

Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ

Lesson 3: *One Mediator - Christ in the Old Testament*

“Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:12–18

“Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.” Hebrews 8:1–6

Introduction

Throughout my walk as a Christian, there have been times when I've really wrestled with the purpose behind the Old Testament period of history. I've asked why God would take so long to go from the fall and curse in the garden to the revelation of Jesus as the consummate Redeemer and restorer of all Creation. Why did it take thousands of years to get to that point? Why were there different covenants, or phases of covenants, which God knew all along would not be sufficient to save His people to the uttermost? Why institute the whole Mosaic law, temple worship, sacrificial system, and national identity of Israel just to have these swallowed up in Christ? Couldn't history have just gone straight to Jesus and save a whole lot of bloodshed and heartbreak? I pray that I ask these questions humbly and sincerely out of love for God and a desire to know His truth. He may choose to answer these

questions by saying, “*Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?*” (Rom. 9:20)...and that answer is sufficient.

But God has been merciful to provide insight into His purposes by revealing Himself in Scripture. We should earnestly and humbly seek answers to the questions we have while also being prepared to be content with the fact that God’s ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts (Is. 55:8). As I have sought God’s design in these historical events and systems, He is gracious to give glimpses of the glory of His purposes and that has caused me to forsake my own inclinations and doubts to worship Him. I still do not claim to fully understand or to grasp all the interactions between the different phases of redemptive history, but God is kind to give answers. He sheds sufficient light to nurture and sustain faith and wonder.

God’s Purposes in the Old Testament

Below are some points related to the intent behind the Old Testament period of redemptive history.

- Show Humanity’s Greatest Need
- Show Humanity’s Inability to Achieve It
- Demonstrate the Centrality of Faith
- Establish Forms for Fulfillment
- God Glorifies Himself and Builds More Majesty Into the Culmination through Anticipation
(That’s a long one! Sorry, I couldn’t think of a shorter way to say this.)

We won’t dissect each of the points above, but summarize them in a couple statements. God’s purposes in recording the Old Testament events and writings was to show that humanity’s greatest need is to be reconciled to our Creator whom we have rebelled against and are justly under His curse. As we recognize that need, we also recognize by the testimony of the Old Testament, alongside the testimony of our own hearts, that we are unable to achieve this reconciliation. We learn of God’s perfect righteousness as we see our own depravity, which necessitates that we be separated from God lest His holiness break out against us. Yet, God’s holiness includes his long-suffering mercy towards those He loves and He desires His people to trust Him fully even when they can’t see or don’t understand what He is doing. This shows us the centrality of faith as a core characteristic of people who experience this desired reconciliation initiated by God condescending to reveal Himself. The Old Testament also gives a framework for thinking about all of the ways in which

God orchestrates salvation while preserving justice. This framework constructed over thousands of years through actual historical events alongside supernatural revelation and an elaborate religious system is literally and beautifully 'fleshed out' in the coming of Jesus Christ. Lastly, the exhaustiveness of the Old Testament and the amount of time it takes for God to deem the time fulfilled demonstrates that Jesus is more glorious than we could have ever imagined. His person is so complex and multi-faceted that it took thousands of years to prepare the way for Him to appear and eternity is not long enough to offer sufficient praises for the One to whom all the Law and the Prophets point.

God is a great storyteller. He is the teller of all stories and the way He crafts this grand story into history shows where all our longings can be fulfilled. It gives us all the elements of a great story and that's why we love good stories which mimic God's patterns in His ways of working. He is the only storyteller who is sovereign over the entire cosmos and can orchestrate all of time and space to convey the message He desires to tell. We should love His story, all of it, and seek out its wonders intently.

