



## **Week 11 – The Offices of Christ**

There were three types of people who led the Israelites before Christ was born:

- The prophet (The prophet spoke God's words to the people) (Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, etc)
- The priest (The priest offered sacrifices, prayers, and praises to God on behalf of the people) (Aaron, Eleazar, Phinehas, Ahimelech, Joseph Caiaphas)
- And the king (the king ruled over the people as God's representative) (Saul, David, Solomon, etc)

These three offices were distinct.

These three offices foreshadowed Christ's own work in different ways.

Therefore we can look again at Christ's work, now thinking about the perspective of these three offices or categories.

### **Christ fulfills these three offices in the following ways:**

- as prophet he reveals God to us and speaks God's words to us;
- as priest he both offers a sacrifice to God on our behalf and is himself the sacrifice that is offered;
- and as king he rules over the church and over the universe as well.

## A. Christ as Prophet

Moses predicted that sometime another prophet like himself would come.

*Deuteronomy 18: 15 “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— 16 just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ 17 And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*

However, when we look at the gospels we see that Jesus is not primarily viewed as a prophet or as the prophet like Moses, though there are occasional references to this effect .

*Matthew 16: 13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”*

*Luke 9: 7 Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, 8 by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen.*

When Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain from the dead, the people were afraid and said, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” (Luke 7: 16).

When Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well something of her past life, she immediately responded, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet” (John 4: 19). But she did not then know very much at all about him.

The reaction of the man born blind who was healed in the temple was similar: “He is a prophet” (John 9: 17; note that his belief in Jesus’ messiahship and deity did not come until v. 37, after a subsequent conversation with Jesus).

Therefore, “prophet” is not a primary designation of Jesus or one used frequently by him or about him. Nevertheless, there was still an expectation that the prophet like Moses would come (Deut. 18: 15, 18).

For instance, after Jesus had multiplied the loaves and fish, some people exclaimed, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!” (John 6: 14). Peter also identified Christ as the prophet predicted by Moses (Acts 3: 22– 24).

So Jesus is indeed the prophet predicted by Moses. Nevertheless, it is significant that in the Epistles Jesus is never called a prophet or the prophet.

Why did the New Testament epistles avoid calling Jesus a prophet?

Apparently because, although Jesus is the prophet whom Moses predicted, yet he is also far greater than any of the Old Testament prophets, in two ways:

1. He is the one about whom the prophecies in the Old Testament were made.

When Jesus spoke with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he took them through the entire Old Testament, showing how the prophecies pointed to him.

*Luke 24: 25 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"*

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to Christ in what they wrote, and the New Testament apostles looked back to Christ and interpreted his life for the benefit of the church.

2. Jesus was not merely a messenger of revelation from God (like all the other prophets), but was himself the source of revelation from God.

The word of the Lord came to the Old Testament prophets, but Jesus spoke on his own authority as the eternal Word of God (John 1: 1) who perfectly revealed the Father to us

*John 14: Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

In the broader sense of prophet, simply meaning one who reveals God to us and speaks to us the words of God, Christ is of course truly and fully a prophet. In fact, he is the one whom all the Old Testament prophets prefigured in their speech and in their actions.

Jesus was "the" prophet.

## **B. Christ as Priest**

In the Old Testament, the priests were appointed by God to offer sacrifices.

They also offered prayers and praise to God on behalf of the people.

In so doing they "sanctified" the people or made them acceptable to come into God's presence during the Old Testament period.

In the New Testament Jesus becomes our great high priest.

This theme is developed extensively in the letter to the Hebrews, where we find that Jesus functions as priest in two ways.

### **1. Jesus Offered a Perfect Sacrifice for Sin.**

The sacrifice which Jesus offered for sins was not the blood of animals such as bulls or goats:

*Hebrews 10:4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

Instead, Jesus offered himself as a perfect sacrifice:

*Hebrews 9: 26 ... But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

This was a completed and final sacrifice, never to be repeated, a theme frequently emphasized in the book of Hebrews (see 7: 27; 9: 12, 24– 28; 10: 1– 2, 10, 12, 14; 13: 12).

Therefore Jesus fulfilled all the expectations that were prefigured, not only in the Old Testament sacrifices, but also in the lives and actions of the priests who offered them: he was both the sacrifice and the priest who offered the sacrifice.

Jesus is now the “great high priest who has passed through the heavens” (Heb. 4: 14) and who has appeared “ in the presence of God on our behalf” ( Heb. 9: 24), since he has offered a sacrifice that ended for all time the need for any further sacrifices.

### **2. Jesus Continually Brings Us Near to God.**

The Old Testament priests not only offered sacrifices, but also in a representative way they came into the presence of God from time to time on behalf of the people.

