

JESUS AS OUR MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST

Last Sunday, people **around the world**—literally—celebrated “Resurrection Sunday”—the historical fact that Jesus rose from the dead. Let’s think for a moment about the types of people who “celebrated” last week.

First, there are many that were absolutely clueless about the **Biblical significance** of the event that was being celebrated! They think Easter is about eggs, the Easter bunny, and candy!

A **second group** would be those of us who understand that Jesus’ resurrection is what **ensured our salvation!** It was God’s “amen” to Jesus’ “It is finished;” the proof that God accepted Jesus’ payment for our sins! There is a **third group** that **understand it intellectually** but have not made it personal in their lives. They have signs in their yard that say, “He is risen” or “He’s alive,” but they really don’t think of Jesus as **the only way** for them to be forgiven and go to heaven.

I believe there is also a **fourth group**—a group that may include some of us.

--We understand that if Jesus had not come to earth...to take on flesh...to die as our Substitute...and rise again from the dead, we would not be saved!

--We also understand that Jesus is not only our **resurrected** Savior, He is also our **returning** Savior who is preparing a place for us and will someday **come back** for us!

--But we **forget** sometimes—or at least **under-appreciate**—what Jesus is doing for **us now**—beside preparing a place for us! **Why** does it matter—**for you** as a believer—that Jesus rose from the dead? And what difference will it make for **your tomorrow**...and your next day...and the day after? That is what I want us to focus on this morning.

Please take your Bibles and turn once again to Hebrews 2; follow along as I read verses 14-18. Last week, we focused on verses 14-15 and looked at two reasons Jesus became flesh and blood. In vs 14, we noted that Jesus came to destroy the power of the devil. In vs 15, we see that Jesus came to deliver us from the fear of death. This morning we are going to be concentrating on vs 17. Here we see that Jesus was made like us to **be a merciful and faithful high priest**. But what does that mean? And why is that important? That is what we will be digging into this morning.

Before we consider Jesus as a merciful and faithful high priest, I want to review what we looked at last week by reading a quote from **William R. Newell**. Although it is a bit lengthy, it captures well verses 14 and 15—and provides a lot of “food for thought” that you can “chew on” later.

When our Lord rose from the dead, and was received up into glory, He went up as the Victor Who had brought the devil to nought! Nothing now but unbelief or disobedience, or ignorance of their liberty, can hold men in bondage to Satan. All his basis of accusation before God, all his power to terrorize believers on earth is nullified, for the judgment for believers was over at the Cross. Do you see that, O believer? Satan has no power, no rights over you. None! He may hinder you; he may oppose you—he did and does oppose all testimony in Christ's Name. But God has reckoned to you the full value of Christ's whole work; and neither *guilt*, nor *bondage*, nor *fear* belongs to you at all! You are *in Christ*, and are *as Christ* in God's reckoning! ‘The sting of death is sin,’ but Christ bore the sin, and put it away.” (*Hebrews Verse by Verse*, pg 65, emphasis his).

Isn’t that great? “My sin—O the bliss of this glorious thought—my sin, not in part but the whole, Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.” I have the Son, so I have life—meaning eternal life. So I don’t have to fear death—or the devil! Neither has power over me anymore!

Is that true **of you?** If you **have** Christ, you are **in** Christ! And if you are **in** Christ, you are **as** Christ—a child of God that can **never be** separated from the love of God!

Back to verse 17: “Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” Jesus became man so He could be a merciful and faithful high priest.

Let's consider first... **1. The high priest in the Old Testament**

The original hearers—and/or readers—of the book of Hebrews were probably *Jews*—thus **the name** of the book! An even **stronger argument** that the initial audience was Jewish is that there are **a lot of** references to the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system—something that Jews were quite familiar with. We Gentiles are not, though, so I want to spend some time looking at that first.

What is a high priest? Aaron, Moses' brother, was the first high priest. He was a mediator—the go-between/middle-man—between the people and God. One of his most important responsibilities occurred on the Day of Atonement. On that day, the high priest would take the blood of an innocent animal and go behind the veil—which was a curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the tabernacle.

To help you visualize this, picture our auditorium being the tabernacle—and this platform being the Holy of Holies. Behind the veil—inside the holy of holies—was the ark of the covenant, aka “the ark of God” or “the ark of the Lord.” The ark was a chest-like piece of furniture that was 4 ft long x 2-1/2 ft wide by x 2-1/2 ft deep. The top of this “box” had a cover—called the mercy seat—and on top of the mercy seat were the figures of two angels facing each other, symbolically protecting the mercy seat. God told Moses in Ex 25:22 that He would **speak to Moses** from between the cherubim, so the ark became a symbol of the **presence** of God.

On the Day of Atonement, the priest would go behind the veil and sprinkle blood on the top of the ark. Why? The answer is alluded to at the end vs 17 “...to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” Without getting too technical, to make **reconciliation** means to provide a way for God's wrath against sin to be satisfied. In a nutshell, God hates sin—and sin must be punished. God's anger against sin—at that time—was satisfied when the people confessed their sin and offered an innocent animal as **their substitute**.

