

I.N.I.

Wednesday Advent II

Dec. 7, 2011

Psalm 110:4

In Christ Jesus, our Prophet, Priest and King, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The redeemed are those who have been ransomed. Are these old words with little present-day impact? Not at all! These are terms torn from the front pages of our times. For the redeemed are hostages set free. And we know all about hostages.

Jesus Christ paid the ransom price for a **world** held hostage and the end facing every human being was not that of a life cut short by some fanatic dictator or religious zealot. . .but everlasting damnation---eternal separation from God.

Now, when people are held hostage and actions are taken to effect their release it is not unusual for an individual with special qualifications to be called in---a mediator. In fact a few years back there was a movie about just such a man, I believe, entitled "The Mediator." That's a title of our Savior also.

... THERE IS ONE GOD AND ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MEN, THE MAN CHRIST JESUS, WHO GAVE HIMSELF A RANSOM FOR ALL, I Tim 2:5-6

This Mediator, Jesus, gave His life to ransom those held captive. That sounds like something one might read in the paper too: A mediator goes in to negotiate the release of some hostages---and becomes their replacement. Not unlike what Jesus did for us whom He has set free from sin, death and hell, except it was no spur of the moment substitution, no last minute change of plans, this was already decided on in eternity to be the purpose for which the Son of God came into human flesh: to be our Substitute, to suffer and die in our place...that we might be freed.

This was proclaimed in advance in graphic detail thousands of times in ancient Israel. Every animal whose blood was shed at the altar of burnt offering was a substitutionary sacrifice, picturing time and again the saving work of the promised Messiah, the Lamb of God.

Jesus would be the ultimate God-appointed sacrifice. He would be the real Substitute, which all those other burnt offerings, all those other lambs and sheep could only picture, the real Substitute for us whose sins had made our lives eternally lost and held hostage to Satan, death and hell.

For that's what the blood of every animal sacrificed said to the people standing there: "**Your lives were lost, held hostage by sin, death and Satan, but God accepts this sacrifice, this animal's life, in your place.**" But not because an animal's blood can actually pay for sin, not because an animal could ever be a stand-in for a human before heaven's high court. No. Each animal offered was a sober reminder of sin's cruel and deadly nature and an urgent admonition to true repentance. And above all, it was a preview of Christ's future sacrifice which would really pay for sin. The sacrifice John the Baptist pointed to when He said at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Through faith in that promised Sacrifice, the Old Testament believers received the assurance of the forgiveness of sins through the outward sign and seal of the animal sacrifice. Old Testament sacrifices could not actually pay the price. As we sang a few moments ago. . .**NOT ALL THE BLOOD OF BEASTS ON JEWISH ALTARS SLAIN COULD GIVE THE GUILTY CONSCIENCE PEACE OR WASH AWAY THE STAIN.** (TLH 156:1) They simply were not costly enough to cover. Not only was a sheep not equal in worth to a human being, but look at the way the sacrifices were appointed by God Himself-- to be repeated over and over and over. Never

finished! Never enough!

Furthermore all those animal sacrifices were unwilling, passive substitutes. But our God-appointed, God-anointed Savior, Jesus the CHRIST would be an active participant in our redemption -- a willing sacrifice. And He would not only be the sacrifice --- He would be . . . **the Priest** who did the sacrifice.

This is so essential to our Savior's redeeming work, so vital to our salvation that God the Father confirmed this office of our Savior with an oath. God here would put so much emphasis on the truth of what He is saying that He calls Himself as His own witness. Truth can't be confirmed in any stronger fashion. **THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT RELENT**, (this is irrevocable!) **"YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."**

The Old Testament priest was nothing like present day priests in certain Christian denominations. He didn't wear a turned-around collar and a black cassock; he wore a turban and dressed in a white robe. He was the God-appointed *mediator* who served in the Temple in Jerusalem. He represented the people before God -- in offering sacrifices and in offering prayers.

