

We Would See Jesus: The Son of God

“He Ever Lives to Make Intercession”

Dave Miller

Before we get too preoccupied with the burdens of life and feel too sorry for ourselves, we ought to be continually reminded of the supreme example of suffering and hurt that Jesus endured for us. Whatever you and I have been called upon to bear in our lives, no matter what difficulties, heartaches and inconveniences we have experienced, we simply must pause—frequently—and reflect on what **Christ** experienced. Only then can we put our own predicaments in proper perspective and be enabled successfully to bear up under the strain.

Besides the lack of physical comforts (Matt. 8:20) and the frequent mistreatment He endured throughout His earthly ministry, He was eventually seized by an angry mob carrying swords and clubs. He was dragged before a kangaroo court to face the false accusations of liars. He encountered the tirade of a raging High Priest who accused Him of blasphemy, and He had to hear the council condemn Him to death. He had people spit in His face, beat Him and strike Him with the palms of their hands as they mocked and taunted Him. He was bound and taken before the Roman authorities where He experienced the further humiliation of a jeering crowd, who chose a notorious criminal over Himself for release. He then suffered further indignities at the hands of Roman soldiers, who stripped Him, pressed a crown of thorns down upon

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His head, spit on Him and struck Him on the head with the reed they had made Him hold as a scepter. Finally, He endured the excruciating, horrifying death inflicted by a Roman cross, as passers-by blasphemed Him, shook their heads at Him and taunted Him to save Himself. Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him. Where was God in all that? And where is God when you or I are struggling with the adversities of life? Where is God when a Christian loses a child? Answer: He is right where He was when He lost His own Son.

Whatever suffering or hurt you or I may experience in life pales in comparison to the agony endured by our Lord. We need to remember—Sunday followed Friday. His suffering unto death provided an incredible outlet that you and I may share. “God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). [All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] So must we hurt?

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, Nor was guile found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. (1 Pet. 2:21-23, emp. added)

In fact, listen carefully to the marvelous clarification provided by the Hebrews writer that helps us to view our own difficulties against the backdrop of what Jesus did on our behalf:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the

grace of God, **might taste death for everyone**. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in **bringing many sons to glory**, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.... Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release **those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage**. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, **to make propitiation for the sins of the people**. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to **aid those who are tempted**. (Heb. 2:9-18, emp. added)

PRIESTHOOD

To grasp more fully the depth of intercession that Christ makes for us, it is helpful to have a better understanding of the Old Testament concept of priesthood. The distinguishing feature of priesthood is the idea of **mediation**. A priest serves the purpose of mediating between the people and God by offering appropriate sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. The writer of Hebrews summarized this priestly role: "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins" (5:1). Notice the priestly

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components: (1) “taken from among men,” i.e., human himself; (2) “appointed for men,” i.e., he functions as the peoples’ representative, acting in their place and on their behalf; (3) “in things pertaining to God,” i.e., his actions are directed to the One Whom humans have offended; (4) “that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices,” i.e., specific objects and actions are required in order to achieve mediation; and (5) “for sins,” i.e., the sacrifices are designed to satisfy, correct or atone for the wrong resulting from human infractions.

Additional aspects of priesthood include the right of appointment: “And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God” (Heb. 5:4). In other words, a priest must be **divinely** designated, i.e., he cannot be self-appointed or elected by other humans. Also, the shedding of blood is an integral part of acting as a priest. While bloodless gifts were incorporated into the Mosaic economy, specific violations of the will of God (i.e., sin) require **blood** sacrifice if atonement is to occur (Lev. 4:4ff). The priests themselves had to be consecrated and prepared for priestly duty with blood (Ex. 29:20ff).

THE HIGH PRIEST AND DAY OF ATONEMENT

While the high priest participated in many of the duties associated with the ordinary priests, he engaged in one unique activity that was confined to him alone and which set him apart from all others. He alone entered the Holy of Holies, and then only one day per year, on *yom ha-kippurim* – the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16; 23:26-32). Unlike the usual sacrifices and priestly service carried on throughout the year, the Day of Atonement functioned as an annual watershed event. It was undoubtedly the most significant day of the year in the Israelite economy.

This annual event took place on the tenth day of the seventh month. The primary activities of the day, which included a stipulated fast (the only one in the Mosaic system), centered on the tabernacle. In addition to the tabernacle being the focal point of atonement, its location held symbolic significance since it was situated in the very center of the nation, i.e., “in the midst of their uncleanness” (Lev. 16:16). The following description is an attempt to reconstruct the sequence of procedures as they occurred on this most auspicious day. [NOTE: See Robert Milligan’s *The Scheme of Redemption* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1975 reprint), pp. 170-172, and Wilhelm Moller’s article “Day of Atonement” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974 reprint), 1:324-325.]

First, the high priest would bathe himself in water, and then put on the clothing of the high priest. He would go to the Laver, wash his hands and feet, and offer the usual morning oblations. Then, he would enter the Holy Place, trim the lamps, offer the incense and exit to bless the people. Then followed a series of sacrificial offerings (Num. 29:7-11). One young bull, one ram, and seven lambs (less than a year old), all unblemished, would be offered as burnt offerings, accompanied by grain and drink offerings, as well as one baby goat for a sin offering.

Next, the high priest would wash his hands and feet a second time at the Laver before entering the tabernacle again. Once inside, he would remove his high priest clothing, bathe himself a second time with water, and then put on his plain white linen clothing. He then took a young bull that had been selected as a sin-offering for himself and his family, placed his hands on its head, and uttered an audible prayer in which he confessed or acknowledged the sinfulness of himself and his own

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family. Then he would kill the young bull, momentarily setting aside its blood. Taking a censer full of burning coals from the bronze altar, with two handfuls of sweet incense, he would enter the Holy of Holies. There he would burn the incense before the Ark of the Covenant, so that a cloud of incense smoke would form and shroud the mercy seat, protecting him from death. He would exit to retrieve the blood of the young bull he had just killed, enter the Most Holy Place a second time, and sprinkle the blood once on the mercy seat and seven times before it using his finger.

Exiting the Holy of Holies again, and moving into the court, he would cast lots over two goats. After killing the one on which the Lord's lot fell, he took its blood back into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled it on and before the mercy seat in the same fashion as the blood of the young bull. This action was intended specifically as atonement for the sins of the entire nation. Exiting the tabernacle and into the court once again, he went to the bronze altar. There he used his finger to wipe some of the blood from both the goat and the young bull on the horns of the altar. Then, he sprinkled the same blood on the altar seven times, cleansing and hallowing it in the midst of the nation's uncleanness.

He now turned his attention to the second goat. A term is used four times in Leviticus 16:8, 10, 26 (and nowhere else in the Old Testament) in connection with this second goat (*azazel*). It generally is translated "scapegoat." Scholars have debated the precise meaning and application of the term. Regardless of their conclusions, it is evident from the text what purpose this second goat served. The high priest would place both of his hands on the head of the live goat. He then would confess over it all the sins, transgressions and iniquities of the Israelites, thereby

symbolically transferring their sins to the head of the goat. The goat then was led away by a suitable person and released in an uninhabited, solitary land so that it would be completely separated from the nation. Notice the statement that pinpoints the significance of this action: "The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land" (Lev. 16:22). Here was a ritual that vividly illustrated the physical removal of sin and defilement from the people, transferring it far from camp where it could no longer contaminate them.

There is a close parallel to this ritual in the handling of the disease of leprosy. If a leper were healed of his disease, the priest would go to him outside the camp, verify the recovery and then select two birds. One bird was to be killed. Its blood was to be applied to the living bird and also sprinkled seven times on the recovered leper. Then the living bird was released in the open field, and the leper was pronounced clean (Lev. 14:1-9).

After the ritual of the scapegoat, the high priest would re-enter the tabernacle, remove the linen clothing he wore into the Most Holy Place, wash himself in water, and once again don the regular garb of the high priest. He then went to the altar of burnt offering in the outer court and offered a ram as a burnt offering for himself and another for the people. He also burned the fat of the sin offerings on the altar, and then saw that the remains of the animals used in the sin offerings were carried outside the camp for final disposal by burning. The one who took the scapegoat away from the camp would wash his clothes and bathe his body in water before returning to the camp.

JESUS AND HIGH PRIESTHOOD

Question: Why have the Jews go through all that "rigmarole" – especially since it did not **actually** provide

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atonement for sin? Do not miss the point! Sin is so consequential, so paramount and of such sinister significance, that God had to go to unfathomable lengths to save us. These extensive rituals were divinely designed to spotlight and accentuate the striking parallels with the Christian system—the climactic fruition of God's redemptive scheme. The Israelite priesthood was a precursor of the church, which is a holy and royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). As citizens of Christ's kingdom, Christians themselves are priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). The pure white linen that the priests wore, and the sevenfold washing, were symbolic of the righteous, moral, spiritual purity that is to characterize Christians (Rev. 19:8). The way the priests were forbidden to marry a divorcee, or enter the military, or pursue a secular career, were intended to anticipate the focus of every Christian on seeking first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33; 1 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 2:5).

When we compare the high priest of the Old Testament with Jesus, we move to yet another level that is rich with meaning and substance. The Greek word for high priest (*archiereus*) is used 17 times in Hebrews. The Old Testament high priest was the **type**, while Jesus is the **antitype**. First, even as Aaron was specifically singled out and appointed to his intercessory role, so was Jesus Christ: "And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'" (Heb. 5:3-5). Second, the high priest's wife in the Old Testament had to be a virgin. The church is Christ's virgin: "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). Third, even as Aaron had placed upon his body the marks

of consecration that designated his role, so Jesus “suffered in the flesh” (1 Pet. 4:1) and “bore our sins in His own body” (1 Pet. 2:24). Fourth, Aaron had on his shoulders and over his heart the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Likewise, Jesus bears our sins and carries us through life (Heb. 2:14-18). Do you remember what the man did who found his lost sheep? He laid it on his shoulders (Luke 15:5). The suffering of Christ, and the present work He performs on behalf of Christians, is high priestly activity.

In alluding to the role of the high priest, the writer of the book of Hebrews emphasizes two activities. First, the high priest offers sacrifices: “For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins” (5:1; cf. 8:3). Of course, the gift and sacrifice that Jesus offered was Himself.

Second, there is the high priestly role of entering into the Most Holy Place once a year on behalf of the entire nation of Israel. Listen again to Hebrews: “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17-18). “But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance” (Heb. 9:6-7).

The Bible is very detailed and explicit on this point. Only the high priest was eligible and allowed to perform this function. No one else in the nation could perform this service. And only Jesus is qualified to perform the function of **ultimate** atonement for sin. This function necessitated entering into—not an earthly tabernacle or location—but into heaven itself. Listen closely to the writer of Hebrews:

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For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but **into heaven itself**, now to appear in the presence of God **for us**; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another – He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. (Heb. 9:24-28, emp. added)

Jesus performed a once-for-all function to deal with our sin problem finally and ultimately. And He did it with His own blood, rather than the blood of another. The sacrifice that He offered was nothing less than **Himself!** This sacrifice, wherein God offers Himself (in the person of His Son), is unprecedented in the popular religious imagination.

Especially noteworthy in the attempt to grasp the significance of Jesus as our High Priest is the role of blood in His atoning work. Two important concepts emerge. First, there is the frequent notification that life is in the blood (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11, 14; Deut. 12:23). Second, blood is required to accomplish forgiveness of sin. These two truths are closely connected. Life being in the blood bears a direct correlation to the essentiality of blood to achieve remission—spiritual life. The sprinkling of blood by the high priest was integral to atonement. Further clarification in the New Testament shows that **animal** blood cannot atone for sin (Heb. 10:4). It takes **human** blood. But, even then, not just any human blood can achieve atonement (Lev. 18:21; Mic. 6:7; Jer. 7:31; Ezek. 23:37). Only the blood

of Jesus Christ could serve as adequate propitiation. Listen again to the Hebrews writer:

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with **His own blood** He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall **the blood of Christ**, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:11-14, emp. added)

Cleansing spiritual uncleanness and defilement could be accomplished only by the blood of Jesus – no one else.

Notice also the fact that the Old Testament high priest was a mere man who had his own sins to reckon with. Hebrews states: “He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also beset by weakness. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins” (Heb. 5:2-3). Not so with Jesus. He was both the perfect High Priest as well as the ultimate sinless sacrifice. In fact, it was the blood of Christ that actually cleansed the sins of the Mosaic high priests!

Since we have all sinned, our access to God was terminated. Jesus’ essential accomplishment as our High Priest entailed **reopening access to God** by blotting out the guilt of sin on our behalf. Listen carefully to the following declarations: “Let us therefore **come boldly to the throne of grace**, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16, emp. added). “For on the one

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hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which **we draw near to God**” (Heb. 7:18-19, emp. added).

Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives **to make intercession** for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever. (Heb. 7:24-28, emp. added)

Therefore, brethren, **having boldness to enter** the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, **let us draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb. 10:19-22, emp. added)

Paul said, “For through Him **we both have access** by one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18, emp. added). Peter said, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might **bring us to God**” (1 Pet. 3:18-19, emp. added).

This opening of access to God on our behalf enables our spiritual reconnection with God, i.e., peace.

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, **we have peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:1-2, emp. added). We have the blessing of Jesus making personal intercession on our behalf: “It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also **makes intercession for us**” (Rom. 8:34, emp. added). John wrote: “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).

CONCLUSION

Jesus suffered great hurt and harm, but what He endured, He endured **for us!** And His actions on our behalf continue to benefit our spiritual condition. Nothing Christ can do for us in alleviating the hardships and physical adversities of life could even begin to compare with what He has done for us spiritually—and continues to do so. The fact is, our daily struggles, hardships, frustrations, disappointments and even tragedies, are the least of our worries. These are all **physical** and will pass away! Our **spiritual** condition, on the other hand, is **the real and ultimate concern**. And on that score, Jesus is continually “going to bat” for us! May we, therefore, endure for Him whatever life may dole out to us. We can and must be like Him in our willingness to endure suffering, while remaining faithful to God. “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). And we must always remember that every single hardship we encounter is something that

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is "common to man" (1 Cor. 10:13). We're not unique in our suffering.

In Revelation 19, we are treated to a spectacular portrait. Heaven opens and out comes a white horse whose rider has three names: "Faithful and True"; "The Word of God"; and "King of kings and Lord of lords." In righteousness, He judges and makes war. His eyes are flames of fire. He wears on His head multiple crowns, and His clothing has been dipped in blood. Protruding out of His mouth is a sharp sword. He rides at the head of the mounted cavalry of heaven. The Christians who were first given this awesome picture had been undergoing intense, excruciating pain and suffering. But neither they nor we can visualize this marvelous scene without coming to at least one undeniable conclusion: God knows when we hurt and experience the adversities of life; but He is there, He is with us, He will not abandon us, and we can and must continue to trust Him.

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