It seems as though some Israelites, especially the leaders and, ironically, the high priests, had some of the same questions I posed above as Jesus undertook His ministry. They seem to have wondered, if Jesus really was who He said He was, why God would seemingly be abandoning all of their heritage. Things Jesus said and did were close enough to what they had expected the Messiah to say and do that they were intrigued, but He was different enough and posed enough of a threat to their power structures that they ultimately did not receive Him. This gets us back to a question we asked in our last lesson about the historical context of Jesus' coming and whether or not there was precedent in the Jewish religion and worldview that would have prepared the Jews for all that Jesus was. Especially in His claims that He and the Father were one, that He could forgive sins, and that the Almighty Eternal LORD was now being manifested in human flesh, we see the Jewish leaders recoil at Jesus.

Well, *Jesus* certainly thought that the Jewish people should have at least partially seen this coming. He frequently uses Old Testament scriptures to point out the foreshadowing that was happening and was now being clearly revealed. Let's look at Luke 24 to see how this is demonstrated when He teaches the disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection. This is especially relevant since

we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus last Sunday. As you prepare to read the section of Scripture below, try to put yourself in the shoes of those who were walking on the road to Emmaus and ask God to give you a sense of what they felt in the despair of thinking they lost the one in which they had hoped. Then ask God to give a burning in your heart similar to what they experienced as Jesus *“interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”*

“That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

*So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, **“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”** And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying,*

“The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:13-35

Jesus, the True High Priest

In response to that general question about the role of the Old Testament in leading us to Jesus and, thereby, to know God more fully, there are a number of specific examples that could be explored to show the majesty of God’s design. We will now zoom in on one specific thread and type that is woven throughout history and is a central part of the Jewish identity. May God use this to give us glimpses of how He was using events and forms to build in His people a desire for the actual substance and a longing for the culmination of what these things prefigured. By doing this, we will see that all of Scripture is beneficial in the life of a Christian and it is a grave mistake to think that the Old Testament plays no role in the worship and teaching of the Christian church. It is the same God at work throughout and His glory is magnified as we see the whole picture being presented by His sovereign work in the time and space of the cosmos.

One specific area where the Old Testament record and heritage of Israel seems to point to the expectation for a truly divine yet still truly human Messiah is the idea of a priest. The core of this is in how God establishes the priesthood and temple worship at Sinai but, as we’ll see, priests existed before this and exist outside of the Judaic religion. This idea of a mediator between God and men is somehow deeply ingrained in the human psyche. All people throughout history have a deep-down feeling (which is sometimes strongly repressed) that they need to draw close to God and to be reconciled to Him, but we know that in ourselves we can’t do it. Thus, the wide range of mediatorial systems in religions throughout the world and throughout history. Just this observation, not based on biblical revelation, shows us that God has worked something into the human heart and mind that sets the stage for an ultimate Mediator and Reconciler. Now we’ll focus in on the special revelation in the biblical account of this phenomenon.

We’re going to do a quick jump through Scripture from Genesis 1 to Genesis 14 to Exodus to the Gospel of Mark and then land in Hebrews. We’ll concentrate on the priesthood that was established at Sinai and look at how this role in the history of the world prefigured Jesus Christ as the true substance of this shadow. For each of the first few sections, we’ll just want to notice a few key points about the passages then we will dwell longer on the book of Hebrews as it pulls all these things

together and shows how Jesus is greater, better, and more than the forms laid out in the Old Testament.

First, we look at the first chapter of the Bible. In Genesis 1:27, we read, “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*” The main thing we want to notice and ponder is what the Bible is saying by calling humanity the ‘*image of God*’. This is commonly thought of in regards to the attributes of humanity which set them apart from the rest of creation. The rationality, creativity, and emotional capacity of humans are seen as the ways that humans *resemble* God. Another way to consider the gravity of this statement is that humans are set up as vice-regents, or surrogate rulers, of the cosmos which God created. This kingly role of humans is spelled out more by the ‘creation mandate’ in the verses following verse 27, which state that humans should be fruitful, fill their earth, subdue it and have dominion over it. This ruling and nurturing activity is clearly part of what it means to be the image of God.

