

“Jesus as Priest”

Leviticus 16

Series: “The Thread: Finding Jesus in the Old Testament”

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Illus. Shaking gifts – One of the many aspects about Christmas that I enjoy most is some of the mystery involved with it. You know what I’m talking about? If you have children or grandchildren you do! This is especially true with my twins – they are of the age when a present is wrapped under a tree, and it has their name on it...the desperately want to know what’s in it!

And so, what do they do? They pick it up...they shake it...they stare at it and study the shape of it to see if they can’t figure out what it is? It’s awesome...and they are totally in the dark UNTIL Christmas day when they can take that wrapping paper off.

I thought about that as I studied for the message this week. We are continuing in *The Thread* series Christmas edition and we’ve talking about how all of the Old Testament points to or finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ.

See, God didn’t want his children...he didn’t want us to be like our kids at Christmas trying to figure out who the Messiah would be. He didn’t want us to be in the dark...keep us guessing at who this “anointed one” (the Christ) to come was.

And this is why he continually gave us pictures and people...signs and scenarios throughout the Old Testament that point toward the coming Messiah.

And if we just look carefully enough...if we would just think deeply enough about what we read in the Old Testament, we can’t help IF we’re aware of and familiar with the life and ministry of Jesus to see the connection and come to the conclusion that Jesus is Messiah.

We don’t have to guess about this...we just have to do the work of studying our Bible and asking God to reveal his truth to us.

We looked at four passages previously in this series, but in this Christmas edition of *The Thread* we are specifically looking at how Jesus fulfills the role and office of prophet, priest, and king.

Now, if you missed last week, I encourage you to go back and listen to it. If you remember, we said that in the Old Testament, the people of God interacted with God primarily through these three avenues...these three offices: Prophet, Priest, and King.

The title of the message is: **Jesus as Priest** - and we are going to follow much of the same outline today as we did with last week’s message on Jesus as Prophet.

We’ll begin by answering these questions:

1. “Who were the priests?”
2. “What did priests do?”

And then we’ll simply look at the life and ministry of Jesus and see if he fulfills this office. Then we’ll close out with a Christmas word of application to think about as we leave here today.

So, let’s start by answering this question: **Who were the priests?**

Now, just as it was with prophets, priests were consecrated and commissioned by God as represented in the act of anointing with oil. If you recall from last week, the anointing of oil symbolized the presence of God and calling of God on a person’s life.

When someone was anointed with oil and typically who we see anointed with oil in the Old Testament was prophets, priests, and kings - these men were set apart – and that’s a KEY TERM especially for priests – they were SET APART for a special and specific God-designed task in their life.

We’re going to talk about what their tasks were in just a moment, but let’s just break what I mean when I say they were to be set apart.

THE distinguishing factor that made a priest a priest was their calling to be separated out from the rest of Israel, and consecrated wholly to God. This is seen in the lineage they came from, the clothing they wore and the responsibilities they carried. They were to be a living representation in the most visible way possible of the holiness of God.

Let me just give you some examples of what I am talking about here. If you read the Old Testament...and some of you will start in the New Year with a New Year’s resolution to read the Bible through...and I think it’s a great resolution but what happens?

You get toward the end of Exodus and then into Numbers and if you make it to Leviticus you are like super saint, right? Sometimes we read and just get lost in the weeds – which is normal and natural - and it can sometimes discourage us. I’ve found this to be especially true when you get to chapters covering the work of the priests, and the descriptions of the Temple and so forth.

I totally get it, but what we see in all these details about this is the importance of holiness. Priests - who they are and at they are doing represents God – and anything God does is consistent with his character – he is HOLY – it’s his chief attribute!

So, priests – they had in-depth, detailed instructions on what they were to wear! Exodus 28 – there is an entire chapter on their clothing – from their linen undergarments that no one saw (only God) to the outer wear that made them stand out from among the rest of the people of Israel.

Exodus 28:1-5 – “Then bring near to you Aaron your brother (tell you more about him and his significance here in a sec), and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to

serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ² And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. ³ You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood. ⁴ These are the garments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests. ⁵ They shall receive gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen.”

THIS is what they wore. They were separated from the rest of Israel in that the tribe that they came from.

Like the prophets from last week, you didn't just decide to become one. You didn't interview to become a priest or work your resume and education and have your references checked and then get an interview to become one.

No, to become a priest you had to be a Levite! Levi was one of the twelve sons of Jacob – and his lineage is known as the “tribe of Levi”.

