

A Great High-Priest - His Sympathy and Compassion

by J.C. Philpot

The blessed Lord, as our great High Priest, can sympathise with us in our afflictions and sorrows because he has personally experienced them, being in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Scripture: Psalm 139:2, Isaiah 53:4, Isaiah 53:10, Ephesians 1:21, Hebrews 4:15 - 5:1, Hebrews 5:8, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "High Priesthood"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the compassionate and sympathizing High Priest in the courts of heaven, emphasizing the necessity of sympathy and compassion in a high priest as a mediator. He delves into the personal experiences of suffering and temptation that Jesus endured to sympathize with His people, highlighting how Jesus bore the weight of sin, endured the wrath of God, and experienced the curse of the law to understand and empathize with His afflicted ones. Philpot explores the deep connection between the Lord's trials on earth and His present intercession in heaven, showcasing how Jesus' personal experiences enable Him to be a merciful and faithful High Priest who sympathizes with His people under afflictions and temptations.

Transcript

Chapter Thirteen from the book Meditations on the Sacred Humanity of The Blessed Redeemer

Having attempted, then, to show the nature and prevalency of the intercession of Jesus at the right hand of the Father, and how mercifully and graciously it meets our case as burdened with countless sins and pressed down with innumerable infirmities, we come now to the consideration of the blessed Lord as our most compassionate and sympathizing High Priest in the courts of heaven. Sympathy and compassion are necessary qualifications of a high priest, as sustaining the office of a mediator. A priest implies a sacrifice; a sacrifice implies a sinner; a sinner implies a guilty, burdened wretch, justly amenable to the wrath of God, and therefore in a most pitiable condition. For such a one the high priest offers a sacrifice, that he may obtain thereby the pardon of his sins. He must, therefore, compassionate the case of this guilty sinner, that, as feeling sympathy with him, he may present prayer and supplication on his behalf, that the sacrifice offered for his sins may be accepted. The apostle, therefore, says, "For every high priest, taken from among men, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that

he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people so also for himself, to offer for sins." #Heb 5:1-3 . The high priest under the law differed in this point from the blessed Lord in that he was himself a sinner, and as such had to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for the sins of the people. By this offering for his own sins two things were intimated: that as a sinner he himself needed a propitiating sacrifice; and, he was reminded thereby that, though a high priest, he was really no better than the sinner for whose sins he offered sacrifice. By this sense, then, of his own sinfulness, thus vividly and distinctly brought before his eyes, he was taught to have compassion on his fellow- sinners, and especially on those who had sinned ignorantly, and were "out of the way" through backsliding or infirmity, for there was no sacrifice provided for presumptuous sinners. #Nu 15:27-31 .

Our blessed Lord, then, as the great High Priest over the house of God, would not have been suitable to us, as encompassed with infirmities, unless he could compassionate our case, and sympathise with us in our troubles and sorrows. It is true that, as perfectly free from sin, both in body and soul, he had no necessity to offer sacrifice for himself; but, as a most loving and tender High Priest, he could compassionate the sinner without partaking of his sins. But this was not all, for even in eternity, before he gave himself for his people, he had pity on them; and we read that, apart from electing love or saving grace, in the days of his flesh, he had compassion on the hungry multitude. But that he might become a merciful and compassionate High Priest he had to learn sympathy with his people in a very different way. In the wondrous depths of the wisdom and grace of God, he learnt to sympathise with us in our afflictions by a personal experience of them. This is the apostle's declaration: "For we have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." #Heb 4:15 . And what a most encouraging conclusion does he draw from this most blessed view of the compassion of our once suffering Head: "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 4:16 .

We showed in the last chapter the close and intimate connection that subsists between the two main branches of our Lord's priestly office: the sacrifice which he offered in the days of his flesh on earth and his present intercession in heaven. So there is a similar connection between the personal experience of suffering and temptation which the Lord endured here below and his present sympathy above with his tempted and suffering people still in the wilderness. We must not, however, suppose the personal experience of suffering was essential to his knowledge of it. As omniscient in his divine nature, the Lord perfectly knows what his people suffer, for "he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust." #Ps 103:14 . In this sense he searcheth and knoweth us, for he understandeth our thought afar off; he compasseth our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways. #Ps 139:2,3 . As the all-seeing, heart-searching God, he sees and knows all our afflictions and sorrows as he knows everything in heaven and earth. But he could only have the personal experience of suffering by becoming himself a sufferer. This is a deep mystery; but as it is revealed to our faith in the word of truth and is full of blessed consolation to the afflicted family of God, we will approach it with all reverence as a part of our Meditations.

It was the eternal will of God that his dear Son should take the flesh and blood of the children, and that he should take it without sin, but not without suffering. Suffering was a part of the atonement: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." #1Pe 3:18 . Our blessed Lord was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," not only that by these sorrows and griefs he might redeem us from the depths of the fall. but that he might experimentally learn to feel for, and sympathise with us in our troubles and afflictions.

None can really sympathise with the afflicted but those who have passed or are passing through similar afflictions. We might as well expect a newly-married bride to sympathise with a bereaved widow, or a merchant worth a million with a ruined bankrupt, as for the unafflicted to sympathise with the afflicted. The very word "sympathy" means a suffering with; but how can there be a suffering with another if the suffering itself be personally unknown? The primary element of the whole feeling is wanting, if suffering be absent on the part of the sympathiser. Thus, in order that our blessed Lord might personally, feelingly, and experimentally sympathise with his suffering people, there was a necessity that he must himself suffer. O mystery of mysteries! O wondrous heights and depths of redeeming love! that the Son of God should suffer, not only that he might redeem, but that he might personally feel for and experimentally sympathise with his suffering people!

But though we feel our inability and inadequacy to open up this sacred subject, yet, as we have proposed it as a part of our Meditations, let us now examine this point a little more closely, and see what sufferings the blessed Lord endured that he might learn thereby to sympathise with his afflicted ones, who drink of his cup and are baptized with his baptism.

In viewing these, we cannot well distinguish between the Lord's sufferings as meritorious and his sufferings as intended to teach him compassion and sympathy; for all his sufferings were a part of his atoning sacrifice: "By his stripes ye were healed." #1Pe 2:24 . He that was "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities" hath also surely "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." #Isa 53:4,5 . In fact, by the sorrows and sufferings of the blessed Lord several purposes, according to the sovereign will and wisdom of God, were at once accomplished, and principally these following:

1. God was glorified, as the Lord himself said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him." #Joh 13:31 . "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." #Joh 17:4 . By his meek endurance of the sufferings laid upon him, and by his voluntary and patient obedience to the will of his heavenly Father, through the whole course of his suffering life, from the manger to the cross. God was supremely glorified.
2. The work of redemption was fully accomplished.
3. He learned obedience by the things which he suffered. #Heb 5:8 .
4. He left us an example, that we should follow his steps. #1Pe 3:21 .
5. He was made perfect; #Heb 5:9 ; that is, he became by suffering perfectly qualified to sustain his high office as a merciful and faithful High Priest, who, "in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted." #Heb 2:17,18 .

It is the last point which chiefly demands our present consideration, as contemplating him now in our nature at the right hand of the Father. The sympathy and compassion of the blessed Lord, as now exercised in the courts of heaven, are chiefly shown under the following circumstances:

1. To his people under affliction;
2. To his people under temptation.

1. The Lord's people are all, without exception, an afflicted people. This was their promised character from the days of old: "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the

name of the Lord." #Zep 3:12 . Their afflictions, indeed, widely vary as regards nature, number, length, degree, but all find the truth of that solemn declaration that we must "through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

i. Thus, some are afflicted in body , racked with continual pain, or suffering perhaps for years from some complaint which may not much shorten life, yet render life often a burden. If health be the greatest, as all must admit, of temporal blessings, the want of it must be the greatest of all temporal miseries. The blessed Lord, indeed, had no personal experience of sickness, for in his holy, immortal body there were the seeds neither of sickness nor death; but he experienced bodily pain, as when scourged by Pilate's command, when he wore the crown of thorns, when struck and buffeted by the rude Roman soldiery, and more especially when nailed to the cross. Thus, even in the matter of bodily suffering, our gracious Lord can sympathise from personal experience with his poor afflicted family still in the flesh who are racked with pain on their bed of languishing.

ii. Many again of the Lord's people are deeply tried in providence . Poverty, if not absolute want, is the daily cross of many of the excellent of the earth. But what a personal experience their gracious Lord had of this sharp trial, who had neither purse nor scrip, but was maintained by the contributions of the women who ministered to him of their substance. #Lu 8:3 . Did he not hunger in the wilderness, and before the barren fig-tree? Did he not thirst at Samaria's well and on the cross? And did he not say of himself, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head?" #Mt 8:20 . He who for our sakes became poor that we through his poverty might be rich, not only spiritually made himself poor by laying aside his divine glory, but actually and literally made himself poor by voluntarily submitting to the pain and pressure of bodily poverty.

iii. Others of the Lord's people are subject to cruel persecutions . This, indeed, has been the lot of all the saints from the days of righteous Abel, and will be to the end of time, for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Fire, indeed, and faggot are now unknown, and the spirit of the times, at least in this country, will not suffer fine and imprisonment, and the other acts of violence which our godly forefathers endured for conscience sake; but the scourge of the tongue is still wielded, heads cut off instead of ears, and reputations branded instead of foreheads. But what a deep and personal experience had the blessed Lord of persecution from the day that Herod sought his life till he was nailed to the cross! How every word was watched which fell from his lips, every action misinterpreted, his character calumniated as a glutton and a wine-bibber, and shame and contempt poured upon him until, as the consummation of hatred, and to cover him, as they thought, with everlasting ignominy, they crucified him between two thieves.

iv. Others of the Lord's people suffer from the treachery of false friends. Had not our blessed Lord an experience of this in the treachery of Judas, so that he could say, "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me?"

But it is not necessary for us to dwell longer on those temporal afflictions which press down so many of the Lord's people, but in which their gracious Head still sympathises with them. He who wept at the grave of Lazarus; he who had compassion on the widow of Nain, #Lu 7:13 , on the beseeching leper, #Mr 1:41 , on the man possessed with a devil, #Mr 5:19 , on the blind, #Mt 20:34 , and on the fainting, scattered multitudes, #Mt 9:36 , surely pities and sympathises with his people in all their temporal sorrows, however diversified. These, though heavy, are not the severest afflictions which befall the saints of the Most High. We will now, therefore, divert our thoughts to those spiritual sorrows and troubles which all the family of

God experience, though these, too, vary widely in number and degree, yet are allotted to each living member of the mystical body of Christ, according to the appointed measure. In these, as peculiar to the Lord's people, Jesus has a special sympathy with his afflicted people, for of this cup he drank to the very dregs, and with this baptism he was baptized with all its billows and waves rolling over him. Whatever spiritual troubles and sorrows the Lord's people may be called upon to endure, their gracious Lord and Master suffered much more deeply than their heart, however deeply lacerated, can feel or their tongue, however eloquent, can express. But we will look at some of these spiritual afflictions, and endeavour to show how the blessed Lord had a personal experience of them, and thus learnt to sympathise with his people under them.

i. The chief burden of the Lord's living family is sin . This is the main cause of all their sighs and groans, from the first quickening breath of the Spirit of God in their hearts till they lay down their bodies in dust.

But it may be asked, what experience could the blessed Lord have had of sin. Seeing he was perfectly free from it both in body and soul? It is indeed a most certain and a most blessed truth that our gracious Redeemer "knew no sin;" #2Co 5:21 ; was "a lamb without blemish and without spot;" #1Pe 1:19 ; and was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." #Heb 7:26 . Still, sin was so imputed to him, and the Lord so "laid on him the iniquities of us all," that he felt them just as if they had been his own. "He was made sin for us;" its guilt and burden were laid on his sacred head, and so became by imputation his that it was as if he had committed the sins charged upon him.

