

## ***“What Can Jesus Do For You?”***

*Hebrews 9:11-15, 24-28*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • March 15, 2015

Who is Jesus? Think about that for a moment. Who is Jesus? The way you answer that question will impact your life more than anything else. Would you say he was a good teacher? Maybe a good example of how we should love God? Or is there more to the person of Jesus?

In the ninth chapter of Acts we find this Jewish leader named Saul going around arresting Christians and even having them stoned to death. He's on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus to round up Christians there when the risen Jesus appears to him. Saul sees a bright light from heaven and he falls to the ground. Then Jesus speaks saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" It's never good when Jesus says your name twice, by the way. Saul's response, however, is this: "who are you Lord?"

You really don't need to know a whole lot to begin following Jesus. He will meet you wherever you are. All you need to do is honestly ask Saul's question, "who are you, Lord?" and Jesus will begin to reveal himself to you through the Bible and through other Christians. But the truth is that we need to keep pursuing that question for our whole life. That pursuit is called "theology," but to put it in terms that we have been studying recently, we could call it growing in faith. Disciples grow in their faith.

That's why we're studying who Jesus is and why it matters to us and in particular we're looking at what is traditionally known as the three-fold offices of Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King. Last week Brian shared that Jesus is the prophet like Moses from Deuteronomy 18. Only Jesus is the better prophet. One of the primary responsibilities of a prophet is to reveal God to the people. Jesus is the perfect prophet because he reveals God in person. Do you want to know what God is like? He's like Jesus. Jesus reveals God to us because He *is* God.

This morning we want to look at Jesus as priest, or as our reading from Hebrews says,

"high priest of the good things that have come."

To understand his role as priest, we need to first look at the role of priests in the Old Testament. Our reading from Leviticus gives us a glimpse into the priesthood in ancient times. What we find is that when someone sins he must bring a sacrifice to the priest who will make atonement so that the sin may be forgiven. The priests were from only one of the twelve tribes of Israel, the descendants of Levi, which is why they were called Levites, and it's where we get the name of the book Leviticus, which as you might have guessed deals largely with the role of the priests.

The heart of the issue is that God is holy and cannot stand any kind of sin. You and I are sinful and so we can't be in the presence of God. We need a mediator. The priests were in charge of the worship, in the Temple in later years and in the Tabernacle in earlier years. The Tabernacle was a large tent that was used as the Temple. It was the place where God's presence dwelled and where he would speak with Moses. Within the Tabernacle or Temple was an inner chamber called the Holy of Holies, which was specifically the place of God's presence. The priest was only permitted to enter the Holy of Holies one day a year, on the Day of Atonement. In Hebrew you would say Yom Kippur. On that day the priest would bring the blood of the sacrifice on behalf of all the people seeking forgiveness for all the sins committed during the year. Basically, the priest served as the mediator between the people and God. Just as the prophet spoke to the people on behalf of God, the priest spoke to God on behalf of the people.

Needless to say there are some problems with this arrangement. First of all, the priest is just as sinful as the other people. Hebrews 5 points out that the priest must offer sacrifices for his own sins before he can offer them for the sins of others. He doesn't really have anything to offer to God. He can't really be a

mediator between God and sinful people because he's one of the sinful people. Second, as verse 24 of our reading points out, the system of the Temple, the sacrifices, and the Day of Atonement were merely symbolic copies of the way things really are in heaven, so they won't be all that effective. And of course third, making sinful humans the mediator between God and people gives them a lot of authority and abuse of that authority is not far behind.

Thankfully, what we find in the Bible is that Jesus came as the true high priest, the perfect mediator between God and humans because he is fully God and fully human. Jesus is fully God, which means he is Emmanuel, God with us. At the same time he is fully human. He provides the perfect righteous response of humanity to God. Without both of those we don't have the gospel. Jesus lived a sinless life, something we could never do. He offered that to God the Father on our behalf and exchanged it for the punishment we deserve. He suffered on the cross in our place. Here we find is that not only is Jesus the perfect priest, but he is also the perfect sacrifice, the lamb without spot or blemish. Verses 25 and 26 make it clear that Jesus' sacrifice was once for all. His death ended the system of animal sacrifices in the Temple because they were no longer necessary.

So what does this all of this mean for us today? The Bible says that at the moment Jesus died on the cross the veil in the Temple ripped from top to bottom. The veil was actually a very thick curtain that was 60 feet high and 30 feet wide and separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple. The purpose of the veil was to protect the sinful people from coming in

direct contact with the holy God. So when the veil was ripped in half it symbolized that God didn't need priests to be his mediators any more. Every person now has direct access to God through Christ.

Hebrews 4 says, "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." Jesus is the only priest we need because he's the perfect priest. Verse 24 says that Christ now appears "in the presence of God on our behalf." Hebrews 7:25 makes it clear that Christ "is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." In other words, Jesus makes your prayers his prayers.

There's one more part to this, though. Even though we no longer need human priests to go to God for us, we all have the opportunity to go to God for each other. This is what Martin Luther called the priesthood of all believers. Because Jesus is our high priest, every believer is called to serve as a priest for others, helping them meet and get to know Jesus. We share, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, in the priesthood of Christ. That's the theology of the church. We gather to participate, by the Holy Spirit, in the Son's worship of the Father and to invite others to that same relationship we have with God.

*Amen*