

Titles of Jesus Christ (#3)

The High Priest

Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

So far we have studied two titles of Jesus Christ: The Messiah and the Advocate. Today we are going to study a third title of the Lord Jesus.

^{NAS} **Hebrews 4:14** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (Heb 4:14 NAS)

Here it says that Jesus the Son of God is our great high priest. What does it mean that he is our great high priest? In order to understand the meaning of this title, the high priest, first we have to look into the Law in the Hebrew Bible to understand the duty of the high priest.

The duty of the high priests in the Hebrew Bible

After the Israelites came out of Egypt, God gave instructions to Moses to set up a Tabernacle, which is a meeting place between God and the Israelites (Tabernacle simply means a tent of meeting). Inside there was a curtain dividing the Tabernacle into two parts: the first part was called the Holy Place, and behind the curtain there was the second part called the Holy of holies.

^{NAS} **Hebrews 9:6-7** Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the divine worship, ⁷ but into the second only the high priest *enters*, once a year, not without *taking* blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. (Heb 9:6-7 NAS)

This passage Hebrews 9:6-7 says that every day the priests would enter the Holy Place (the first part of the Tabernacle) to offer daily sacrifices. But into the second part of the Tabernacle (the Holy of holies) only the high priest would enter once a year to offer sacrifices for sins. Then on which day the high priest would offer sacrifices for sins?

^{NAS} **Leviticus 16:29** “And *this* shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls, and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you; (Lev 16:29 NAS)

^{NAS} **Leviticus 16:34** “Now you shall have this as a permanent statute, to make atonement for the sons of Israel for all their sins once every year.” And just as the LORD (Yahweh) had commanded Moses, so he did. (Lev 16:34 NAS)

Leviticus is one of the five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) of the Law for the Israelites in the Hebrew Bible. These two passages Leviticus 16:29 and Leviticus 16:34 clearly show that on the 10th day of the 7th month every year the Israelites should make atonement for all their sins.

^{NAS} **Leviticus 25:9** “You shall then sound a ram’s horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land. (Lev 25:9 NAS)

This passage Leviticus 25:9 confirms the 10th day of the 7th month in the Hebrew calendar is the day of atonement Yom Kippur (יום כִּפּוּרִים in Hebrew).

But even the high priest himself also committed sins, therefore he had to offer sacrifices for his own sins first, then he offered sacrifices for the sins of the people. Besides that, the high priest also represented his people in other matters: he interceded for the people, he also asked God for guidance on behalf of the people.

The Lord Jesus as the high priest

Here the passage Hebrews 4:14 says that the Lord Jesus is called the high priest. What does he do exactly?

1. The first thing: The Lord Jesus offered himself as the sacrifice for our sins

^{NAS} **Hebrews 9:11-14** But when Christ appeared *as* a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:11-14 NAS)

This passage says that our high priest the Lord Jesus Christ entered the Tabernacle – the tent of meeting not made with human hands, which means it is made by Yahweh God; it is not of this creation, that means it is in heaven. He entered not with the blood of goats and calves, the sacrificial animals, but entered through his own blood; that means he himself is the sacrifice for our sins.

We just saw that the high priest of Israel had to offer sacrifice for himself first, because he also committed sins. But the Lord Jesus has no sin at all, so he doesn't have to offer sin offerings for himself, and neither does he offer sacrifices year after year. The Lord Jesus entered the holy of holies once for all, and instead of offering sacrificial animals he offered himself as the perfect sacrifice and obtained eternal redemption for us.

The sacrifices in the Old Testament couldn't really take away the sins of the people, they were simply reminders to remind the Israelites of their sins. But the blood of the Lord Jesus can wash away our sins and cleanse our conscience. As a result of that, we no longer feel guilty over our sins so that we can serve the living God.

This is the first thing the Lord Jesus does as a high priest. Please take note of this, if your sins have been cleansed, you won't feel guilty of your sins any more. On the other hand, if you still feel guilty of your past sins, it means that your sins have not been cleansed, you have no peace in your hearts, as a result of that you cannot serve Yahweh God with a clear conscience. In which case you would have to do something, you need to repent of your sins and ask Yahweh God for forgiveness.

2. The second thing: The Lord Jesus always intercedes for us

^{NAS} **Hebrews 7:24-25** but He, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently. ²⁵ Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:24-25 NAS)

Here it says the Lord Jesus is the high priest forever because he lives forever, so he always intercedes for us. This is the second thing: The Lord Jesus always intercedes for us.

3. The third thing: We can draw near to God

^{NAS} **Hebrews 10:19-22** Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the

veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19-22 NAS)

Here it says that by the blood of the Lord Jesus we can enter the holy place and draw near to the throne of God with a clear conscience.

In the Gospel account of the Lord's death, the curtain of the Temple was torn in two.

^{NAS} **Matthew 27:50-51** And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up *His* spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split, (Mat 27:50-51 NAS)

This curtain separates the holy place from the holy of holies. The tearing of the curtain symbolizes that truth that the people of God can enter the holy of holies right before the throne of Yahweh God.

Our response to the wonderful grace of Yahweh God

This is such a wonderful grace; how should we respond to such grace?

1. We do not keep on sinning deliberately

^{NAS} **Hebrews 10:26-29** For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of* two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb 10:26-29 NAS)

Some non-Christians or even some Christians think that as long as we confess our sins every time after we sin, God will forgive us and everything would be alright. That simply is not true. This passage says that if we willfully keep on sinning after having received the knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire that will consume the adversaries. We should never take sin lightly.

2. We offer up sacrifice of praise and good deeds

^{NAS} **1 Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1Pe 2:9 NAS)

Here it says that Christians belong to the royal priesthood, which means that every Christian is a priest. For the meaning of priests and the duties of priests, please refer to my earlier sermon in the series called Titles of Christians, specifically sermon #11 on “Priests”. But we don’t need to offer sacrifice for sins because the Lord Jesus offered himself once for all. Instead we offer a sacrifice of praise, our praise to Yahweh God is a sacrifice to Him.

^{NAS} **Hebrews 13:15-16** Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. ¹⁶ And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Heb 13:15-16 NAS)

This passage says that when we give thanks for God’s name and when we do good and share with others, that’s our sacrifice of praise. Do you know that?