Take the following illustration. View sin as a debt to the justice of God. Now, if you are a surety for another, and he cannot pay the debt, it becomes yours just as much as if you had yourself personally contracted it. The law makes no distinction between his debt and yours; and the creditor may sell the very bed from under you to pay the debt, just as if you were the original debtor. So the blessed Lord, by becoming Surety for his people, took upon him their sins, and thus made them his own. How else can we explain those expressions in the Psalms, which are evidently the language of his heart and lips, such as the following? "For innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me." #Ps 40:12 . Does not the Lord here speak of his iniquities taking hold upon him, so that under their weight and burden he could not look up, and that they were more in number than the hairs of his head?

ii. With the burden and weight of sin comes the wrath of God into the sinner's conscience; and this is the most distressing feeling that can be well experienced out of hell. So the blessed Lord, when he took the burden and weight of sin, came under this wrath. This was "the horrible pit" into which he sank, #Ps 40:2 , "the deep mire in which there was no standing," "the deep waters where the floods over-flowed him." #Ps 69:2 . This made him say, "For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of thine indignation and thy wrath; for thou hast lifted me up and cast me down." #Ps 102:3,4,9,10 . None who read the word of truth with an enlightened eye can doubt that these Psalms refer to the blessed Lord, and that it is he who speaks in them.

iii. Then there is the curse of the law , which peals such loud thunders, and sinks so deeply into the heart and conscience of the awakened sinner. But did not Jesus endure this too? Surely he did, both in body and soul, as the apostle declares, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written. Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." #Ga 3:13 .

iv. Then there are the hidings of God's countenance , the withdrawals of his presence, and his forsakings of the soul that still hangs upon him and cleaves to him. But cannot our gracious Lord here deeply sympathise with his people who are mourning and sighing under the hidings of God's countenance, for was not this the last bitter drop of the cup of suffering which he drank to the very dregs? Did heaven or earth ever hear so mournful a cry as when the darling Son of God, in the agony of his tortured soul, cried out, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

Thus, whatever in number or degree be the spiritual griefs and sorrows of the Lord's people; whatever convictions, burdens, sorrows, distresses, pangs of conscience, doubts, fears, and dismay under the wrath of God, the curse of the law, the hidings of his face, and the withdrawals of the light of his countenance they may grieve and groan under. Jesus, their blessed Forerunner, experienced them all in the days of his flesh, and to a degree and extent infinitely beyond all human conception. Can any heart conceive, or any tongue express what the dear Redeemer experienced in the garden of Gethsemane, when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; when he thrice prayed that the cup might pass from him, and being in an agony, prayed more earnestly, so that his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground? Might he not truly say, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." #La 1:12 . An awakened sinner, under divine quickening, has to bear but the weight of his own sins; but Jesus had to bear the sins of millions. It is at best but a few drops of the wrath of, God, and that wrath as already appeased, that fall into a trembling sinner's conscience; but Jesus had to endure all the wrath of God due to millions of ransomed transgressors. It is but the distant peals of the law which sound in a convinced sinner's soul; but the whole storm burst upon the head of the Surety. In a little wrath God hides his face from his Zion for a moment; but in great wrath he hid his face from his dear Son. Thus, whatever be the spiritual sorrows and troubles of afflicted Zion, even though she be "tossed with tempest and not comforted," in all she has a Head who suffered infinitely more than all the collective members. They do but "fill up what is behind of the afflictions of Christ;" #Col 1:24 ; but 0 how small is that measure of affliction compared with his!

It was, then, his personal experience of these spiritual afflictions which makes the blessed Lord so sympathising a High Priest at the right hand of God. Though now exalted to the heights of glory, he can still feel for his suffering saints here below. The garden of Gethsemane, the cross of Calvary, are still in his heart's remembrance, and all the tender pity and rich compassion of his soul melt towards his afflicted saints; for,

His heart is touch'd with tenderness.

His bowels melt with love.

