lord. So He knows what we experience when we are tempted, and He is able to help us before we sin. See again Heb. 4:15 and 16. The same verb for tempting is used in both passages (Heb. 2:18 and 4:15). It is often a trial of our faith. It is a time when we are being tested. But this was all a part of our Lord’s suffering. The trials we face, He faced. And He knows how to help us, and will help us, so we can “come boldly [or confidently] to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

So, while we as believers are capable of sinning, we don’t need to sin. But just as the Lord Jesus was the only One Who could save us from our sins, so He is the only One Who can keep us from sinning. He uses the Holy Spirit, and He uses the Word of God in our hearts, but He is our Savior, and He is our Keeper.

**Concl:** There are people in the world would like for us to forget Christ completely, but they will not succeed. We are not defending a certain day as His birthday (because we don’t know what day He was born). But we believe He came, came to save sinners from their sins, and to keep them from sinning after they are saved. In the first of these truths, we have our justification; in the second our sanctification. And for both we are utterly dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ.