

Heb. 2:-17-18 Our Faithful and Merciful High Priest

When we consider the incarnation of Christ, we must remember the Son did not lay aside his divinity. Yes, his glory was veiled by his humanity, but he is still 100% God, 100% man. And the greatest mystery to me in this world is that He is ONE person. There is a perfect union between his two natures. And because of this perfect union, He is the ONE mediator between God and men. And we've seen this wonderful union in Heb. 1 & 2. There are things said about the Son that can only be said of God. And, there are things about the Son that can only be said of man. When we consider the person and work of Christ, we cannot diminish the Son, who, in his essence is equal to God. And, we cannot diminish the Son, who, in his flesh, a man, is just like us.

Today I would like to emphasize the humanity of Jesus, namely the necessity of the Son to take on flesh and become a man, in order to save his people from their sins. Many people in this world say, "*God can save. He can do it any way he desires. There are many roads that lead to heaven.*" But, this is not what the Scriptures teach. Paul says, "**There is only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**" (1 Tim. 2:5). In vv. 17-18 the author is setting up the argument for the rest of the letter, particularly cps. 3-4. He says, "**Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect . . .**" Why? "**so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.**" If we look back at v. 11 we read: "**For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.**" What is this one source that we share with the one who sanctifies us? It is a common humanity.

This passage (and the Book of Hebrews) teaches us that in order for Jesus to be our high priest, he had to be like us. Why? Look again at v. 17: "**so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest . . .**" A. W. Pink says that the word "faithful" describes his "godward" work as high priest. He is "faithful" . . . "**in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.**" And the word "merciful" describes his work towards his people, who are in desperate need of mercy. And neither of these works as high priest could happen apart from his humanity. I have two truths: 1) Because of our common humanity, Jesus is our faithful high priest, and 2) Because of our common humanity, Jesus is our merciful high priest.

1) Because of Our Common Humanity, Jesus Is Our Faithful High Priest. Here, the emphasis is faithful, particularly faithfulness as a man in the service of God. A.W. Pink says, "*his compassions are regulated by holiness, his sympathies are exercised, according to the requirements of God's truth.*" In order for Jesus to be our high priest, the mediator between God and men, Jesus had to be faithful in his "service to God." There had to be a man who, unlike Adam, would be faithful in every way. Look down at 3:2: Jesus "**was faithful to him who appointed him . . .**" And then in 3:6: "**but Christ is faithful over God's house as a Son.**" This is his "Godward" work. And let me ask, "what is the result of this "Godward" work of the Son's faithfulness in the flesh?"

Look back at v. 17. "**to make propitiation for the sins of the people.**" Now, this word propitiation has been translated as "expiation" which means "to take away sin." It is also translated as a "sacrifice" for sin. The KJV 1611 translates this word as "reconciliation." Though

each of these are true, I believe these translations miss the full meaning. The proper translation is “propitiation.” And this word captures most the “Godward” effect of Jesus’ sacrifice. Propitiation captures the important fact that there is something stemming from God himself that keeps us from Him. To propitiate means to “*take away that which stands between God and us.*” What stands between us? It is his anger and wrath and righteous judgment that always exists between the sinner and God, between Adam and his kin (all humanity) and God. Yes, it is true that our sins keep us from God. God is holy and we cannot enter his presence, nor can we be reconciled if our sins are not taken away. Here, the author is clear. The faithfulness of Jesus results in PROPITIATION . . . and this for the “sins of the people” (v. 17). Unless he take on flesh and blood and become “like his brethren” “like us in every way,” there is no propitiation, there is no removal of the wrath of God. He must be united with us in a common humanity!