2. But the gracious Lord can also sympathise with his saints under all their temptations . This is a deep mystery, but not more deep than blessed; and as it is pregnant with consolation to the tried and tempted children of God, we will attempt to unfold it to the best of our ability. The Holy Ghost expressly declares that our blessed Lord "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." #Heb 4:15 . This, then, we must accept as a most solemn and, as viewed by faith, a most blessed truth. Nor must we limit the language of the Holy Ghost, but as he has said " in all points ," so must we receive it on the testimony of him who cannot lie.

But as the word "temptations" has in the original two significations, including in its meaning "trials" as well as temptations, properly so called, we will extend the sense of the term, and view our Lord's trials, and our Lord's temptations. The distinction between them is sufficiently evident. Trials may have God for their author, but not temptations, for we are expressly told that God tempteth no man. #Jas 1:13. Indeed, as temptation implies the presentation of sin to the mind, it would make God the Author of sin to make him the Author of temptation. But do we not read, it may be asked, that God "tempted Abraham?" #Ge 22:1. The word "tempted" there should be rendered "tried," for in Hebrew as well as Greek the same word means to tempt and to try. God did not tempt Abraham to sin, as Satan tempted Eve, or as he tempted David, but "tried" him, as the apostle speaks, #Heb 11:17, whether his faith was genuine.

Thus our blessed Lord was tried, and tried by God himself; for he is "a stone, a tried stone," of God's own laying. #Isa 28:16. When the Father provided him with a body in which to do his will, he became God's servant, as he speaks, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." #Isa 42:1. As a servant he yielded obedience, for he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. #Php 2:8. His obedience was a tried obedience. God tried it; men tried it; devils tried it; enemies tried it; friends tried it. The weakness and ignorance of his disciples; the treachery of Judas; the desertion and denial of Peter; the craft and malice of the Scribes and Pharisees; the unbelief and infidelity of the people; the sins by which he was surrounded; the sinless infirmities of the flesh and blood which he had assumed, as hunger, thirst, and weariness, the long journeyings, nightly watchings, the daily spectacle of sickness and misery - all these, and a thousand other circumstances beyond our conception tried the blessed Lord during his sojourn here below. But he bore all that was laid upon him. The purity of his human nature, in which were no seeds of sin actual or original, the strength of his divine nature with which it was in union, and the power of the Holy Ghost, which rested on him without measure, all concurred to bring him through every trial, and give him victory over every foe.

But by these trials he learnt to sympathise with his tried people. He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." #Heb 4:15. We may then freely go to him with our trials, may spread them before his face, as Hezekiah did the letter of Sennacherib in the temple, may feel a sweet persuasion that he sympathises with us under our heavy burdens, and will alleviate them, or support us under them, or if they be not removed will sanctify them, and make them work for our spiritual and eternal good. Thus faith in the sympathy of our blessed Lord is wonderfully calculated to subdue fretfulness, murmuring, and self-pity, to teach us submission and resignation under afflictions, and to reconcile us to a path of sorrow and tribulation. It brings before our eyes the sufferings of the blessed Lord here below, the trials which he endured, and his holy meekness and submission under them when he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. If we compare our sorrows and troubles with his, how light they seem! This works submission to them, and when we can look up in faith and love, and see the once suffering Lord now sympathising with us under our afflictions, it makes even sorrow sweet.

A conformity to the dying image of Jesus is hereby wrought into the soul, a fellowship given of his sufferings, a crucifixion of the flesh with its affections and lusts, a deadness to the world, a mortification of the whole body of sin, a separation of heart and spirit from everything ungodly and evil, and a communion produced with the blessed Lord at the right hand of the Father. Thus we may bless God for our afflictions and trials, our sicknesses, our bereavements, our losses and crosses, our vexations and disappointments, our persecutions, our being despised by the world and graceless professors, our doubts, fears, and exercises, our sighs and groans under a body of sin and death, and, in a word, for every footstep in the

way of tribulation which brings us nearer to Jesus, and opens to us more and more of his love and blood, grace and glory, sympathy and compassion, and all that he is as a merciful and faithful High Priest, whom God has raised from the dead, and seated at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. #Eph 1:21-23.

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