Numbers 3:5-13 – “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

⁶“Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him. (now, you get a sense for what they will do here and we'll work this out more in just a moment) ⁷They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. ⁸They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle. ⁹And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. ¹⁰And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death.” (you get a glimpse of how serious this is...no messing around with the holiness of God. You presume upon God and don't take your role and responsibility seriously, God would take you out! Just read (v. 3-4) that precedes these verses – Aaron's sons – priests themselves offer unauthorized fire and he kills them right then and there! Holiness – complete consecration!) ¹¹ **And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,**

¹²“Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine,¹³ for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the Lord.”

The firstborn in every family in Israel up to this time was considered the Lord's. Now, God says, “I want the tribe of Levi to be mine as well. They will serve me as priests.”

Priests were consecrated to God. Anointed with oil. Totally set apart from the clothes they wore to the lineage they came from, to the duties they performed.

Now, before we move into discussing what these specific duties were, there are two priests that are highlighted in scripture that we need to be aware of.

First, is...well, not necessarily first, but the one we will deal with first is Aaron. We just read his name in the Exodus and Numbers passages we read. He was a very significant “player” so to speak because Aaron was the first to hold the office of what is termed the “High Priest”.

Now, if regular priests were considered holy and set apart, up that even a little bit more when talking about the High Priest. Much of the book of Leviticus is about the standards of a High Priest in comparison to that of other priests.

A small example of that would be something like this. A regular priest could touch the dead body of a close relative. They would be considered unclean until they went through ceremonial cleansing, but the High Priest could never touch a dead body – not even if it was his mom or dad, son or daughter – NOTHING unclean.

The High Priest had a bit of a different wardrobe than the regular Levitical priests. When it came to the Tabernacle and later to the temple, the regular priests had certain duties they could perform, but only the High Priest could go into the Most Holy Place behind the veil – where the very presence of God dwelled and offer a blood sacrifice – and he could only do it once a year on the Day of Atonement.

This is who Aaron was and ALL the High Priests that followed, followed in his steps.

Another priest that you need to be aware of and he is referred to often in scripture is a priest by the name of Melchizedek. Now, let me tell you about Melchizedek. If the priesthood of Aaron is a hereditary priesthood, the priesthood of Melchizedek is a “royal priesthood”.

And here is why this is important. We are not told much about Melchizedek in scripture. Listen to what we do know about him though:

- His name means “king of righteousness”.
- He ruled over a place called Salem which in Hebrew means “peace” – the original word in Hebrew has its roots in the word “Shalom” – peace.

And so, Melchizedek was a royal priest who was considered a king of righteousness and peace. He is described in the New Testament book of Hebrews as:

Hebrews 7:3a – “He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.”

And so, Melchizedek is a picture of Christ...what is called in theological terms a “type” of Christ and the only time he is mentioned in the Old Testament outside of a verse in the psalms is in Gen. 14.

Abraham rescued his nephew, Lot and defeated a group of kings and peoples that had banded together and were making raids in the Jordan Valley area. When Abraham had returned from this battle the priest-king Melchizedek comes out to meet him, and listen to how the scripture describes Melchizedek and this encounter:

**Genesis 14:18-20 – “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)¹⁹ And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”
And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”**

So, two priests that we need to be aware of in scripture. Aaron, the High Priest and Melchizedek, the royal priest. Melchizedek would rank higher than Aaron because of his royal priesthood AND because Melchizedek ranks higher than Abraham – the father of the Jewish faith! We know this because Abraham offered to Melchizedek tithes and offerings, not the other way around.

We have seen who the priests are, now let’s answer question two: **What do priests do?**

Illus. Illustration! - ? – How we doing? Following okay? As I was looking through my notes, I knew I needed a little commercial break here...an illustration to give our minds a quick break, but I've got nothing! How bout them Astros!

There are four main duties a priest is to carry out. We won’t look at these in a great amount of detail due to time, but it’s important for you to know and understand what their responsibilities were:

1. Priests offered sacrifices

This is probably what they were best known for and was their primary role. We get glimpses of priestly sacrifices before the Law and sacrificial system even came into being. For example, Noah, Abraham, and Job all built altars and made sacrifices as an act of atonement and worship to God.

When you read the opening chapters of Leviticus you find that there were five major sacrifices and the priest was responsible for knowing what sacrifice to make at a certain time. They had to know how to inspect and treat the animal that was being sacrificed as well as what to do with its blood and body after it was sacrificed – and this was the thing about sacrifices – it was all about the blood.