Think about the high priests of the OT who entered the Holy of Holies every year on the Day of Atonement? How faithful were they? Well, humanly speaking, for the most part, they were very faithful to their duties. Year after year they did what God required of them according to the Law of Moses. As they entered the holy of holies (in the tabernacle and later the temple), they fulfilled their duties. But, how successful were their actions as far as a lasting work? What was the extent of their faithfulness? Yes, they were obedient! But, who were they? They were sinful men. They were from the kin of sinful Adam. And no matter what they did, they could not overcome sin and death, even if they were to enter the holy of holies a trillion times over. Even their entry over and over and over again shows that their faithfulness was not enough. And, when they entered the holy of holies, they entered with great fear and trembling. It is even said that they would tie a rope around them in case they were to die, and their body pulled out. Why were they so fearful? They were sinful men! And those who entered by faith knew their righteousness was as a filthy rag (Is. 64:6). They stood before God as Adam stood, “naked and afraid.” In every way that Adam failed to be faithful to God, so were they. They stood as Isaiah did in his vision of the holiness of God, saying “*Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips*” (Is. 6).

And so we stand today! Try and count your sins this past year. Try and count them this past month, or this past week, or even this morning. Think about the people of this world who are trying to reach God, to find some kind of “faithfulness” that will make God accept them. Our Muslim neighbors are praying 5 times a day to Mecca (among other works). Our Hindu and Buddhist neighbors are convinced their sufferings in this world will aid their cause in the next life as they try to be faithful. The Jews of Jesus day and many today are trying to be faithful to keep the Law of Moses. Over and over again, in and of ourselves, WE FAIL in FAITHFULNESS. When I think I have not murdered anyone, I remember the words, “*But have you thought evil of your brother?*” When I think I have always been faithful to my wife, I think of the words “*if you’ve looked at a woman with lust, you’ve committed adultery.*” When I think I am content with what I have and then I find myself desiring the possessions or status of my neighbor, I know my heart is sinful and unfaithful. Even for those who call themselves Christians, many are relying on church attendance or their baptism or their giving, etc.

At the end of the day, we fall short of faithfulness, that which God requires to enter his presence and have fellowship with Him. And like Adam, we have been banished from the garden of his presence. But, the Son, “**who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born**

in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus, the Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit, was no sinner. And He did not enter the holy of holies with mere outward faithfulness as a sinner. He entered on his own merit! He was the perfect, spotless, lamb of God. As the high priest of the OT sprinkled the blood on the altar year after year, so the Son of man laid himself on the altar and shed his blood. And because of faithfulness in EVERY regard, his sacrifice was pleasing to God. His wrath was poured out upon the Son. He was our propitiation! And as the earthly priest entered the earthly tabernacle, so the Son of Faithfulness entered the heavenly tabernacle. 2 Cor. 5:21: **“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** And all of this happened because of our common humanity. Truly, in our place He stood! He suffered and died as a man. He is our faithful high priest!

Quick Applications:

1. It is the greatest cause of worship.
2. Practically, it is the greatest source of peace . . . to know our sins are completely forgiven.
3. Our works cannot contribute to our salvation (not one ounce of molecule).

2) Because of Our Common Humanity, Jesus Is Our Merciful High Priest. Look at v. 18: **“For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”** Here we see the “manward” side of Jesus work as high priest. Because he shares a common humanity he is fully able and willing to help us, showing us the greatest mercies in this life. It is true that the mercies of God are new every morning. Why? Because every morning as I look to heaven I see the Son seated at the right hand of the majesty on high as my high priest. And the mercies of God flow from a never ending fountain. I love this truth! Jesus says, **“Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”** (Matt. 11:28-30). Look over at Heb. 4:15: **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize without weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”**

The emphasis of this verse is not on whether Christ could have sinned or not. The emphasis is that as a man like us, he experienced the trials and temptations of this life and in every way, He was faithful to God and did not sin. Therefore, He is our merciful high priest, who is able to help his people. The KJV translates “to help” as succor. I’ve never used that word. But the meaning is more than just “help.” Jesus is not sitting in an easy chair in heaven looking down as he decides when to help us. No! It is more like a mother who hears here one year old in another room crying out in pain. What does she do. She runs to her child. She makes every effort with the greatest of desire to go to her child and help him/her. This is the Lord Jesus! And this is the most practical truth. For the rest of our time, let’s consider some of the ways he suffered and was tempted as we are and now helps us.

i. In his flesh he was tempted as we are under the normal circumstances of life in the flesh. In his body, he was hungry and thirsty. Often, he was overcome with fatigue. He slept just like us. He laid his head on his pillow at night and got up the next morning. He was taught; the Bible says he

grew in wisdom and stature. As he grew, he also grew in mental and normal strength. In his affections he loved. He was astonished at many things. He marvelled at the unbelief of men. Sometimes, he was glad and rejoiced in his spirit. He was angry and indignant as he saw the hypocrisy of the Jews. Zeal like fire burned over him as he overturned the tables in the temple. He was grieved. He wept. He trembled with emotion. Sometimes he was overcome with the waves of emotion as he considered his future suffering and death on the cross.

ii. In his flesh he suffered in his relationships. He was often disregarded and not believed, which caused him great sorrow. He was forsaken even by his followers for preaching the mysteries of the gospel. In the Garden of Gethsemane, all his disciples ran when he was arrested. He had great anguish for his mother when, on the cross, “a sword pierced her soul” as she saw her son suffer. He had many enemies from all sides, as the Jewish leaders were constantly trying to catch him in words and even arrest him.

iii. In his flesh he suffered the temptations of Satan. For 40 days and nights, he had season of intense temptation, an “hour of darkness,” we might say.

iv. The greatest of temptations and the greatest mystery come from his words: “***My God why have you forsaken me***” as God turned his back on him (which, by the way, the Christian does not have go through this.) In all these ways he was tempted as we are. Why? That He might understand and help us, even run to us, in this life. And here, the emphasis is not so much on helping our flesh, but helping us endure our temptations in the flesh (which goes completely against the health, wealth, and prosperity movement.)

Think of all the times we need help from our great high priest.

Surgery, death of a loved one, financial stress, fear in all kinds of ways, frustration when someone lets you down, or, when a friend deserts you or betrays you, when the world falsely accuses you, when you are old and your body will hardly go on.

Think of all the ways you sin and he gives you help. Are you lazy? Are you angry with your spouse? Are you sinfully disappointed in your children? Do you find it hard not to gossip? Children, do you find it hard to obey your parents when they tell you to do something you don't agree with? Others, Do you find it hard to pray? Do you feel as though God has turned his back on you? Do you use business in this life as an excuse to neglect your duties as a Christian? (Jesus was busy. Everyone wanted his attention. Yet, he purposeful in his efforts.)

During the pandemic, are you angry? Do you find it difficult to “submit” to authorities and rulers? Do you find it hard to love your brothers and sisters with whom you disagree? Often, when Jesus preached the mysteries of the gospel, his disciples did not agree with him. When Jesus said he would wash his disciples feet, Peter said, “*No way Lord, can you do such a thing.*” When Jesus preached his death, Peter said, “*This will not happen. And if it does, I will go with you.*” Often, Jesus was misunderstood by his disciples. Yet, he loved them with faithfulness and mercy! How often are we wrong in our estimations of the truth? Yet, Christ bears with us. And all of these things and more, Jesus did and is doing. And the reason Jesus says to us, “***Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden,***” is because he suffered and died. And this happened

to a man who was just like us, except in regard to sin. The emphasis of this temptation is not Jesus' temptation, but his ability to help us when we are tempted. In all of these things, the world does not receive mercy. In this passage over and over again, we see that the Son is the high priest of his people, not everyone. For he helps the "*offspring of Abraham.*"

At the end of the day, the suffering of Jesus finished at the cross. And we often hear, "*He could have called ten thousand angels to take him down.*" Of course he could have! But, you know, one would have been enough. And to put it in perspective, Jesus created the angels. He is superior to them infinitely. He HIMSELF could have come down on his own power. And if this would have been the case, He could have judged all sin at that time. And this would have meant death and separation for all of us. But, he did not! He suffered as a sacrifice in the place of his people. HE was slaughtered as the Lamb of God. He did this as a man. And He did not come down because we would have had no faithful and merciful high priest. He did it for us. And it is true that our sins held him there. And because He did not hold back from taking on flesh and suffering and death on the cross, He is able to help us in every way. Therefore, we have a great high priest, FAITHFUL and MERCIFUL in every way. And, He is there, NOW, always interceding for us, always there to help us in our weakness, in EVERY WAY!

I will finish with Heb. 4:14-16: "**Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**"