

Christ's Work as Priest on Earth

by F.W. Grant

The sermon argues that Christ's work on the cross was a priestly work, and that His priesthood was perfected at the baptism of John.

Scripture: Hebrews 2:17, Hebrews 7:27, Hebrews 8:3, Hebrews 9:11

Topics: "Christ's Priesthood", "Eternal Redemption"

Description

F.W. Grant preaches on the controversial topic of Christ's work as a priest on earth, addressing misconceptions and objections. He delves into the arguments presented in Hebrews, emphasizing that Christ's priestly work on earth was unique and necessary for salvation. Grant highlights the significance of Christ's sufferings, His role as a merciful and faithful High Priest, and the eternal redemption obtained through His sacrifice.

Transcript

CHRIST'S WORK AS PRIEST ON EARTH.

THE question of the Lord's having been a priest on earth is one to which, now that the attention of many is being drawn to it, should be given due and patient consideration. Mistake on this point may easily lead to further error, as should be plain to us, and there needs no apology for another review of the subject here, in which especially it is my desire to look at some things which as yet have had but brief and unsatisfactory notice in these pages, if any. I shall, however, briefly state the whole argument. i.

The main ground for the belief that the Lord was not a priest on earth is certainly Heb. viii. 4, which however, says nothing of the kind. Speaking of Christ as "a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man," it says, "If He were on earth, He should not be a priest." And why? "Seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law;"- that is, the place is occupied already! Well, but what place? Plainly that of offering gifts according to the law.

But would any of the Lord's work on earth have interfered with that? The question is idle, of course. So, then, is the argument which needs to raise the question: for it is this, and only this, from which the apostle argues, that there are priests already installed in the legal sanctuary, and doing the legal work. Could the work of the cross come in here? Nay, if you will observe, with the perfect accuracy of Scripture, while in the third verse the apostle says that "every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices," when he goes on to the argument of the fourth verse, he drops the "sacrifices," because in the Lord's present

priestly work there is no sacrifice, and only says, "Seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law."

Backward he does not look: he does not say, "When He was on earth He was not a priest"- and to change the statement into this is surely unallowable. Put in its connection, the whole argument is, "If He, the Minister of the sanctuary, were on earth, He would not even be a priest, seeing that there are priests of another order fulfilling that office as to the sanctuary on earth." This is surely clear, and we may pass on. 2. A second objection to the doctrine of the Lord's having been priest on earth is derived from the fifth chapter, where it is stated that being "made perfect".

He was "called of God a high priest after the order of Meichizecdek": thus it is urged. if He were made perfect through the things which He suffered, as all will allow, then it must be after His sacrificial work that He became high priest. Two things need, however, to be considered : first, that the word for "called" in this case, is not that for calling to an office, - the actual word for which occurs before, where His calling seems clearly grounded, not upon His work, but upon His person - "And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron : so also Christ glorified not Himself to be made high priest : but He that said unto Him.

'Thou art my Son, today have I begotten Thee' as He saith also in another place. 'Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Then there can be no just doubt that the call to office is implied in the acknowledgment of Sonship otherwise these words would be irrelevant, and the last quotation would be the true and sufficient one. Secondly : on the other hand, it is really His being the Son of God in humanity that constitutes His fitness for the priesthood - that is for the mediatorial office.

Aaron's anointing without blood shows that His work was not needed for this: and the acknowledgement of Sonship would thus be tantamount to the call, and the two quotations exactly harmonize. It is after this that His sufferings are introduced : and then "being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation saluted of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. "The work is done, and God greets the Victor by the title under which He has done the work. How suitable this when we know that everything. with the great High Priest Himself, had been under the cloud from which He has just emerged!

That here there should be the reaffirming of a title which was before His own need cause no difficulty. But it is affirmed that "perfected" means "consecrated." as it is translated in chap. vii. 28. "consecrated for evermore." if, then, He was only consecrated as priest through the sufferings He endured, it is plain that He could not have been priest before His sufferings. Yes, it is plain, if the basis of the reasoning be true, but is it true? As to the word "perfected " is truly the sense, as everyone the least competent will admit the admit, th margin and the Revised Version have it even in chap. v11 28.

As to the application, of course the force may vary according to this, and abstractly the perfecting of a priest may be his consecration to office - may be, not must: and the application and the force are alike open to question here. The application - for the passage itself does not say "being made perfect as priest" nor is this connected in this way by the structure of the chapter and the strictly parallel passage(as it would appear) chap.2:10, substitutes (if we may speak so) for priest, "the Captain of salvation": "it became Him to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

Is not this very like "And being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation"? But if the connection be admitted, (and I for one cannot be unwilling to admit that the Priest is as priest the Author of salvation,) the conclusion does not follow that is supposed. It must then be asked, In what sense are we to

take "perfected"? If as consecrated through sufferings, was not that at least on earth? and if He were consecrated through sufferings on earth, is not that inconsistent with the thought of a consecration by His being saluted as High Priest after death, or perhaps resurrection?

Take it as "perfected,"- the Scripture word,- and you may say as Priest, and I for one have no question and no difficulty. I believe there was such a "perfecting" of our blessed High-Priest, and that not seeing this occasions much of the perplexity that many are in today. For since the apostle is addressing Christians, (who have their place, as Christians, as the result of His accomplished work,) it is necessarily a risen and ascended High Priest with whom we have to do, and whom we need; and thus his words are very simply applicable to Him as He now is: "Such a High priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (chap. vii. 26).