It also appears that the language of the ‘image of God’ in Genesis 1 is also used to give a foundation for how we think about the eventual Incarnation of Christ. The terminology which points to humans having some resemblance to God and to the role of humans in ruling also pertains to God establishing a sort of bridge between creation and the Creator in humanity. It is as though God is telling humans to mediate His presence to the creation while also, by their benevolent and productive rule, drawing forth praise and abundance from creation to the glory of God. To be clear, Adam is not a pre-existent divine being who comes to earth. He is a creature designed to bear the divine presence so, like all types, it is not an exact parallel to the incarnate Christ. However, this concept demonstrates that within the Judaic worldview there were hints of humanity having a mediatorial role to play.

One other point to notice is that this passage in Genesis sets the stage for the anti-idolatry position of Israel and the commandment that no image of God shall be constructed. Man was made in God’s image and was to be God’s image on earth already so it was not necessary or fitting to build a different image of the Creator.

Now we move along in the story to Genesis 14:17-20, which reads, “*After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the*

Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said,

*“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”*

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”

As we saw last week, this event takes place right before God establishes His covenant with Abraham so this is obviously a climactic point of Abraham's story and Abraham is obviously a very significant character in the biblical narrative. He is the one in whom *“all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* (Gen. 12:3). So who is this random guy who blesses Abraham, then blesses God, and then receives offerings from Abraham? The ESV Study Bible says that the name *Melchizedek* means *‘king of righteousness’* and that Salem is possibly a shortened version of Jerusalem, a pretty noteworthy place in biblical history. Salem is also related to Shalom so later we'll see that Melchizedek is labeled as a *‘king of peace and righteousness’*...does that sound like anyone you know? The ESV Study Bible also says, *“Although very little is known about Melchizedek, he provides an interesting example of a priest-king linked to Jerusalem.”*

There are a few other things to consider as we keep moving through the bible to trace the thread of the priesthood. Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High so this indicates that there were traces of true worship and devotion to God that remained in the world post-Eden and post-Flood.

Melchizedek's priesthood was not based upon his lineage. We don't know his mother or father and he certainly wasn't a priest in accordance with the Mosaic law because that had not been given at this point in history. Also, he was a priest that was out in the world. He was in the *‘Valley of Shaveh’*, not hunkered down in some temple somewhere waiting for people to come to him. He brought a *‘picnic’* out to Abraham and then used the time of fellowship over a meal to bless Abraham and bless God. Lastly, this mysterious priest-king is greater than Abraham, who is a very great man. Abraham gives him offerings, which is a form of worship. A shadowy picture is starting to form of a type of ruler which represents the best in humanity by ruling graciously and mediating between God and man.

Moving along with those things in our minds, the priesthood of Israel is spelled out in exhaustive detail in Exodus 25-40. There is much to consider here, but again we'll just get a few of the high points. In a recent interview, theologian and author Crispin Fletcher-Louis makes five points related to the priesthood established in Judaism.

The first point is that the high priest in the Mosaic law appears to be in some ways a new Adam. As God is progressively restoring His relationship with people after the Fall, he gives Israel directives on how to worship. The high priest is at the center of this vision of worship. The priest, dressed in specific garments representing specific things, plays a role of mediator which is in part what Adam was supposed to do in the garden, but failed. In being a figure of the restored Adam, the priest causes us to reflect on what Adam was in the garden...the image of God.

Secondly, as we imagine what it was like to be in the temple and all the symbologies present in the design of the temple, we are invited to see the temple as a '*microcosm*', or miniature cosmos, in which the priest mediates. This again harkens back to the garden. There is a sense that the temple is a restored place separate from the fallen world where God dwells and where communion with God is tentatively possible.

Third, one of the items that the priest wears is a breastplate with twelve stones on it. The stones represent the twelve tribes of Israel. This leads us to see the priest as the embodiment of Israel. So, the priest is not just the *image of God* as the reconstituted Adam, but also the image of God's people, the chosen nation of Israel. It seems that there is a shadowy picture of the mingling of natures within the person of the priest.