Since this was done **yearly**—and mostly by the **same group** of people—it was obviously **not** a picture of our initial **salvation**. Why do I say that? Because we **need to** be born again—**but not year...after year...after year!** If we are born again...if we are a child of God...if we have the Son, we don't need to “**re-get**” or “**re-ceive**” **the Son!** II Cor 5:17 “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a **new creature**: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” You **will be** “new” in the future, but you are also **new now!**

The picture, then, is not of coming to God for **salvation**—it is coming to God for **sanctification**. It is not for **initial rescue** from the penalty of our sin—it is for cleansing from **daily** sin.

Mark your place here—we'll come back in a little bit—but let's turn to John 13. Some of us were reminded of this account just recently when we saw the Passion Play at Camp Douglas. Jesus is washing the disciples' feet and He comes to Peter.

Notice vs 8. Peter says you can't wash my feet. Jesus says, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” In other words, ‘if I don't wash you, you don't belong to Me. You are not one of Mine.’

Vs 9. When Peter hears that, he goes from **not wanting** his feet washed **to wanting** his feet washed... and his hands...and his head!

Notice Jesus' answer in vs 10. What is Jesus saying? If you are washed—if you **have been cleansed already**—you don't need to be washed all over again! All you need is **your feet** washed! What's the picture? If you are born again, you only need to be cleansed from **daily** sin. You **don't need a total bath**, but just like their feet got dirty wearing sandals on dry dusty roads, we get “dirty feet” from living in a sinful world!

So the high priest in the OT—and Jesus' example here in John 13—are visual reminders of what I John 1:9 is all about. **I John 1:9** “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Back to Hebrews 2...

2. Jesus became man to be a merciful high priest

Let's look again at vs 17 “Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He **might be a merciful** and faithful high priest...”

It is interesting to me that when Jesus was on earth, we didn't see Him in the temple **as a priest** carrying out the sacrifices. He certainly spent time in the temple, though. That's where Mary and Joseph found Him as a 12-year-old boy when they accidentally left Him behind after one of the feasts in Jerusalem!

And as an adult, Jesus **taught** in the temple...and **healed** in the temple. He also **cleansed** the temple—but not by offering a sacrifice! We see that in **Mt 21:12-13** “And Jesus went into the temple of God, and **cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple**, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,¹³ And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”

The point I’m making is this: The truth that Jesus is our merciful and faithful high priest has more to do with what Jesus is **doing now** in heaven than what **He did** on earth!

Back to our vs again: “Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He **might be a merciful** and faithful high priest...”

If you just read this verse—and don’t wrestle with it a little bit—you could get the impression that Jesus **could not have been** a merciful high priest if He had not become a man. Is that what the verse is saying?

I don’t think so—and here’s three reasons why.

1) Jesus was merciful **in the first place**. He would never have left heaven...to take on the form of man...to have God’s wrath poured on Him for our sins...if He wasn’t merciful! I would argue that that is the **epitome** of being merciful—full of mercy!

2) If Jesus **was** merciful—but became **more merciful** by becoming human—it would mean He **lacked** mercy as God, and “improved” after becoming human! I have a big problem with the suggestion that God **needs improvement**. I have an **even bigger** problem with the thought that “manhood” could “provide” the improvement that God **supposedly needed!** Hopefully you have a problem with that, too!

3) The Greek word that “might be” comes from is **gin-o-mai**—a word that occurs 671 times in the Greek NT! Not surprisingly, a word used **that many times** has a number of different meanings. The meaning that best fits here—in my opinion, anyway—is to “be found, to show, or to prove.” In other words, Jesus **showed Himself** to be merciful—He **proved** that He was merciful—by becoming man.

Next, let’s consider... **3. The proof that Jesus was merciful**

Jesus showed Himself merciful by dying for us, didn’t He? But that’s not the only way! Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus demonstrating mercy in His **healing** of the blind...and the deaf...and the demon-possessed...and the lame...and the mute. He even brought people back to life again—like the son of a widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-16) and Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha (John 11).

But we are not talking about Jesus being **a healer before He died**; we are talking about Jesus being our **high priest** now! How do we know that Jesus **was—and still is**—a merciful high priest?

Because of how He **forgave** Peter after He had died and risen again! Once again, those of us who went to the Passion Play were reminded just recently of some of these things.

Jesus told the disciples that they would all be scattered from Him and He would be left alone (John 16:32). Peter boldly proclaimed that though **all** would be offended, he **would not** (Mt 26:33). Jesus warned Peter in **Mt 26:34** “...That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.” Peter replied that he would rather **die than deny** Christ! But **he slept**, instead of prayed. And he **followed afar off**—instead of staying near—when Jesus was taken away. And—after **denying Jesus** for the third time—the rooster crowed. **Luke 22:61-62** “And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter **remembered the word** of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.⁶² And Peter went out, and **wept bitterly.**”

Imagine how Peter felt! How defeated...and devastated...and discouraged he must have been! The last time he **looked on** Jesus was a reminder that he **had failed Jesus**. **Where** did Peter go? **What** did he do? We don’t know; the Bible is silent about **what Peter did** during the 3 days Jesus lay in the tomb.