He was not a rabbi -- a teacher. He was not a scribe -- a Bible scholar. He was the person who received the animal offering at the altar of burnt offering, killed it in the prescribed manner, sprinkled and poured the blood as prescribed, and burned the parts in the appointed way, --all as outlined by God Himself in Leviticus.

By divine inspiration the writer of the book of Hebrews points out that the Old Testament Priest had two primary qualifications and that Jesus the Christ, our Priest --- the priest prefigured by all who served in ancient Israel, was pre-eminently qualified for this office--both with respect to

- 1) Divine appointment and
- 2) Human empathy.

Listen to what he says in Hebrews Chapters 5 about Christ's appointment to be our great Priest and then about His ability to truly understand and be empathetic toward our needs.

EVERY HIGH PRIEST IS SELECTED FROM AMONG MEN AND IS APPOINTED TO REPRESENT THEM IN MATTERS RELATED TO GOD, TO OFFER GIFTS AND SACRIFICES FOR SINS. HE IS ABLE TO DEAL GENTLY WITH THOSE WHO ARE IGNORANT AND ARE GOING ASTRAY, SINCE HE HIMSELF IS SUBJECT TO WEAKNESS. THIS IS WHY HE HAS TO OFFER SACRIFICES FOR HIS OWN SINS, AS WELL AS FOR THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE. NO ONE TAKES THIS HONOR UPON HIMSELF; HE MUST BE CALLED BY GOD, JUST AS AARON WAS.

SO CHRIST ALSO DID NOT TAKE UPON HIMSELF THE GLORY OF BECOMING A HIGH PRIEST. BUT GOD SAID TO HIM, "YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BECOME YOUR FATHER." AND HE SAYS IN ANOTHER PLACE, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER, IN THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." Hebrews 5:4-6 (NIV)

And lest someone suggest that Jesus, because He is without sin, is unable to empathize with the problems we have and the pressures which make our hearts cry out to God...the Spirit caused the following to be written: **DURING THE DAYS OF JESUS' LIFE ON EARTH, HE OFFERED UP PRAYERS AND PETITIONS WITH LOUD CRIES AND TEARS TO THE ONE WHO COULD SAVE HIM FROM DEATH, AND HE WAS HEARD BECAUSE OF HIS REVERENT SUBMISSION. ALTHOUGH HE WAS A SON, HE LEARNED OBEDIENCE FROM WHAT HE SUFFERED AND, ONCE MADE PERFECT, HE BECAME THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION FOR ALL WHO OBEY HIM AND WAS DESIGNATED BY GOD TO BE HIGH PRIEST IN THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.** Hebrews 5:7-10 (NIV)

Christmas reminds us time and again that the Son of God by human birth became the Son of Man as well--- became one with our human race. And the announcement of the angel to the shepherds on that first Christmas plainly indicated that the Savior just born was to be the Anointed One, (the one appointed by God to be our Prophet, Priest and King) **UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOUR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD** Luke 2:11(KJV)

Our sermon text this evening and the title name of our Savior -- ***THE CHRIST*** -- speak of Jesus' divine appointment. Appointment not only to be the Ruler we desperately need -- our King (which we shall hear about next Wednesday) and to be the Spokesman for God who reveals God's will to us as our Prophet (as we heard last Wednesday)--He is also anointed and appointed to be the Priest we need...and also to be the Sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

Now, the priests of Israel were all appointed by God from the tribe of Levi, the family of Aaron. But Jesus, according to His human birth was not a descendant of Levi; He was of the tribe of Judah; of the family of David. And this was exactly as God ordained. The Promised Christ, when appointed Priest through the prophetic pronouncement in Ps 110 is pointedly said to be -- not from the order of Levi, but **TO BE HIGH PRIEST IN THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.**

Who is Melchizedek? He appears in one historical reference in the Old Testament, in Genesis 14. As Abram returns from the rescue of Lot, Melchizedek comes out to meet him in the king's valley. He is identified as a priest of the Most High God. But while plainly human, Melchizedek is not a priest by virtue of a family tree, but rather by direct divine appointment (after all, this is years before the birth of Levi and the establishment of the Jewish priesthood).

