



What is the Lord doing now?

Part B

Our Great High Priest

Introduction

Simply stated, a **priest** is one who ministers before God on behalf of man; one who officiates between man and God. The term **priesthood** generally refers to the *existence* and *responsibilities* of priestly ministry vested in a person or persons. We speak therefore of the Aaronic priesthood or the priesthood of the Lord. Its propriety and principles are first seen in Abel and his righteousness (Heb 11:4). There we get the elements of true priesthood - an *offering* an *altar* and a *sacrifice*. "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering" (Gen 4:4).¹

It becomes clear why we never read in Scripture of a priest or priesthood among men before the fall in Eden. There was no need for an offering, an altar or a sacrifice because sin had not entered the world. It was the time of man's innocence during which he enjoyed unfettered fellowship with God. After the fall however, all this changed dramatically. Man was no longer innocent. Sin had entered the world through man's wilful disobedience and it separated him from a God who is holy and righteous. As a result the need arose for a priest and, in some cases a body of priests - a priesthood to represent and intercede for man before God. And so it is only after the fall that we hear of priests and forms of priesthood. They distinguish the *dispensation* or age in which they are found, and they are *themselves* distinguished according to their pattern and origin.

First of all there was the **patriarchal** priesthood in the days of Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, marked by the family altar and its sacrifice. Second, there was the **royal** priesthood seen in Melchizedek – the priest-king, who is a figure of Christ who is a Priest after the order of Melchizedek. Third, we had the **national** priesthood of Israel. God's desire was that every Israelite was to be a priest before Him (Ex 19:6). However, the people failed through idolatry and God brought in the fourth type of priesthood – a **tribal** priesthood which characterized the dispensation of Law. The tribe of Levi, more particularly, a family within it (Aaron and his sons), were charged with the responsibilities of priestly ministry within Israel. It is often referred to as the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood, which is an OT figure of the pattern of Christ's present priesthood.² When we leave the OT we come to the dispensation known as the Church Age. We now have the fifth form of priesthood – the priesthood of **all believers** (in Christ). Every person redeemed by Christ composes a priesthood. Unlike Israel, we are a holy nation, a holy and royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:5, 9).³ Contrary to the belief among some, we do not become saints through verdicts of the Vatican; nor do we become priests by attending a seminary. We become saints and priests through faith in Christ. Last, but never least, we have the *eternal* and *unchangeable* **priesthood of Christ** and the glorious ministry of our Great High Priest, which we now take up.

The Place and Posture of His High-Priestly Ministry

Whereas the Lord's past ministry was on earth, the scene of His rejection and humility, His present ministry is in heaven – the scene of His exaltation. By virtue of the merit of His past ministry, the Lord is now exalted and seated at the right hand of God. The eminent credentials of Christ's superior priesthood presented in the Hebrew Epistle begin with His exaltation at God's right hand. "[Christ] who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when He had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3). The writer concludes his presentation of the Lord's unequalled and unique priestly resume with this same truth. "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb 8:10; 8:1-2).

¹In the NT we have the Greek word *hiereus* translated as "priest." It speaks of one who offers sacrifices and attends to the duties associated with them. The intermediary nature of it is reflected in the word *pontifex*, which is Latin for priest or a "bridge-builder."

²The other Levites were the servants of the priests, Aaron and his sons. All priests were Levites but not all Levites were priests.

³The idea and institution of a human priesthood on earth comprising a select class is an anathema to God and a denial of the blessed place all believers have within the sanctuary as priests through the cross-work of Christ.

The Scope of His High-Priestly Ministry

“And having an 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 10:21-22). The “house of God” is the Church. The blood-bought provisions of our Lord’s priestly ministry are the entitlement of every believer in Christ. “Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house are we” (Heb 3:6).⁴ Note the collective pronoun – not “ye” but “we.” It is an entitlement not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done and who He is, evidenced by His exaltation at God’s right hand. It is a ministry that includes and rightly to be claimed by every saint through simple faith unto salvation. It excludes every sinner by the absence of it. It is reserved for the saints of God who are “purged worshippers” and who have “no more conscience of sins” (Heb 10). The divine ministry to the sinner continues today however, according to divine grace cradled and sounded out in the preaching of the Cross through the Spirit of Christ; but it is not a priestly ministry.

The Nature of His High-Priestly Ministry

It is before God

The Lord’s priestly ministry *views* us as a **redeemed people** - redeemed **by God** and **before God** **within** the heavenly sanctuary. It serves to sustain and enrich the *privileges* and *responsibilities* we possess **from** God as His redeemed people. These principles were embedded in the priestly ministry of the OT. The OT priesthood was exercised in regard to a people redeemed through the mighty arm of the Lord – the nation of Israel. It sought to bring out the blessings and responsibilities that God ordained for Israel in redemption, to enable a redeemed people to worship Him and in doing bear a testimony to those outside the commonwealth of Israel.

Now this is noticeably different to the Lord’s ministry as our Advocate, which we take up in Part C of this Series. The distinction is critical to understanding the nature of the Lord’s present ministry and how it impacts practically on the believer. The ministry of the Lord as Advocate *views* us as **children born into the family of God** with God as our **Father**. Accordingly, the Lord’s advocacy deals with the one thing that can spoil the fellowship or communion with the Father and His children - sins that we may commit in our walk. Not so the Lord’s priestly ministry. We are seen here as a redeemed people without sin, as saints before God perfected in Christ. As a result we stand before God having an unencumbered title to *enter* the *sanctuary*. By unencumbered we mean no sin on us or in us. “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified [i.e., the saints] are all of one” (Heb 2:11). We are deemed “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1). Christ takes us where Aaron could take no one – into the holiest of all. We enter on the effectual ground of Christ as the *Sin-Offering*, the offering that “put away sin.” It was the blood of the sin offering that enabled the high priest of old to enter the holiest of all (the blood of the burnt offering was left at the altar). And so when we come to the various passages in Scripture that relate to the Lord’s priestly ministry, they speak of things that relate to *God* and His holy sanctuary. “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” (Heb 2:17). Again, “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God” (Heb 5:1). Correspondingly, the “things pertaining to God” are ministered within *the presence of God* – the heavenly sanctuary. “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb 9:24).

Let us be very clear concerning these principles of distinction, otherwise we are at risk of muddling the entire subject of the Lord’s present ministry and lose out on the practical benefits particular to them. The Lord’s priestly ministry is to do with us as *redeemed saints of God within the sanctuary*; His advocacy is to do with us as *children born into the family of God* and our *walk on earth* as members of His family.

⁴“If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.” This latter part of the verse does not refer to a “conditional membership” of the house. The writer is speaking about those Jews – the false professors, who in reality are mere fellow travelers with Christianity. They are identified as those who fall back into Judaism for it held the real desire of their hearts.

Our priesthood – also in regard to God

This distinction becomes more apparent when we consider our own priesthood, noted above. We are “made kings and priest unto God” (Rev 5:10).⁵ We compose a *holy priesthood* “to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). It views us as having gone into the sanctuary as purged worshippers by virtue of the Sin Offering that was Christ. In that same chapter of First Peter, we are also seen as a *royal priesthood*, the “people of God” called by God (v 10). “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him [God] who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Pet 2:9).⁶ This royal priesthood is in the likeness of the ministry of Christ in His Melchizedek priesthood in that coming millennial day, when He shall come from the heavenly sanctuary and manifest and magnify the Excellencies of God on earth before all men. We abide in the sanctuary as a holy priesthood and when we come out we exercise our royal priesthood. We are indeed holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.

It is on behalf of every believer in Christ

The Lord’s priestly ministry is *only* in regard to the *saints* of God – and as we noted in Part A, we are speaking specifically about the saints of God within the Church dispensation. Scripture makes this abundantly clear. It is the Lord as our Great High Priest who has entered the presence of God “for us” – the believers in Christ. He is the High Priest over the “House of God” whose “house we are” as we noted earlier. Only those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ are of the “house of God” and are entitled to claim the blessings of Christ’s priestly ministry.

It is available to every believer in Christ

The collective personal pronoun “we” in the crowing text in the Hebrew passage relating to the Lord as our Great High Priest, leaves no doubt that His priestly ministry is available to every believer. “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb 8:1). It is a universal resource – a rich legacy of Christ in His death on the cross to each and every redeemed saint of God. It is one of the many truths that we testify to at the Supper when we “show forth this death.”

It is accessible to every believer in Christ

Something may be universally available but not universally accessible. There are things in life that are available to us all, but not all of us have the means to access them. For example, this article is available to the world at large on the internet. However, those who do not have access to the world-wide web due to technical or financial limitations cannot avail themselves of it. The Lord’s High-priestly ministry is available to every believer and, what is more, it is *freely* accessible to every believer. Its cost was fully borne by the Lord Himself. And so we have that glorious exhortation in Hebrews, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; And having an 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).

⁵ Revelation 1:5-6 is not an exception. “And from Jesus Christ ... Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood. And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” The expression “unto God and His Father” teaches that our priestly ministry is before God, while at the same time *identifying* God as the Father of Christ. It is not “hath made us kings and priests unto God and to *our* Father.”

⁶ Showing “forth the praises” must be taken within the context of the chapter and Scripture in general. It is again praising **God** and through *this* priestly activity, believers – those of the house of God, are built up in their holy faith. *This* is our ministry as royal priests – unto God, and through it the edification of the saints of God. Blessing is in the character of our Lord’s ministry as a royal priest, one that is after the order of Melchizedek and according to the New Covenant. Our priestly ministry to the *saints* is corroborated firstly, in that it agrees with the context given in verse 5 which refers to a “spiritual house” – even the “house of God” whose “house we are.” Secondly, verse 5 together with verse 9 brings together the two aspects of our priestly ministry to God – “sacrifice” and “praise.” “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Heb 13:15).

Further aspects of the nature of the Lord's priestly ministry

Let us now consider further details concerning the nature of our Lord's priestly ministry. As noted in Part A of the Series, the Lord's ministry as our Great High Priest can be broadly described as a work of *prevention*, which necessarily includes His work of *representation*, *intercession* and *presentation*. In these respects it conforms to the pattern of priesthood that belonged to Aaron and the high priests of the OT. The *pattern* of priesthood may be usefully identified as the way in which the priesthood operates – its functioning. In this it is distinguished from the *order* of priesthood – its origin. Though now of the pattern of Aaron's priesthood, the Lord's priesthood is not of the Aaronic order, because His priesthood is everlasting and unchanging. "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood" (Heb 7:24).

Representation

Consider first His priestly work of *representation*. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb 3:1). In His past ministry as the Apostle the Lord brought *God before us*. Now, as our Great High Priest, He brings *us before God*. "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb 9:24). Doubtless inspired by a recollection of the breastplate and shoulder garments of Aaron, the hymn writer was moved to pen fitting words concerning our Great High Priest and His ministry in representation.

"Jesus, in His heav'nly temple, sits with God upon His throne....on His heart our names are graven;
On His shoulders we are borne."

How blessed! The Man who redeemed us *to* God now represents us *before* God. There is a Man now exalted in "heaven itself" who appears before God on our behalf. This is what the expression "for us" means. It is an expression often used in connection with the blessed provisions in Christ. For example, we have it in relation to His past ministry. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died *for us*" (Rom 5:8). "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up *for us* all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things" (Rom 8:32)? "For he hath made him to be sin *for us*, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). But now in His present ministry He is within the heavenly sanctuary, "a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens" (Heb 4:14). He is there *for us* – representing every saint of God on earth, which brings us to consider His work in *intercession* and *presentation*.

Intercession

The Lord intercedes for us as our Advocate and Great High priest. The latter is our present subject. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched [have sympathy] with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin [i.e., sin excepted]" (Heb 4:15). The generic term "tempted" refers to trials, which are in this instance defined by the term "infirmities." Infirmities are not our sins and cannot be our sins for three reasons.

1. *The term itself*: "Astheneia" means "weaknesses" or "feebleness." It is used by Paul to illustrate His dependence upon the Lord in times of spiritual weariness. "And He [the Lord] said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor 12:9). It can never be said that Paul is declaring that he "glory in his sins." Rather, he is bearing testimony to the priestly work of Christ during a time of trial.
2. *The holiness of the Lord*: The Lord who is holy cannot in any way have sympathy with our sins. Sins incur divine wrath and judgment – never divine sympathy. God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab 1:13). So what are the trials envisaged here? They are the wearying trials which the Lord experienced in His path as a Man on earth – the path of sorrow, hunger, thirst, humiliation,

unjust accusation and rejection: every trial, except that which involves sin, for the Lord could never be tempted with sin. Satan came and “found nothing” in Him – no sinful root in Him and so no fruit (sins). Christ *did* no sin (1 Pet 2:22); He *knew* no sin (2 Cor 5:21); because *in* Him is no sin (1 Jn 3:5).

3. *The holiness of the Lord’s redeemed*: This is a matter of our *standing* before God. Can we stand before Him “partly redeemed?” Impossible! A person is either redeemed or not redeemed. Furthermore, we have been redeemed by His Son - “perfected forever” and sanctified – set apart to God (Heb 10:14). This is how the Lord’s High-Priestly ministry *sees* us and *deals* with us – as a *redeemed* people who stand before God forever without sin in or on us.⁷ Accordingly, there can be no thought of a broken relationship with God due to sin or our sins. There is no *need* then for the Lord’s High-Priestly ministry to deal with the sins in a believer’s life. It all to do with our standing as a purchased possession before God (and not our *state* as in His advocacy. It is not here the fellowship between the Father in heaven and His children on earth, which can be broken by sin in life).

We identified the nature of Christ’s priestly ministry as a work of “prevention.” We can see now what this means. It is when we are wearying under the weight of infirmities such as physical deprivation, loneliness, isolation and rejection that we are prone to weaken and stumble into doubt and sin. During such times we are more prone to giving up and fail to “hold fast the confession” (Heb 4:14). Though redeemed saints of God and accepted in the Beloved, we still possess a vulnerable and corruptible nature. The Lord knows this, and being in the presence of God “for us,” He intercedes on our behalf before God. What does this involve? He pleads before God that we may be spiritually strengthened - *kept from* trails as well as sustained *through them*, according to the will and purposes of God. This priestly ministry of intercession is our constant resource. “But this *Man*, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Heb 7:24-26). Knowing and *owning* that the Lord is able to minister to us during times of spiritual trial, is an abiding spring of comfort and joy. But to what purpose? It is that we may be encouraged to boldly enter the *presence* of God and draw near to Him within the sanctuary and find help in times of spiritual want. “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:15-16).

Presentation

But there is more. It is not just about us entering into the presence of God for our need, but also to give *praise* to Him because He has supplied all our need “according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Php 4:19). It speaks of *our* ministry as *holy* priests unto God. “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings” (Mal 3:8). We are worshipping priests, which brings before us the Lord’s priestly ministry in the *presentation* of our worship of God as a redeemed people. Knowing, owning and experiencing the Lord’s High-Priestly ministry during times of trial uplifts our hearts, enabling us to render “by Him” – “the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name” (Heb 13:15). Such is *our* present ministry according to our *holy* priesthood, to which Christ as our Great High Priest adds His fragrance. And so we see that Christ’s ministry as our High Priest is also to do with preserving and strengthening our relationship with God as worshipping redeemed priests. “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5).

⁷ The expression “forever” (*eis dienekes*) has the compound thought of *eternity* and *continuity*. But what about the sins we commit after salvation? How are they dealt with? These come under the Lord’s ministry as our Advocate – our subject in Part C of the Series “What is the Lord Doing Now.”

Intimations of His High-Priestly Ministry

The NT record is adorned with occasions that prefigure the Lord's present ministry as our Great High Priest. There are three that particularly come to mind which reveal His priestly sympathy and preservation. First we have His tender support for a spiritually challenged Peter. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Lk 22:31-32). Note the comforting words of our "Forerunner!" It is not "I will pray for you" but "I have prayed for you." Time and again the Lord intimates His gracious priestly ministry in His ways with Peter, in that He is able to humble, yet never humiliate the sometimes restless and redoubtable apostle. Second, observe the consoling tears of our "Friend" who is "not ashamed to call us His brethren." "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" (Heb 2:17). We see the Lord in His consolations at Bethany, and then at the grave of Lazarus – weeping, such that the onlookers remarked, "Behold how he loved him" (Jn 11:36).

Perhaps the deepest intimation of the Lord's High-Priestly intercession and sympathy was demonstrated upon the Cross. It is not, as we may suppose seen in His prayer of mercy – "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). That was a matter of sin and forgiveness – not sympathy and succor. Rather, it is seen in His words to a disciple, born out of His own present deep distress. Loneliness has a singular power to undermine the joy and priestly service of the most robust child of God – perhaps because it has the ability to create the feeling of abandonment. What dreadful darkness invades and grips the soul when it falls prey to the sense of abandonment – forsaken by friends, family, fellow believers - and even by God Himself. Job was a companion to it. The Lord in His sojourn on earth was well acquainted with it. "He came unto His own, and His own received him not" (Jn 1:11). "The foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Lk 9:58). Then, in the ninth hour we hear His soul's deep cry of travail, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me" (Matt 27:46). Yet, during His hour of abandonment and imminent death for sin, He anticipated the looming loneliness of His mother. "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (Jn 19:26-27). Indeed, "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." What an object lesson for us – not now in regard to our holy priesthood, but in regard to our ministry as a *royal* priesthood, which is sustained by the Lord's priestly ministry on our behalf. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood ... that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet 2:9). We have it too in the instance of Peter noted above. It was not simply that the Lord prayed for Peter, but that after Peter was restored by the Lord's intercession, that Peter was to "strengthen his brethren." We have here a vital and often ignored connection between the Lord's High-Priestly ministry and our own ministry as priests – prefigured by the "ribband of blue." The "heavenly" ribband of blue on the hems of the garments of the Israelites complemented the blue head-band of the High Priest, symbolizing the connection between his ministry within the holiest and the ministry of God's people in the light of it. It was a provision for the wilderness, for a redeemed pilgrim people – not Canaan. It was ordained without the defining edict "when ye come into the Land."⁸ Have we known the blessed preservation of the Lord's intercession? Have we then set about the royal priestly duty before God to serve our brethren – to encourage, exhort and edify them as the indwelling Spirit of God leads according to our appointed spiritual gifts and abilities?

⁸The ribband of blue is never spoken of after its institution, which has led some to suggest that it was given essentially as a figure of the Lord as the Great High Priest in relation to the Church, which has been called out of the world.

The Qualifications for His High-Priestly Ministry

There are two things that the Lord's priestly ministry requires, each unique to Him and to His priesthood – His deity and perfect humanity.

His deity

Our Lord is *able* to be our High Priest because of His deity and His perfect humanity. On the one hand He has to possess unceasing and undiminished deity in order to intercede on behalf of *each* and *every* believer before God and, what is more, do so while meeting every demand of divine righteousness. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa 41:10). This is why the Epistle to the Hebrews which singularly presents Christ as our High Priest begins with a declaration of His deity. He is the "brightness of his glory, and the express image of His Person." "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom" (Heb 1:8).

