

Christ's Priestly Office.

by Edward Payson

Edward Payson's sermon emphasizes Christ's role as the ultimate High Priest, Tabernacle, and Sacrifice, fulfilling the Old Testament types and providing access to God for believers.

Scripture: John 14:6, Philippians 3:8, Colossians 2:9, 1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 4:16, Hebrews 7:25, Hebrews 8:1, Hebrews 9:22, 1 Peter 1:18, 1 John 2:2

Topics: "Christology", "Sacerdotal Ministry"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the significance of Jesus Christ as the ultimate High Priest, the true tabernacle, and the atoning sacrifice, emphasizing how he fulfills and surpasses the roles of the Levitical priests, the tabernacle, and the sacrifices in the Old Testament. Payson explains how Jesus is the Christian's tabernacle, high priest, and sacrifice, drawing parallels between the Jewish practices and Christ's redemptive work. He urges believers to appreciate the divine origin and truth of the Scriptures, highlighting the importance of understanding the Old Testament in relation to the New Testament and the gospel of salvation through Christ.

Transcript

"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum; We have such a 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. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer"

Hebrews 8:1-3

apostle informs us, that the Levitical law, with its tabernacle, its priesthood, its altars, and its sacrifices, was a shadow of good things to come; but that the body, or substance of which they were a shadow, was Christ. In other words, they resembled Christ, just as a shadow resembles the body which projects it. They exhibited a kind of outline of his person, character, offices and work. This truth is stated and illustrated at considerable length in the preceding chapters.

In our text the apostle gives a brief summary of his statements respecting it: 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. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is necessary that

this man have somewhat also to offer. That we may understand the import of this passage; it is necessary to recollect, that the three principal things under the Mosaic dispensation. were the tabernacle, the priests, and the sacrifices.

On these every thing else depended. Take away these and nothing valuable was left. Now in our text the apostle intimates, that each of these three things was a type of Christ; or that he is to his people, under the Christian dispensation, what the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrifices were to the Jews. He is our tabernacle, our high priest, and our atoning sacrifice. Each of these assertions we propose to illustrate. 1. Jesus Christ is the Christian's tabernacle, or he is to his people, what the tabernacle was to the Jews.

The true tabernacle, of which the apostle here speaks, and which he informs us the Lord pitched, and not man, was the body, or human nature of Christ. The Jewish tabernacle, was pitched by men. But the body of Christ was prepared by God. He says himself to his Father, A body hast thou prepared me. And he said to the Jews, during his residence on earth; Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again. But, adds the inspired penman, he spoke of the temple of his body.

Now the temple, as you are doubtless aware, was of the same nature, and designed to answer the same purposes as the tabernacle, and differed from it only in being more permanent and substantial. Calling his body the temple, was therefore the same as calling it the tabernacle. By calling his body, the true tabernacle, the apostle intimates that the Jewish tabernacle was not the true one, but only a shadow or type of it. That he gives it this appellation with perfect propriety, a moment's reflection will convince us.

The Jewish tabernacle was the only place on earth where God dwelt in a peculiar manner; the only place where he was accessible; the only place where he could be found; the only place where he could be approached on a mercy-seat; the only place where he answered the inquiries of his worshippers; the only place where offerings could be acceptably presented him. Hence the pious Jews, whenever they prayed, turned their faces towards the tabernacle, and afterwards towards the temple; and they addressed their, prayers to Jehovah, as to him that dwelt between the cherubim, that is the cherubim which overshadowed the mercy-seat in the most holy place.

Now in all these respects the tabernacle was a type of Christ. In all these respects, his body or human nature is the true tabernacle. In him alone God dwells: for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. God can be found, he can be approached acceptably, nowhere else; for through Jesus Christ, says an apostle, we have access to the Father, and in him alone are we accepted. As the tabernacle was the appointed meeting-place between God and the Jews, so Jesus Christ is the appointed meeting-place between God and sinners now.

As the mercy-seat was in the tabernacle, so, an apostle informs us, Christ is set forth or exhibited as a mercy-seat through faith in his blood. They, and they only who come to God in Christ, will find him on a mercy-seat, or, in other words, find him ready to show mercy. There is salvation, says an apostle, and of course there is mercy, in no other. And as from the tabernacle, God communicated his will, so he now communicates it through Jesus Christ. He is the only true light.

In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and through him alone are they dispensed to mortals. As the Jews, when they prayed, turned their faces towards the tabernacle, so we are directed to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, looking to him by faith; and as Jehovah was then addressed, as one who dwelt between the Cherubim, so he is now to be addressed as the God who dwells in Christ. In fine, the substance of the gospel is, that God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

Well then may Jesus Christ, or his human nature, be called the true tabernacle. 2. Jesus Christ is the Christian's High Priest; or he is all that to his people which the Levitical priests were to the Jews. This is repeated again and again in the epistle before us. Now the office of the Jewish high priest is thus described by the apostle: Every high priest is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sin. Accordingly we find that this service was assigned exclusively to the Jewish priests.

They were, in an inferior sense, a kind of mediator between God and his worshippers. They only were allowed to approach him, and to offer up sacrifices. No other man, however holy or highly exalted, not even the most pious of the Jewish kings, was allowed to offer his own sacrifice, or to enter the sanctuary. Uzziah, in other respects a most exemplary monarch, was struck with leprosy, for only attempting to do it. Especially was it the work of the high priest to make an atonement for the sins of the nation once in a year, by offering up a sacrifice and carrying the blood into the most holy place, and there sprinkling it before God.

And not only the sin offerings, but all other offerings, were to be made by the priest alone. If one who had received any providential mercies brought a thank-offering to God, he was on no pretence allowed to present it himself, but the priest received it at his hand, carried it into the sanctuary and there presented it before the mercy-seat; to him who dwelt upon it. In all these respects, the Jewish priests were most strikingly types of Christ, and he is, as the apostle styles him, the great High Priest of our profession.

He is the one great Mediator between God and sinful men, and there is no access to God, either for our persons, our services, or our prayers, but through him, nor can they be accepted unless offered up by him. I, says he, am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me. Hence an apostle informs us, that the spiritual sacrifices which Christians offer up, are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ; and another apostle exhorts us, whatever we do, in word, or deed, to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to the Father by him.

It is also his work and prerogative alone to make atonement for sin. The Jewish high priest made a typical atonement for the sins of the Jews only; but Christ, says an apostle, is a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. And as the Jewish high priest, after offering a sacrifice for atonement, went into the most holy place, in behalf of the nation, and as their representative, so Christ, as the apostle informs us, has entered, not into holy places made with hands, but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for his people.

And as at the hour of prayer the Jewish high priest offered up incense in the sanctuary, while the people stood praying without, that their prayers, and the smoke of the incense, might ascend together, so St. John in vision, saw Christ as the great angel of the New Covenant, offering up the prayers of all saints with much incense. It is owing to his merits and intercession alone, that the prayers of his people are accepted and answered; and he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

The word "such" in our text refers to a previous description of what was necessary to qualify one for the office or work of our high priest. Such a high priest, says the apostle in the context, became us, or was necessary for us, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. And such a high priest we have, one who is perfectly holy in heart, harmless in his conduct, and undefiled or unspotted by the pollutions of the world, and who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty on high.

It appears, then, that every service which the Levitical priests typically performed for the Jews, Jesus Christ really performs for his people. Well then may he be styled and regarded as our great High Priest. 3. Jesus Christ is the true sacrifice of which the Jewish sacrifices were only types. This is intimated in that clause of our text which says, it was necessary that he also should have somewhat to offer. What he had to offer, what he did offer, we are informed in the context, as well as in many other places.

He offered up himself, his body his blood, his life. He was, says an apostle, sacrificed, or offered up as a sacrifice, for us. On the nature and design of the Levitical sacrifices, and the benefits which the Jews derived from them, we have often dwelt, and with them you are, we presume, acquainted. You are aware, that as the apostle remarks, all things were under the law purified with blood, the blood of the sacrifices, and that without shedding of blood, there was no remission of sin.

If an Israelite was betrayed into any sin in consequence of which his life was forfeited to the divine law, he was permitted to bring a lamb as a substitute to die in his stead; and if he brought it in the exercise of repentance and faith, to be offered up by the priests, it was accepted, he was forgiven, and his life spared. And it was by carrying the blood of the sacrifice into the holy place, and then sprinkling it before God, that atonement was invariably made for the sins of the nation.

These sacrifices were however only typical; they had no efficacy in themselves to atone for sin. They owed all their efficacy to their reference or relation to the great, meritorious, and efficacious sacrifice which was made by Christ, when he offered up himself on the cross. By this offering, he made a real, and not a typical atonement for sin. In consequence of this offering, every penitent believer, is freely and fully forgiven. He is justified by the blood of the Lord Jesus.

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. And as the blood of the sacrifice was presented and sprinkled before God in the most holy place, so Christ, says the apostle, not with the blood of bulls and of goats, but with his own blood, entered in once into the holy place, or into heaven, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Hence in allusion to the Jewish sacrifices, his blood is called the blood of sprinkling. Thus it appears that Jesus Christ is the true tabernacle, the true priest, and the true sacrifice of which the Jewish tabernacle, priests, and sacrifices were only types, and that as such he procures for his people really all those blessings which these institutions procured in a typical manner only for the Jews.