Heb. 9:22 – “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

So, the priests in what they wore and in their calling, represented God before the people, but in their task of making sacrifices, they represented the people before God. We see this play out best in Leviticus 16 – it’s the Day of Atonement.

Again, we don't have time to go into full detail, but you've got to see this picture that is painted here.

Leviticus 16:1-7 – “The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the Lord and died,² and the Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.³ But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

⁴He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. (Notice the detail...everything this High Priest was doing was representing purity/holiness – outwardly for sure, BUT Aaron was human like me and you – that means he was a sinner! And he couldn't be pure/holy before God unless his sins were atoned for too! Thus (v. 5-6) **⁵And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. ⁶“Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. ⁷Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting.”**

If you were to keep reading, Aaron confesses his sin and slays the first unblemished goat and puts its blood on the altar. This is an act of what is called “propitiation” – this blood appeases the wrath of God.

Aaron then places his hands on the other goat and confesses the sins of the people and then sends that goat away into the wilderness – you've heard of the scapegoat?! That's it and in sending this goat away with the sins of the people it is the act of what is called “expiation” – our sins are taken away!

There's a reason when John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus on the day he baptized him: **John 1:29 – “The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (expiation)**

John would later write in **1 John 2:2 – “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”**

Jesus didn't just fulfill the office and role of the High Priest and every other priest as we will work out in a moment, he fulfilled the role of the unblemished lamb that was being sacrificed– the sacrifice of himself is what saves us from our sins!

2. Priests taught scripture

It was the job of the priests to teach the Law. When priests made sacrifices, they were teaching people what was acceptable to God. They were teaching people what God regarded as holy and

clean verses that which was considered unholy and unclean. This is part of what “guarding the temple” or “ministering in the tabernacle” consisted of.

Read some of the prophets writing...sometimes the judgment of God came upon the people of God primarily because the priests weren't doing their job in rightly teaching who God was and what he expected of them as a people.

Just think about it! Where else were they going to learn it? Priests who didn't do their job could cause people all sorts of harm because they weren't rightly taught what pleased God and what displeased him.

Same is true today by the way...much of the reason we are in the predicament we are in as a country as it relates to godlessness - a lot of it could be laid at the feet of people who supposedly represent God in pulpits and in churches across America that don't teach truth...they teach what itching ears want to hear...they compromise on the gospel and as a result you have a lot of people that have no idea who God is and what he truly desires for us.

Priests had an obligation to teach people about who God was and represent him to the people – and this is why Jesus butted heads with so many of the religious leaders during his day because they were NOT doing this! Wish I had to fully unpack more of this!

3. Priests made intercession

Part of what priests were responsible for was interceding to God on behalf of the people of Israel. You see all the time the priests offering up prayer on behalf of the people.

Ezra is a great example of this. You read how after the reconstruction of Jerusalem – Nehemiah is the one who rebuilt the walls and Ezra, the priest was responsible for restoring the worship.

The temple is rebuilt and rededicated, and it's Ezra that is sent to teach them God's Law and he prays for them – just read Ezra 9-10 – powerful two chapters of Ezra praying to God confessing the sins of the people and asking God for his mercy.

4. Priests pronounced blessing

You see throughout the pages of scripture priests pronouncing the blessing of God. The one we are probably most familiar with is what is called the “Aaronic Blessing”.

**Numbers 6:24-26 – “The Lord bless you and keep you;
²⁵ the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”**

Remember in 1 Samuel – it was Eli, the priest who saw Hannah deeply distressed and praying and weeping before God – she inquired what was wrong with her and after sharing with him that she desperately wanted a child, what did Eli do? He pronounced a blessing on her and told her that her request would be answered.

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist was a priest. He's in a time out – he can't talk as a consequence for not believing the angel God sent to him when he was told he would have a son that would be a forerunner to the Messiah. Once he gets out of his time out and opens his mouth, just read his pronouncement of blessing upon his child (Luke 1:67-79) – its beautiful!

This is what priests did. They: offered sacrifices, taught scripture, made intercession and pronounced blessings. Bottom line if you summed all of this up in one word – priests served as mediators.

Here's the definition of a **Mediator - a person who attempts to make people involved in a conflict come to an agreement; a go-between.**

Just hold on to that definition and let's turn the corner and ask: Does Jesus fulfill this office? This role? And the answer is absolutely 100%, YES!

There's an entire New Testament book dedicated to answering this question. It's called the book of Hebrews, and it was written to Jewish believers who were thinking about going back to their old way of life.