As near as we can tell, Peter was **not at the cross** as Jesus was dying upon it. John is mentioned as being there, but not Peter. Peter was nowhere to be found. And—just like that—Peter’s life is ruined and we **never hear of him** again!

Thankfully, that’s not true! That’s not how it ends; we do hear of Peter again! How did **Jesus respond?**

1) Notice the **message of the angel** to the women who came to the empty tomb first. **Mark 16:7** “But go your way, tell His disciples **and Peter** that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you.” **Wasn't Peter a disciple?** Yes, he was! But the angel wanted Peter to know—because the Lord wanted Peter to know—that God had not given up on him!

2) In Luke 24, we read of Cleopas and another man who unknowingly walked and talked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. These two returned to Jerusalem to tell the eleven how they had seen Jesus. The eleven spoke first, though, and said in **Luke 24:34** “The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared **to Simon.**”

--**When** did this meeting take place? We don't know because the Bible doesn't say!

--**What** did Jesus say? Again, we don't know because the Bible doesn't tell us!

But we do know from John 21—which occurred **after** this private, unrecorded meeting with Peter—that Jesus forgave Peter...and restored Peter...and put him back to work. Once in John 21, Jesus told Peter to “Feed my lambs;” twice He told Peter to “Feed my sheep.” In essence, Jesus was saying ‘I'm not done with you, Peter. Get back to following me...and living for me...and serving me!’

I, for one, am glad that Jesus didn't just show He was merciful **by dying for us**—He also showed us He **is still merciful** after He rose from the dead! We should all be grateful for that! Why?

--Because there are times in our life that we are **on fire for God**—and then grow cold!

--There are times that we proclaim we will **always follow** Jesus—but then we stop!

--There are times that we cannot imagine we would **stoop so low as to curse** and deny Jesus, but then we do—with our **lips**...or our **lives**...or both!

Lastly, Jesus not only **was** merciful—He **still is!** How do we know that? Because God tells us that He is!

4. The proof that Jesus is still merciful

--Jesus **still says**, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Mt 11:28)

--According to Rom 8:39, there is **still nothing** that “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

--Heb 2:17—our verse for today—**still says** that Jesus is a merciful high priest in things pertaining to God.

--Heb 7:25 reminds us that “...He [Jesus] **ever liveth** to make intercession for them”—meaning us!

--I John 1:7 reminds us that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from **all sin.**”

--Notice the exhortation of the apostle John, the oldest living disciple and long-time follower of Jesus.

I John 2:1 “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an **advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:”

John is saying, ‘Don't sin!’ In verse 6 of the same chapter, he writes: ‘Try to live as Jesus lived! But if you fail, you have an advocate.’ Ryrie states that an advocate is “one summoned alongside, a helper or a patron in a lawsuit.” And then he points out this: John is the only NT writer that uses this word and it is usually translated “Comforter.”

Think about that! Don't sin—but if you do, you have **a Comforter**. Pretty safe to say that Jesus is our Comforter when we **repent** of our sin—not when we are doing it and loving it!

But...sometimes sin traps us. It binds us...it holds onto us—and won't let go. What then? Do we need to **break free first**—on our own—and **then come** to the merciful Jesus? I don't think so!

We're in Hebrews 2; turn the page to Hebrews 4. We'll look at this more next week, but look at vs 15. We have a high priest—Jesus—that **is touched** with the feelings of our infirmities. What are infirmities?

--Failures...sins...weaknesses.

Based on the fact that Jesus **is touched**—He is moved—by our weaknesses, what are we supposed to do?

Vs 16. “Come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may **obtain mercy**, and find grace to help in time of need.” **When** should we come to the throne of grace? In time of need—especially if the need **is mercy!**

So how is it between you and the Lord?

I'm told that there are people **who believe that they cannot be saved**; they believe they have done too much wrong in their life to be forgiven. I don't think I've met anyone like that, though—at least that I can recall.

On the other hand, I believe there are a **lot of God's children** that are slow to bring their **messed-up life** to the Lord. Why? Because they have a faulty view of God's mercy!

They think God's mercy is **like human mercy**—it runs out...and gives up on people. God's mercy isn't like that, though. He is rich in mercy...He will abundantly pardon...His arms are always open to the wayward prodigal.

So what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. If you've **never trusted Christ**, you certainly need to be forgiven. Come to Christ—and obtain mercy.
2. If you **have trusted Christ** but are away from Him, come back to Him.
3. If your friends or family members need mercy, point them to Christ.