Yet even such statements show he does not mean to deny that Christ was High Priest before He was "made higher than the heavens," or "passed into the heavens" (chap. iv. i 4), but in fact affirm that He was: otherwise his language would be that He was passed into the heavens, and then became Priest; but this he never says. But does not the apostle say that (in contrast with the Levitical priesthood, in which those who were priests "were not suffered to continue by reason of death") "this Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood" (chap. vii. 23, 24) and does not this imply that only after He had passed through death He could become Priest?

No: this is but an inference, and a false one,- derived, no doubt, from too close a reference to mere earthly priests. Death would remove one of these from his place of office: could it remove similarly a heavenly priest? It would rather introduce him to it. And the "endless life" after the power of which Christ was made Priest could only be that "eternal life," though in man, over which death could have no power. But this will be supplemented by after-considerations. 4. We must now look at some other statements of the epistle to the Hebrews, which seem to affirm in the strongest way the fact of the Lord's priesthood upon earth.

In chap. viii. 3 we have already found the apostle saying, "For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer." Again: "For such a high priest became us - who needeth not daily, as those high-priests, to offer up sacrifices, for this He did once, when He offered up Himself" (chap. vii. 27). "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 propitiation (R.

V.) for the sins of the people" (chap. ii. 17). "But Christ being come, a High Priest of good things to come, . . . neither by the blood of bulls and calves, but by His own blood, He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption" (chap. ix. ii, 12). Now what is the consistent testimony of these passages? Is it possible to say, in view of them, that it was not high priestly work to offer sacrifice? Surely not: they were ordained to do it. Was not this typical of what Christ did as priest ?- or was it something in which the types failed to represent the truth,- as shadows, but not the very image?

Nay, He was "a merciful and faithful High Priest to make propitiation "- for that purpose,- and as the high priests offered daily, so "He offered up Himself." After this, as High Priest still, by His own blood He entered the heavens. Surely the texts are plain, and must be forced, to make them speak otherwise than upon the face of them they seem to do. Where did the High Priest offer Himself up? In heaven, or on earth? How did the High Priest enter heaven by His own blood, if He were not High Priest till He entered heaven?

Will the perfection of Scripture allow me to say that the High Priest did these things, but not as High Priest? and even where it is asserted that He was High Priest to make propitiation, still that He did not make it "as" High Priest? No; as believing in the perfection of the Word of God, we dare not say these things. If we were at liberty to interpolate Scripture after this fashion, it would soon cease to have authority over us, because it would cease to have meaning for us.

Any body, in this case, could see how simply such passages could be altered for the better; and if it be the exigency of what has seemed to us the meaning of some particular verse or verses which requires this, have we not the very best reason to see if indeed we have interpreted such passages aright? The apparent contradiction is the result only of partial views of truth: with the whole, the perplexity clears. Scripture has not to be perfected by our thoughts, but cleared from the mists which our thoughts introduce into it.

But, it is said, the priests did not kill the sacrifices, except where for themselves, and that this shows that Christ's work on the cross was not a priestly work. But in this way evidence might be brought against evidence: for the burning on the altar or on the ground, the sprinkling and pouring out of the blood, were so strictly priestly functions that no private person dare ever assume them. Yet these are but different sides of one blessed work. It is not even strictly true that the priest never killed the victim except where for himself; for he did kill the burnt-offering of birds (Lev. i. is), and on the day of atonement,- the very day which is specially referred to in the epistle to the Hebrews,- he killed also the sin-offering for the people.

But in any case the burning upon the altar or upon the ground was the most strictly sacrificial part, and this belonged to the priest expressly. On the other hand, it is not difficult to see that in the death of Christ we have the victim side, as we have the atoning side in the offering up, and that the death at the offerer's hands may represent the victim, as the priest's work the atoning side. This, I have no doubt, is the truth, the offerer for his part marking out thus the penalty of sin which he had brought upon an innocent sufferer, while the priest offers it to God as sacrifice, and so atoning.

The slaying of the bird offered for the healed leper is not by the offerer, and that of the red heifer (between which and that of the leper there are strong points of resemblance) concurs with it, I believe, as showing Christ's death at the hands of the world; and this is in connection with the truth in both cases of the crucifixion to the world implied in the cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop being in the one case cast into the fire, in the other stained with the blood of the victim.

Both are lessons as to purification. The offering, in any case, was exclusively priestly, and this was surely the representation of the death of Christ in its divine meaning. 6. One thing more in this connection. In Numb. xvii. the true priest for God is known by the blossoming and fruit-bearing of Aaron's rod - a type unmistakably of resurrection. But this only marks out the priest, does not make him one, as in fact Aaron already was in office. Resurrection has the most important bearing upon priesthood, all the more on this account: for thus it is the acceptance of the work of Him who offered up Himself, and is by this shown to be the Author of salvation to those who obey Him. 7.

If, then, the acknowledgment by God of His Son were the call to the priesthood, and if the anointing of the Spirit, and apart from the blood of sacrifice, marked out the great High Priest,- if it was the High-Priest who offered up Himself, how clearly all this was fulfilled when at the baptism of John the Lord came forward to His public work among men! Then the Father's voice came forth in testimony, "This is My beloved Son," and the Spirit like a dove descended upon Him. From that baptism to death which was the shadow of it,

the Lord went on to another baptism, and a Jordan that filled all its banks for Him. Yet so was His priesthood perfected, and He entered heaven by His own blood.

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