Fourth, one of the twelve tribes of Israel is the royal line of Judah. So, within the priest being the embodiment of all of Israel, he is also playing a kingly role.

The last point which Dr. Louis-Taylor makes is how the high priest is an anonymous office within Israel. We know the priests came from a particular lineage, but the specific individuals who fill this role throughout history are not important. Their names are not even kept in the biblical record which is unusual given how much space is given to recording all the names of the kings of Israel and Judah. This shows us that it is the office that is crucial and the people who fill the role are meant to leave

their own particular identity behind and follow a very specific script. The individuals are subsumed underneath the role as they put on the priestly garments and enter into the place designed by God to perform detailed rituals prescribed by God.

All of these things (and more) about the priesthood and temple in Israel can be seen to provide typologies for the incarnate Christ. This appears to be what is described in great detail in the middle of the book of Hebrews, which we'll get to in a bit.

We now move to Jesus coming on the scene within the context of all this (and much more). When Jesus launches into his ministry, he proclaims in Mark 1:15, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand (or in some translations 'has drawn near'); repent and believe the gospel.*" The temple was previously the place where God dwelt and where His people, through the priest, would draw near to Him. The rituals performed in the temple were dramatic enactments of true worship and of what was necessary for humans to be in the presence of God. That enactment of the kingdom of God in the temple, Jesus says, is now breaking out into the wider world. No longer confined to the temple building, Jesus is the true high priest that is out among the world going to the people. He is taking the initiative to bring God's presence and domain out among the people. Instead of Israelites taking a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to be involved in temple worship, Jesus has left the holy of holies in the temple to bring God's presence to them.

Just a little bit later in Mark 2, Jesus has an encounter with a paralytic who was lowered down through the roof. He wants to be healed, but instead of moving right to healing him, Jesus first proclaims that, on account of faith, his sins are forgiven. The scribes then question in their hearts, "*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*" (Mark 2:7). Jesus then proceeds to show them that He has authority over all creation, as God does, by healing the paralytic man in addition to forgiving his sins. The Jewish leaders clearly knew that even though the temple rituals were performed by the priests, it wasn't the priests who forgave sins, but the priests in their mediatorial role ministered forgiveness of sins from God in a provisional way through the sacrificial system. Forgiveness of sins was accomplished through temple rituals, but now the kingdom of God is drawing near and activities that were only done in the temple are now being done wherever Jesus is and God's glory is breaking forth. Jesus is the true priest and Jesus is the true temple in which God dwells fully. Hallelujah! What a God we serve! What a beautiful plan of salvation! What perfect timing! What a Savior!

Now we come to Hebrews, which elaborates on all the things laid out above. The author is clearly speaking to an audience that is familiar with Jewish history and the religious system. It seems that the purpose of the book of Hebrews is to awaken the affections and steadfastness of a group of believers who were lagging in the vigor of their faith. The way the author does this is by showing that Jesus is greater, better, and of more worth than all of the shadows and types that comprised Jewish identity. Jesus is greater than angels, greater than Moses, the salvation Jesus brings is greater than the rest sought after by Israel in Canaan, and Jesus is greater than the high priest who served in the earthly temple because he is the *“one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent set up by the Lord, not man.”* (Hebrews 8:1-2)

Jesus was, on his adopted father’s side, of the royal tribe of Israel, the house of David. This would have probably been well known. So, as he began his ministry, people could have gotten their heads around the fact that he was potentially a royal messiah and his followers could have expected him to assert his reign as a king. But he was not of the priestly lineage so it would have been offensive for Jesus to do priestly things, especially things that typically only took place in the temple. He was merging the two domains of priest and king.

This is why Hebrews harkens back to Melchizedek as a priest-king who existed before the Mosaic covenant and whose lineage was not known. There was precedent for this type of ruler and, in Christ, the veil is lifted and our hearts are softened so that we can behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

I invite you to spend time this coming week reading through the book of Hebrews, especially Chapters 7 and 8, to see how God designed the priesthood to point us to Christ and how Christ perfectly fulfills the purposes that were provisionally assigned to Israel’s priests.