Simple faith in Jesus was hard for them to grasp - and that makes sense, right? Forever they had grown up in a culture that was deeply religious and it was rooted in the sacrificial system. That's NOT something that would be easy to just stop doing – it's all they knew!

And then Christ died. And the good news of the gospel is, you don't have to make sacrifices anymore, Jesus is the sacrifice. At Pentecost thousands of people believe and they take this "good news" message with him, and more converts are made.

But over time, the thought is, "Are we sure? Yes, let's believe by faith, but let's go back to the sacrifices and offerings – they're not that hard to participate in...we'll be welcome back to old family and friends that still worship in this way that wrote us off for following this new religion called "The Way". It can't be that bad if we just go back to some of those things..."

And the writer of Hebrews (we don't know who it is) he writes, and the entire book is essentially, "DON'T DO THAT! That day is over...it's obsolete!"

I don't have time to read you the whole book, so here's what I've done. There is SUCH power in the reading of God's word. I found some short passages from Hebrews, and rather than me try to show you the Thread of Jesus as Priest, it's best to just let whoever wrote Hebrews do it.

Does Jesus fulfill the role of priest? You be the judge. Here we go!

Heb. 4:14-15 – "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens (who is that high priest? You don't have to guess!), Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our

confession. ¹⁵ 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 (fully human), yet without sin (also fully divine).”

Heb. 5:1-6 – “For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; ⁶ as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

Jesus is a royal priest! – all of Hebrews 7 is about this and how Jesus is GREATER than Aaron...greater than Melchizedek! Listen to:

Heb. 7:26-28 – “For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.”

All of Hebrews 8 is about how Jesus is the High Priest of a greater covenant – the New Covenant! Hebrews 9...can I read two more passages?! Hebrews 9 – my goodness!!!

Heb. 9:11-12 – “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”

Just one more...I promise just one more! I remember where I was when the truth of this passage hit me (describe).

Heb. 10:11-14 – “And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”

Jesus is our High Priest. And he doesn't just offer sacrifices – he is the sacrifice! Jesus right now is acting as our priest as he intercedes for us RIGHT NOW – that's what he's doing at this very moment (Heb. 7:25). He teaches us scripture by his Holy Spirit as we open up his word and learn. He pronounces blessing on our life as we commit our lives to him.

Recall our mediator definition. **Mediator - a person who attempts to make people involved in a conflict come to an agreement; a go-between.**

This is Jesus – the conflict – we are sinners, and in our sin are separated from God. How is it going to be resolved?!

NOT by good works...NOT by going to church...NOT by making sacrifices...NOT by going to a priest and asking him to intercede on our behalf. NO! NONE of this will resolve the conflict of sin.

We need a mediator! Paul tells us what the solution is...WHO the solution is in **1 Tim. 2:5** – **“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...”**

Jesus, as Priest is our only hope. And so, like last week, in this Christmas series, I’m giving you a Christmas word of application to think on and reflect on throughout the week.

When I think of Jesus as prophet, it’s the word WONDER. When I think of Jesus as Priest, it’s the word: **JOY**

Illus. Christmas movies/Elf – The spirit meter was low so the sleigh couldn’t fly. They had to sing to get the Christmas spirit going. Well, if your joy meter is a little low this Christmas, you know how to get it going – think and reflect on Jesus as priest.

Just think about Jesus, leaving heaven on a mission to save us from our sins. Reflect on how in our sins we were separated – there was a conflict between us and God and we needed a go-between!

And Jesus came to this earth to be our go-between! He is not only our High Priest that gets us to God. He is the sacrifice FOR our sins! “In Christ” ALL our sins are covered and atoned for – nothing more we can do/need to do – that will bring joy.

Think for a moment that Jesus is interceding for you RIGHT NOW. I know Christmas is tough. For many, this is a year where you struggle because it reminds you of what you don’t have.

- Someone you love is no longer here...
- Or maybe it’s a health crisis or financial crisis or relationship struggle...

I don’t know what it is that’s causing you to be down – I do know this though – Jesus is interceding for you and if you think on that long enough it will bring you joy.

Think about their veil being torn at his death, representing access to God – we can approach God at ANY time! We don’t have to put on special garments...go through special routines. We just have to “put on Christ” by faith and we can approach God with boldness – that’ll bring some joy.

If the joy meter is a little low this Christmas, let’s turn our minds and hearts toward Jesus as Priest and see if joy doesn’t start to grow from within. Would you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.