His perfect humanity

The Lord must also be man so He can effectively sympathize with us in our trials. The Word who was God became flesh. This is why in Hebrews Chapter 2 His sinless humanity is presented. His life as a man among men was necessary to become a fitting High Priest. As redeemed pilgrims facing the trials of earth, what do we require in a high priest? Who would a man redeemed from the deprivations of bondage go to find the wanted sympathy in times of need? To the very person who redeemed him, who himself endured similar trials and temptations. No other will do; because no other was so moved in his heart and soul to pay the price of his redemption and, in addition, who once walked where he is now walking. No other could be *merciful* and *faithful* to the one who was redeemed. For this cause our Great High Priest entered into manhood – perfect manhood of course. "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 [propitiation] for the sins of the people" (Heb 2:17).⁹ God the Son *voluntarily* took the path of a Man; a path of sorrow, hunger, thirst, humiliation, unjust accusation and rejection. He is therefore eminently qualified and able to support those who experience such trials (v.18). "Though he were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb 5:8). It is not that He learned "how to obey" because He was and is inherently the obedient Son. Rather, it was that He learned what it *was* to obey as a Man in an unrighteous world. He knew what it was to walk as the perfect Man in the wilderness. He is therefore able to uphold those who walk in the wilderness who are perfected in Him. He is a merciful and faithful High Priest, "for in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted" (Heb 2:18). Accordingly, He is fitted to represent and intercede for those who have been redeemed by Him before God. There is a further precious aspect to His sympathetic manhood in regard to His faithfulness as our Great High Priest. Because of Him, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able" (1 Cor 10:13).

The Basis of His High-Priestly Ministry - His shed blood

Christ entered His office and ministry as our Great High Priest on the basis or ground of the infinite value of His sacrifice and shed blood. "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:24-26). The Lord, as the perfect Man, unlike the imperfect priests of old did not need to offer up a sacrifice for Himself in order to enter the holiest (Lev 9:7). Neither did He, like the imperfect animal sacrifices of old have to be offered up as a sacrifice for sins repeatedly. Observe the abundant

⁹ Significantly, when the Lord's work as our Advocate is in view it is not a case of a "merciful and faithful" Advocate, but a matter of "justice" and "faithfulness." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9). We take up this distinction in Part C of this Series.

and absolute testimony to all this in Scripture. “[Christ] Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this [i.e., the sins of the people] He did once, when He offered up Himself” (Heb 7:27). “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb 9:12). “But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12). The unfolding of the Lord’s priestly ministry in Hebrews begins with the grand and grounding truth of His work of propitiation for sins. “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 [propitiation] for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17).

Old Testament Type

We have an instructive picture of all this in the work of Aaron the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). On that day he divested himself of his high-priestly garments of glory and beauty. He presented himself before God in plain linen robes - as one of the priests. He was required to do this in association with the work of atonement for the sins of the people. When this was accomplished, he put on his high-priestly garments of glory and beauty and began his high-priestly ministry of intercession and representation – typified in the ephod, breastplate, Urim and Thummim. How wondrously all this foreshadows the high-priestly work of the Lord. He divested Himself of His outward glory and was “made like unto His brethren.” He went to Calvary and in the days of His flesh there put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. On the basis of this accomplished work He now acts as our Great High Priest crowned with glory and honour. This is where the Epistle to the Hebrews begins. Chapter 2 starts with His finished work of propitiation. It lays the foundation for His High-Priestly work of intercession which is unfolded in the later chapters, where we see Him in His garments of beauty and glory. As the redeemed, we are on the Lord’s heart “when He goeth in before the LORD.” Unlike Aaron, the Lord *Himself* has borne the judgment of the redeemed which He bears “upon his heart before the LORD continually” (cf Lev 28:30). “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb 8:1-2).