I shall now proceed to make some improvement of these interesting and instructive truths. 1. From these truths, those who are tempted to despise or ridicule the Jewish rites and ceremonies, or to regard them as unworthy of divine appointment, may learn their error. Many, there is reason to fear, are guilty of this irreverence, and even some serious persons consider the whole Levitical law, as a very uninteresting portion of the Scriptures. But if any think it such it is owing solely to their own ignorance.

The fact is, that this part of the Scriptures is full of Christ; and if properly understood, will assist greatly in obtaining a right understanding of his gospel, and of the way of salvation by him. Of this no one can doubt, who attends to the use which St. Paul makes of it in this epistle. And permit me here to beseech you all, my hearers, for your own sakes, not to despise any part of Scripture, because you do not understand it, or perceive its use. Surely reverence, humility, modesty, require us rather to suspect ourselves, than to censure the all-wise God.

An apostle mentions some persons, who like natural brute beasts, made only to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of things which they understand not, that they shall utterly perish in their own corruption. If we would avoid their doom, let us beware how we imitate their conduct. 2. This subject furnishes one proof of

the divine origin, and consequently, truth of the Scriptures, and it shows us how exactly the Old Testament and the New correspond. The Old Testament teaches by types and shadows, what the New more clearly reveals; yet the men who wrote them, lived many centuries apart.

Must not the writers of the Old Testament then have been inspired? Could they ever have thought of devising such a complicated system of rites and ceremonies; a system too, which should so exactly shadow forth the character, offices and works of a Saviour, who was not to make his appearance in the world till many ages after their death? It is impossible. He who can believe that they could do this, or that such a coincidence is the result of accident, may believe any thing. 3.

Since God took care under the former dispensation, to shadow forth, in so many ways, the dwelling of the Godhead in Jesus Christ, his priesthood, sacrifice, atonement, and intercession, we have reason to believe that he regards these truths as fundamentally important. Nor is it strange that he thus regards them; for they compose the sum, the substance, the essence of the gospel. Take them away, and the gospel is gone. Take them away, and we have no way of access to God, no place in which we can find God, no pardon, no salvation.

In a word, as the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrifices, were all important in the old dispensation, so is Christ whom they represent, in the new. Those then who reject his divinity, atonement and intercession, who deny that he offered up himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, reject the true gospel and give its another, which is a gospel in name only. This however many do. Some do it speculatively. A still greater number do it practically. As many of the Jews neglected the tabernacle, the priesthood and the sacrifices, which God had appointed, and built high places where they officiated as their own priests, and offered up their own sacrifices, so many nominal Christians neglect the priesthood, atonement, and intercession of Jesus Christ, come to God relying on their own merits, offer up their prayers in their own names, and hope to be saved by their own works and services.

They justify themselves in their course by saying, so long as we worship and pray to the true God, it cannot be of much consequence in what manner we worship him. But the Jews might have said the same, respecting their high places. They might have said, we do not, like many of our countrymen, forsake the true God to follow idols. We still worship Jehovah alone, and offer our sacrifices to him, and we hope to be accepted, though we do not go up to the tabernacle and offer our sacrifices through the priest.

But such hopes would have been groundless, such incense would not have been accepted. God would still have rejected and been displeased with their services, and the same may be said of the hopes, the incense, and the services of those who, instead of coming to God, relying on his merits, and presenting their prayers and services in his name, come in their own names, and rely on their own merits. A curse, and not a blessing will be their reward. 4. The subject is full of instruction and consolation to the real disciples of Christ, and to all who are willing to accept of him as their Saviour.

Let such persons consider, in the first place, what encouragement and consolation the tabernacle was suited to give the Jews. They might say to themselves, since God has caused it to be raised among us for his special residence, since he dwells in it on a mercy-seat, since he has told us where we may always find him, and since he is there ready to dispense pardon, instruction and favor, he must be willing that we should approach him, he must be willing to receive us, to hear our prayers, and to accept our offerings.

We will therefore go to him with confidence. So we may say, since God dwells in our nature, in the man Christ Jesus; since he dwells there as a God of mercy and grace, and as a prayer-hearing God; since

through him he dispenses pardon and light and strength and salvation, and since he has done all this on purpose to encourage us to come to him, we will come, we will trust in him; we will seek God in Jesus Christ, and neither expect to find, nor seek to find him, any where else.