But Jesus does much more than that. As our perfect high priest, he continually leads us into God’s presence so that we no longer have need of a Jerusalem temple, or of a special priesthood to stand between us and God.

And Jesus does not come into the inner part (the holy of holies) of the earthly temple in Jerusalem, but he has gone into the heavenly equivalent to the holy of holies, the very presence of God himself in heaven (Heb. 9: 24).

This means that we have a far greater privilege than those people who lived at the time of the Old Testament temple.

They could not even enter into the first room of the temple, the holy place, for only the priests could go there. Then into the inner room of the temple, the holy of holies, only the high priest could go, and he could only enter there once a year (Heb 9: 1– 7).

But when Jesus offered a perfect sacrifice for sins, the curtain or veil of the temple that closed off the holy of holies was torn in two from top to bottom (Luke 23: 45), thus indicating in a symbolic way on earth that the way of access to God in heaven was opened by Jesus' death.

Therefore the author of Hebrews can make this amazing statement to all believers:

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary literally 'the holy places,' meaning both the 'holy place' and the 'holy of holies' itself] by the blood of Jesus . . . and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. (Heb. 10: 19– 22)

Jesus has opened for us the way of access to God so that we can continually "draw near" into God's very presence without fear but with "confidence" and in "full assurance of faith."

### **3. Jesus as Priest Continually Prays for Us.**

One other priestly function in the Old Testament was to pray on behalf of the people.

*Hebrews 7: 25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*

*Romans 8: 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

Some have argued that this work of high priestly intercession is only the act of remaining in the Father's presence as a continual reminder that he himself has paid the penalty for all our sins.

According to this view, Jesus does not actually make specific prayers to God the Father about individual needs in our lives, but "intercedes" only in the sense of remaining in God's presence as our high priestly representative.

However, this view does not seem to fit the actual language used in Romans 8: 34 and Hebrews 7: 25. In both cases, the word intercede translates the Greek term *entygchanō*.

This word does not mean merely "to stand as someone's representative before another person," but clearly has the sense of making specific requests or petitions before someone.

We may conclude, then, that both Paul and the author of Hebrews are saying that Jesus continually lives in the presence of God to make specific requests and to bring specific petitions before God on our behalf.

This is a role that Jesus, as God-man, is uniquely qualified to fulfill. Although God could care for all our needs in response to direct observation (Matt. 6: 8), yet it has pleased God, in his relationship to the human race, to decide to act instead in response to prayer, apparently so that the faith shown through prayer might glorify him.

In Christ, we have a true man, a perfect man, praying and thereby continually glorifying God through prayer.

Humankind is raised to a highly exalted position:

*1 Timothy 2: 5 "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"*

Yet in his human nature alone Jesus could not of course be such a great high priest for all his people all over the world.

He could not hear the prayers of persons far away, nor could he hear prayers that were only spoken in a person's mind.

He could not hear all requests simultaneously (for in the world at any one moment there are millions of people praying to him ).

Therefore, in order to be the perfect high priest who intercedes for us, he must be God as well as man. He must be one who in his divine nature can both know all things and bring them into the presence of the Father.

Yet because he became and continues to be man he has the right to represent us before God and he can express his petitions from the viewpoint of a of a sympathetic high priest, one who understands by experience what we go through.

Therefore, Jesus is the only person in the whole universe for all eternity who can be such a heavenly high priest, one who is truly God and truly man, exalted forever above the heavens.

The thought that Jesus is continually praying for us should give us great encouragement. He always prays for us according to the Father's will, so we can know that his requests will be granted.

Jesus is "the" priest.

### **C. Christ as King**

In the Old Testament the king has authority to rule over the nation of Israel.

In the New Testament, Jesus was born to be King of the Jews (Matt. 2: 2), but he refused any attempt by people to try to make him an earthly king with earthly military and political power

*John 6: 15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

He told Pilate:

*John 18: 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."*

Nonetheless, Jesus did have a kingdom whose arrival he announced in his preaching

*Matthew 4: 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

*23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.*

He is in fact the true king of the new people of God.

Jesus refused to rebuke his disciples who cried out at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Luke 19: 38; 39– 40; also Matt. 21: 5; John 1: 49; Acts 17: 7).

After his resurrection, Jesus was given by God the Father far greater authority over the church and over the universe.

*Ephesians 1: 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,*

That authority over the church and over the universe will be more fully recognized by people when Jesus returns to earth in power and great glory to reign (Matt. 26: 64; 2 Thes. 1: 7– 10; Rev. 19: 11– 16).

On that day he will be acknowledged as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19: 16) and every knee shall bow to him (Phil. 2: 10).