Abram clearly recognized and acknowledged Melchizedek's priesthood as being from God by presenting to him a tithe of all the goods the LORD had enabled him to recover. And we know how Abram felt about giving the LORD'S honor to anyone else. Remember how he refused any part of the spoils from the King of Sodom lest the heathen king claim he made Abram rich.

Jesus was not a priest in the line of Levi but "after the order of Melchizedek". As the writer to the Hebrews comments. . . **IT IS CLEAR THAT OUR LORD DESCENDED FROM JUDAH, AND IN REGARD TO THAT TRIBE MOSES SAID NOTHING ABOUT PRIESTS. AND WHAT WE HAVE SAID IS EVEN MORE CLEAR IF ANOTHER PRIEST LIKE MELCHIZEDEK APPEARS, ONE WHO HAS BECOME A PRIEST NOT ON THE BASIS OF A REGULATION AS TO HIS ANCESTRY BUT ON THE BASIS OF THE POWER OF AN INDESTRUCTIBLE LIFE.** Hebrews 7

A priest "**ON THE BASIS OF AN INDESTRUCTIBLE LIFE?**" What does that mean? We know that Jesus is our eternal priest; He lives forever to intercede. How could any man, even a Melchizedek, prefigure that? By the Biblical record! For every other priest of God there is a record of his ancestry, both his ancestors. . . and his descendants.

There is no such record for Melchizedek. He has no precursor! And he has no successor!

Clearly that is a most important part of the picture of the Christ as Priest. Jesus did not come from a long line of priests. And He has no successor. But in His case it is not merely a matter of record. It is reality! He has no successor because none is needed. No further sacrifice is necessary. Jesus made the ultimate and completely satisfactory offering for all sin when He sacrificed Himself upon the cross. Jesus brings us into immediate (direct) fellowship with God.

Jesus Christ is our High Priest, our Mediator -- in Him each of us has direct access to God. Jesus also needs no successor to His priesthood because death cannot ever take Him from us -- and He is not about to retire! He ever lives to intercede. In Hebrews we again read **NOW THERE HAVE BEEN MANY OF THOSE PRIESTS, SINCE DEATH PREVENTED THEM FROM CONTINUING IN OFFICE; BUT BECAUSE JESUS LIVES FOREVER, HE HAS A**

PERMANENT PRIESTHOOD. THEREFORE HE IS ABLE TO SAVE COMPLETELY THOSE WHO COME TO GOD THROUGH HIM, BECAUSE HE ALWAYS LIVES TO INTERCEDE FOR THEM. SUCH A HIGH PRIEST MEETS OUR NEED -- ONE WHO IS HOLY, BLAMELESS, PURE, SET APART FROM SINNERS, EXALTED ABOVE THE HEAVENS. UNLIKE THE OTHER HIGH PRIESTS, HE DOES NOT NEED TO OFFER SACRIFICES DAY AFTER DAY, FIRST FOR HIS OWN SINS, AND THEN FOR THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE. HE SACRIFICED FOR THEIR SINS ONCE FOR ALL WHEN HE OFFERED HIMSELF.

To know Christ as Prophet but not listen to Him is foolish and eternally dangerous. To know Christ as Priest but not rely on His sacrifice for our sins is fatal and eternally damning.

Other priests were appointed by God for the service of the people of Israel--Jesus was appointed for the salvation of all people.

Other priests poured out the blood of beasts on behalf of the people--Jesus shed and poured out His own blood to save all people.

Other priests offered sacrifices for themselves, Jesus offered Himself as a Sacrifice for others.

Other priests were fed by the sacrifices brought by the people, Jesus feeds our souls with His own body and blood.

Other priests were appointed for a time, Jesus the Christ is our Priest--forever.

May that be our eternal comfort!

Amen.