Again, consider what encouragement and consolation the Jews might derive from the priesthood. They might say, we are too sinful, too much polluted, to approach a holy God with acceptance; but we are not therefore wholly shut out from him. He has appointed an order of men, to act as mediators between himself and us, to take our offerings and present them before him, and to burn incense in our behalf. Surely then, he is willing to admit us to some intercourse and communion with himself; he must be willing to accept our offerings, though worthless in themselves, when presented by his own appointed priest; we will therefore come, we will offer him our gifts and sacrifices, we will confidently hope for acceptance.

Especially what an encouragement was it to there, at the hour of prayer, to see the priest enter the sanctuary by God's appointment to burn incense, while they stood praying without, and to see the cloud of smoke ascending upward from the golden altar. They might then say, though we are not permitted to enter the sanctuary ourselves, there is one appointed to enter it on our behalf, and to burn incense for us. The smoke of that incense offered by his own appointment, God has declared to be of a sweet savor, and our prayers ascending with it to heaven, shall find acceptance and obtain answers of peace.

So we may say, though we are sinners, children of disobedience, children of wrath; though we have wandered far from God, and our moral pollution renders us unfit to approach him, or pray to him, yet we are not excluded from him forever. He has provided a great High Priest and Mediator for us, in the person of his own Son, whom he always hears, who is infinitely worthy, and who is ever ready to receive and present to the Father, our petitions and requests. Though we are not, as yet, permitted to enter heaven, he has entered it on our behalf, as our forerunner and representative; and while we stand praying without, he intercedes for us within, and causes our prayers and services to come up with acceptance, perfumed as with a cloud of incense.

Even at this moment we have an advocate, a powerful, prevailing advocate of God's own appointment, pleading for us at the right hand of his throne. Surely then, we may hope for acceptance through him; we will therefore pray, will hope confidently for an answer of peace. God never would, at such an expense, have provided such a high priest for us, had he not been willing and desirous that we should thus approach him. Further, consider what comfort and encouragement a believing Jew might derive from the divine institution of sacrifices.

Without such an institution, when he had once sinned, he would have felt he was undone forever. He would have said, my life is forfeited, my blood is demanded by the law which I have violated, and I can never redeem the forfeiture; nor can I hope that a holy, just, and true God will remit it. There is no hope, no escape for me. I must perish. But by appointing sacrifices, God did as it were say, No, sinner, there is hope; you need not perish, I have provided a remedy; bring a lamb without spot to be offered by my priests as a sacrifice, and I will accept it.

Its life shall go for thy life, its blood for thy blood, and thou shalt be free. Just so, were it not for the atoning sacrifice of Christ, we as sinners could have no ground of hope, and a sinner convinced of his sin would entertain no hope, but sink down in utter despair. He would say, the language of God's law is, the soul that sinneth, it shall die. I have sinned, I must die, I cannot hope that a holy, just, and true God will sacrifice his justice and holiness, give up the honor of his law and violate his word, for the sake of saving me, a

miserable sinner.

How can I dare ask him to do it? How can he hear me if I do? And even should I obey him hereafter, my life will still be forfeited for my past disobedience. There is no remedy, no way of escape. Hell must be my portion, there is nothing before me but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. But in the gospel of Christ, God does as it were say to such a sinner, No, sinner, thou needest not perish. Thou needest not go down to the pit, for I have found a ransom.

My Son has offered up himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He has borne the curse of the law, and died, the just for the unjust, to make atonement for their sins. And now if, with penitence and faith, thou wilt trust in him, thou shalt be pardoned and saved for his sake. Surely this is gospel, this is good news indeed for sinners; and as such, every one who has proper views of God, of his law, and of his own sinfulness, will consider it. Finally: How precious should the Lord Jesus Christ be, in our estimation!

He is the tabernacle in which God dwells, the only place where we can find him. He is the Mediator, through whom alone we can come to God, the High Priest, who alone can present our prayers and services with acceptance; the atoning sacrifice, through which alone our sins can be forgiven. Surely then, he ought to be precious to us. To those of you who believe, he is precious. In your system of religion, in your hopes, he is all in all. But even you do not praise him by any means as you ought.

Even you know not the thousandth part of his worth, his excellence. O seek and pray for more knowledge of him. Like Paul, count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. And while you come around this table, look up and see what a high priest, what an advocate you have to plead your cause in heaven. See that very Saviour, the symbols of whose body and blood you are about to receive, seated on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high, where he ever liveth to make intercession for his people.

Is he worthy? then all who trust in him will be so regarded. Is he accepted? then the persons and services of all who believe in him are accepted. Will the Father hear him? then he will hear all who pray in his name. O then, Christian, bless God for Jesus Christ, and take courage; and since we have a great High Priest, Jesus, the Son of God, who is passed into the heavens, let us hold fast our profession, without wavering, and come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

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