#### **D. Our Roles as Prophets, Priests, and Kings**

If we look back at the situation of Adam before the fall and forward to our future status with Christ in heaven for eternity, we can see that these roles of prophet, priest, and king had parallels in the experience that God originally intended for man, and will be fulfilled in our lives in heaven.

In the Garden of Eden:

**Adam was a “prophet”** in that he had true knowledge of God and always spoke truthfully about God and about his creation.

**He was a “priest”** in that he was able freely and openly to offer prayer and praise to God.

There was no need of a sacrifice to pay for sins, but in another sense of sacrifice Adam and Eve’s work would have been offered to God in gratitude and thanksgiving, and so would have been a “sacrifice” of another sort (cf. Heb . 13: 15).

**Adam and Eve were also “kings”** (or king and queen) in the sense of having been given dominion and rule over the creation (Gen. 1: 26– 28).

After sin entered into the world, fallen human beings no longer functioned as prophets, for they believed false information about God and spoke falsely about him to others.

They no longer had priestly access to God because sin cut them off from his presence.

Instead of ruling over the creation as kings, they were subject to the harshness of the creation and tyrannized by flood, drought, and unproductive land, as well as by tyrannical human rulers.

The nobility of man as God had created him— to be a true prophet, priest, and king— was lost through sin.

There was a partial recovery of the purity of these three roles in the establishment of the three offices of prophet , priest, and king in the kingdom of Israel.

From time to time godly men occupied these offices. But there were also false prophets, dishonest priests, and ungodly kings , and the original purity and holiness with which God intended man to fulfill these offices were never fully realized.

When Christ came, we saw for the first time the fulfillment of these three roles , since he was the perfect prophet, who most fully declared God’s words to us, the perfect high priest, who offered the supreme sacrifice for sins and who brought his people near to God, and the true and rightful king of the universe, who will reign forever with a scepter of righteousness over the new heavens and new earth.

But amazingly we as Christians even now begin to imitate Christ in each of these roles, though in a subordinate way.

We have a “prophetic” role as we proclaim the gospel to the world and thereby bring God’s saving Word to people.

In fact, whenever we speak truthfully about God to believers or to unbelievers we are fulfilling a “prophetic” function (using the word prophetic in a very broad sense).

We are also priests, because Peter calls us “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2: 9) .

He invites us to be built into a spiritual temple and “to be a holy priesthood” as well as “to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2: 5).

The author of Hebrews also views us as priests who are able to enter into the holy of holies (Heb. 10: 19, 22) and able to “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Heb. 13: 15).

He also tells us that our good works are sacrifices pleasing to God: “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb. 13: 16).

Paul also has a priestly role in mind for us when he writes, “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12: 1).

We also share in part now in the kingly reign of Christ, since we have been raised to sit with him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2: 6), thus sharing to some degree in his authority over evil spiritual forces that may be arrayed against us (Eph. 6: 10– 18; James 4: 7; 1 Peter 5: 9; 1 John 4: 4).

God has even now committed to us authority over various areas in this world or in the church, giving to some authority over much and to some authority over little. But when the Lord returns those who have been faithful over little will be given authority over much (Matt. 25: 14– 30).

When Christ returns and rules over the new heavens and new earth, we will once again be true “prophets” because our knowledge will then be perfect and we shall know as we are known (1 Cor. 13: 12).

Then we will speak only truth about God and about his world, and in us the original prophetic purpose which God had for Adam will be fulfilled. We will be priests forever, for we will eternally worship and offer prayer to God as we behold his face and dwell in his presence (Rev. 22: 3– 4).

We will continually offer ourselves and all that we do or have as sacrifices to our most worthy king. Yet we shall also, in subjection to God, share in ruling over the universe, for with him we shall “reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22: 5).

Jesus says, “He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3: 21) .

In fact, Paul tells the Corinthians, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we are to judge angels?” (1 Cor. 6: 2– 3).

Therefore for all eternity, we shall forever function as subordinate prophets, priests, and kings, yet always subject to the Lord Jesus, the supreme prophet, priest, and king.

## Things to Mull

1. Can you see some ways in which an understanding of Christ's role as prophet, priest, and king will help you understand more fully the functions of prophets, priests, and kings in the Old Testament?
2. Read the description of Solomon's kingdom in 1 Kings 4: 20– 34 and 1 Kings 10: 14– 29. Do you see in Solomon's kingdom any foreshadowing of the three offices of Christ?
3. Any foreshadowing of Christ's eternal kingdom?
4. Do you think that you have greater or lesser privileges living now as a member of the church in the new covenant age?
5. Can you see any fulfillment of the role of prophet in your life now?
6. Of the role of priest? Of the role of king?
7. How could each of these functions be developed in your life?

## Bibliography

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