Application

As we see in Hebrews, considering the nature of the priesthood is no mere speculative exercise. Seeing Christ in all of Scripture as the one true Mediator is presented by the biblical authors as crucial in inaugurating and sustaining vibrant faith. As we think about the application of this majestic line of biblical revelation we should recognize how the Bible uses these truths to bring forth greater

worship and devotion. How does examining the Old Testament and the history of an ancient religious system help us care for and comfort souls in today's world? How can we encourage each other with these truths?

First, the time and "energy" that God put into these elaborate structures and in orchestrating historical events demonstrates the surpassing glory of Christ. It was fully worth the wait to see Jesus. The anticipation that welled up in people for the Messiah was all greatly valuable in drawing praise and glory from the redeemed.

Second, Christ came to us as the True High Priest. He did not stay in the heavenly temple and require us to ascend to Him. We do not need to perform rituals that bridge the gap between us and God. Jesus has done all that is necessary to meet our deepest human need. Through repentance and faith, we are united to the True Priest-King who is now seated on His heavenly throne in the presence of the Ancient of Days.

This relates to the third point, Christ is a 'high priest forever' so He is now continuing His loving work on our behalf. A priest was established to serve the people and Christ is now serving us in the presence of God continually by interceding for us. Jesus taught His disciples that God rules by serving and Jesus displayed this rule spectacularly and perfectly by laying down His life in service to God the Father and for '*all those that the Father has given him*' (John 17:2). We should rejoice in the fact that we are loved by a God who serves and we should mimic His rule with our lives.

Lastly, the Bible says that we, having been united to Christ, are now a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). As Christ came out of the temple to minister to all the nations without fear and with boldness in proclaiming forgiveness of sins and newness of life, so we can live in a similar way. We do not stay hunkered down in our own religious subculture, but we are called to proclaim to the nations that a True Mediator has come and the greatest human need is met in Him. And He has promised to be with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

Jesus is a priest who does not *play a role* of mediator in the limited sphere of the temple and its rituals. He is the True Priest, *the ultimate, unbound Mediator*, who leaves the physical temple to go out into the world and spread the mercy of God to the whole world. He has not just put on priestly

clothes and gone through some prescribed rituals, he has fully lived out the role of mediator by being in Himself the bridge between God and man. Let's praise Him with our whole lives!

Prayer (from *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* by John Piper)

O Father, how we need mercy. We sin every day. We fall short of your command to love you with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. We are lukewarm in our affections. All our motives, even at their best, are mixed. We murmur. We are anxious about tomorrow. We get angry too quickly. We desire what ought not be desired. We get irritated at the very attitudes in others that we ourselves displayed five minutes before. If you do not show mercy to us, we are undone. O God, let us see the mercy of Christ and savor it for what it is. Grant us power to comprehend his love. Incline us to read and ponder the stories of the mercy of Jesus in the Gospels. Let us so admire what he did that we imitate him. But let it be much more than external imitation. Let it come from the heart where we have been broken for our sin and where we have come to cherish mercy and live by mercy and hope in mercy and long for mercy. Make the mercy of Jesus the greatest beauty of the Savior in our eyes. Let us behold, and beholding, become like him. And bend this taste for mercy outward so that we show it. Make us full of his mercy that we might show mercy. Fulfill in us the command to do justice and love mercy. Let us love showing mercy. Make it so much a part of use that it is who we are. So unite us to Christ that his mercy is our mercy, and our mercy is a presenting of Christ. Glorify his mercy, Father, in our faith and in our patience. Thank you, oh, thank you, for Christ and your mercy to us in him. In his name we pray, amen.

Songs of the Week:

Before the Throne of God Above by Citizens & Saints:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAKDndEBaiA>

Joy Invincible by Switchfoot: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uA_UiAFLDSA