

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Person of Christ: Jesus the Priest and Advocate

In the year 1500 BC, or thereabouts, the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt. The ruler of Egypt, or Pharaoh to give him the title by which he was known, was a very hard man. His philosophy was to grind the Israelites into the dust. He set harder and harder targets for their work performance. If they succeeded, he raised the target even higher. If they failed, he cruelly punished them for insubordination. All this was, of course, most distressing to the people of Israel. In particular, those with a good knowledge of the history of the nation realised that something was drastically wrong.

When the nation was brought into being, God had told them that they were to be very special to Him. Indeed, they were to be unique, quite different to the other nations. They would have a unique relationship with God. He would look after them. He would take care of them. He would do everything for them. Now, if all this was true, how could God, if there is a God, allow this detestable man Pharaoh, and this foreign nation, Egypt, to exert such terrible power over Israel? Why was he allowed to keep them in slavery like this?

Some of them, perhaps the older ones, could still remember hearing about the "good old days," years before. The Pharaoh of that time, a stern but fair man by all accounts, took the good advice of a godly, brilliant young Israelite called Joseph. Joseph had warned Pharaoh that hard times were coming. Pharaoh should make judicious plans to cope with the difficulties that would arise. Pharaoh was very wise. He said, "Right, Joseph. You are the only one with the foresight to see the difficulty. You'd better do the job yourself." And he did, earning high ranking office, responsible directly to Pharaoh. Read Genesis chapters 39 to 41 for further details.

Sadly, those glory days had gone. The present Pharaoh had no sympathy at all for any Israelite. He piled on the agony as much as he could. Eventually, God raised up another godly, brilliant leader, Moses. On God's instructions, Moses gave Pharaoh several opportunities to liberate the Israelites. He backed up his requests with a threat of severe plagues from God, if Pharaoh did not respond to his pleading. The result of Pharaoh's blanket refusal was the well known series of ten increasingly severe plagues. They culminated in the final one, the plague of death upon the eldest son in each Egyptian home. In each Israeli home, God spared the life of the eldest son. He accepted as a substitute the life of the Passover lamb, sacrificed on their behalf. Again, for further details, read Exodus chapters 5 to 12.

Imagine, then, the picture so far. Under Moses' guidance, the nation of Israel had been liberated from the Egyptian tyrant. They would ultimately live a new life in the land promised to them by God, the land of Canaan. That was a long way from Egypt. Many long, weary days and years lay ahead for them before they would get there. However would they cope? They would be able to cope only because God made special arrangements for their care and protection along the way. God had brought them out of Egypt. He would look after them in the wilderness. He would bring them, after forty years of struggle, into the promised land of Canaan.

How would God do it? He is in heaven. They were on earth. With God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). He would provide a link of communication between Himself in heaven and the people of Israel on earth. It was God's declared intention that Moses would be the sole mediator between God and Israel. Sadly, Moses did not consider himself capable of doing the whole job. When he demurred, God brought in Aaron, Moses' brother, to share the load. Communications were necessary in both directions, from God and to God. Moses was to be God's representative with Israel. He came out from the presence of God to speak to Israel on behalf of God. Aaron was to be Israel's representative with God. He went into the presence of God to speak to God on behalf of Israel, and to present the people's praises to God. Moses was a prophet or apostle. Aaron was a high priest. As always, God kept His word. He cared for his people through forty long, difficult years of the wilderness experience. God then brought them into Canaan, as He said He would.

Now, let us turn our thoughts to the New Testament, and Christianity. We are encouraged to look for the present day counterpart to what happened to Israel. After all, we read in 1 Corinthians 10:11, "Now all these things happened unto them by way of example and they are written for our admonition."

If we are the Lord's we have believed the Christian gospel. "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and ... He was buried, and...He rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4). As with the Passover lamb in Egypt, God has accepted the death of Christ on our behalf. We have been delivered from the

penalty and slavery of sin. God has saved us. He has guaranteed us a place in heaven at the end. In the meantime, He has undertaken to preserve us, look after us, care for us, throughout life's journey, short or long.

Let us think back for a moment to Moses and Aaron. 'They both did their jobs well. Between them they provided that vital communication between God and Israel. In Christianity, God's ideal of combining both functions in one person is realised in the Person of God's beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, there is something important that we must be very clear about. It is not to be considered normal for a Christian to commit sins. It is, however, recognised as normal that a Christian looks upon himself as a pilgrim, on a long journey, on his way home. The Christian pilgrim is on earth. He is on his way home to heaven. The path will be difficult. Problems will arise. Many times, he will realise that he needs Sympathy and support. Often, he will get extremely weary with the journey. He will be in danger of wondering if it's all worth the bother.

It is in this connection that we need to know why Jesus is called our High Priest in heaven. You know, from first trusting Him as Saviour, we enjoy the thought expressed in 1 Peter 5:7, "Cast all your care on Him; for He careth for you." How that thrills us. He loves us. He died to save us. He rose from the dead. He went back to heaven. He will look after us till He takes us to heaven to be with Him forever. In the meantime, He encourages us to come to Him in our weakness and frailty. He comforts us. He consoles us. He provides us with the relief we need along the way. How does He do it?

In John 13 we read of a very significant incident. The Lord Jesus was teaching His disciples to rely upon Him for everything. Relief in distress. Refreshment in weariness. Comfort in sorrow and difficulty. He took a bowl of water. He began to wash the disciples' feet. Peter objected. "I can't let You do that, Lord. You are the Master. We are your disciples." Graciously, the Lord explained. 'This was part of His service for His own. "Peter," He said, "this is absolutely necessary if you are to be comfortable and relaxed in My presence. If you are going to enjoy to the full your relationship with Me, you must let Me wash away the dust and sweat and weariness of the day's journey. Only then will you be able to relax and enter with Me into all the good things I have to show you about My Father in heaven."

Wisely Peter submitted and gained the benefit. In our journey to heaven, through this world, we shall often be weary, distressed, distraught, disappointed. Like the disciples, we shall need to have the dust and heat of the journey washed away. How does it happen in our case? Jesus washed His disciples' feet with actual, physical water. Very often, in the Bible, water is used as a symbol of the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. After washing their feet, Jesus said, (verse 14) "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet." That is, as we read our Bible, privately or to one another, the Lord uses His word to provide the comfort and refreshment we need day by day. As we read in Ephesians 5:26, Christ is busy "sanctifying and cleansing His church with the washing of water by the word."

This incident recorded in John 13 illustrates a major truth taught in the Epistle to the Hebrews. This is the great book about the Lord Jesus as our great High Priest. Chapter 1 teaches us that He is really God. He is therefore great enough in person to deal with God. Chapter 2 teaches us that He is really man. He is therefore lowly and gracious enough to deal with us human beings. 3:1 says such a person is qualified to be both the Apostle and High Priest of our Christian profession. He makes God known to men. Through Him we have access into the very presence of God, in virtue of His precious blood, shed at Calvary.

How does it work out in practice? Read 2:18: "For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted." Read Hebrews 4:14-16: "Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God ... we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Read 7:25, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing that He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

How do we come to Him? We come to Him in prayer. The simplest, newest, youngest believer in Jesus knows all about it.

*"Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy laden,
 Cumbered with a load of care?
 Precious Saviour still our refuge,
 Take it to the Lord in prayer.
 Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
 Take it to the Lord in prayer;
 In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
 Thou wilt find a solace there."*

The Christian poet who composed those words certainly knew what is involved in the Lord Jesus being our Priest in heaven. The Lord has lived here on earth. He knows what it feels like in all the circumstances of life. He can provide whatever kind of sympathy is appropriate in any particular situation. To avail ourselves of the love and care and solace He has for us, we must come to Him. Come in devotion. Come in submission. Come in love. Come in faith. He will provide whatever we need. How many times we need to truly thank Him for bringing us through difficult, weary days. We realise that we learn things about Him and things about ourselves, in that way, that we would not learn in any other way.

Even then, it is not an end in itself. There is another aspect of the Lord's priestly grace that we need to learn if we are to enjoy our Christianity to the full. Let us think back to the feet washing incident in John 13. In verse 8 of that chapter, the Lord Jesus said to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." What did He mean? "Part with Me?" When we spend time thinking about the Lord as Priest, the answer becomes clear. The Lord graciously helps us and cares for us, in our things, so that, relieved of all distress, we are free to enter with Him into His things, heavenly things, spiritual things, eternal things.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, above all books in the New Testament, describes and amplifies what this involves. From the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3, up to the end of chapter 7, we are taught in detail about how the Lord's priestly grace is available to us at any time, at any place, in any situation.

From chapter 8 onwards to almost the end of chapter 10, we learn that He relieves us of all the pain and distress on our side, so that He can conduct us into the very presence of God, a praising and worshipping people. In the language of John 13, He relieves us of things connected with our side with a view to introducing us into His side of things. What a wonderful Saviour He is! In Hebrews 8:2, He is called the Minister of the sanctuary. That is, He is like the composer of a major symphony who steps onto the podium and conducts a huge orchestra, blending together the contributions of all the varied instruments, large and small, in one grand, majestic harmony.

Before we finish, we must return to something to which we referred earlier. It is not to be considered normal for a Christian to commit sins. This is not a claim to sinless perfection. As long as we are alive in this world, we have within us a nature which will express itself in sinful acts, if given the opportunity. We Christians also have a divine nature, implanted within us by God. In any situation, on any day, we must choose whether to allow the old nature to express itself in sin, or the new divine nature to express itself in things that please God.

The Bible, then, looks at sinning by a Christian as being a rare exception. Nevertheless, in His grace God has provided for it. We read in the 1 John 2:1, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous One." Reading that statement in its own context, the situation might be summed up this way: When we trusted Christ as our Saviour we were brought into the family of God. We became His children. He is our Father. Nothing can break that link of family relationship we have with Him. However, while the link of family relationship can never be severed, the link of communion can be and is broken when we sin.

1 John 1:7-2:2 make the situation and sequence plain. Fundamentally, the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we sin, it is put as normal that, as soon as we are aware of it, we repent and confess our sin. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Our Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous One, points to the total effectiveness of the sacrifice He made in giving up His life on the cross of Calvary. That answered every righteous claim of God upon us because of our sins. This truth is called propitiation in the Bible. God the Father accepts the Advocacy of His Son on our behalf. Our family link with God as Father is maintained intact, not in virtue of anything we have done, but because of the value to God of the precious blood of Christ, the evidence that He really died. The distinction is plain. Our link of family relationship with God as Father is secure on the basis of the work of Christ at Calvary on our behalf. Our link of communion, disturbed when we sin, is restored when we repent and confess our sin.

This is easy to understand when we think about it. If we harbour unconfessed sin, how can we possibly enjoy communion with our blessed Lord, or our God and Father. When we repent and confess our sins, what peace floods

into our souls. The barrier is removed. The joy of communion is ours once more. Then we can avail ourselves once more of the Lord's priestly grace as we continue our pilgrim journey home to heaven. As that other Christian poet said,

*“All your anxiety, all your care
Bring to the mercy seat, leave it there.
Never a burden He cannot hear,
Never a friend like Jesus.”*

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank Thee that Thou hast died to save us. We thank Thee that Thou art alive now in heaven to look after us. Through Thee, we praise our God and Father, in Thy precious Name. Amen.

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