

Prophet and Priest

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WE ARE now dealing with the three offices which Christ exercises as our Redeemer. They are the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king.

So far we have dealt only with the first of these—with Christ's office of a prophet. In that office of a prophet Christ reveals to us the will of God for our salvation. In other words, He proclaims the gospel to us.

We observed how He began that proclamation of the gospel even in Old Testament times. He sent the Holy Spirit upon the Old Testament prophets and they testified beforehand of Him. But ordinarily when we think of Christ's office of a prophet we think of that part of the execution of the office which Christ accomplished and is accomplishing after He became man.

Last Sunday afternoon we spent most of our time dealing with the teaching of Christ during His earthly ministry. We observed that all of that teaching is to be regarded as part of Christ's execution of the office of a prophet, because in everything He uttered He had the full presence of the Holy Spirit and spoke with the full authority of the triune God. Other prophets spoke with divine authority sometimes; Jesus spoke with divine authority always. That is one great difference between Jesus and all other prophets.

We observed also that another difference is far greater still. That other difference is that, whereas other prophets spoke for God, Jesus not only spoke for God but was Himself God. He revealed God not only by what God gave Him to say but also by what He was. No man hath seen God at any time, says the Gospel of John. But that same Gospel of John says in the very same verse that Jesus, who was God's only begotten, has revealed that unseen God. When men looked upon Jesus they actually saw with their eyes one who was truly God. That is the marvel of the incarnation. To behold with one's bodily eyes one who was truly God—what greater wonder can there possibly be than this?

We shall one day have that wonderful privilege, as it was had long ago by the writer of the Fourth Gospel and the other eyewitnesses of the earthly ministry of Jesus. We shall have that wonderful privilege when Jesus comes again. Then we shall actually see with our very eyes one who is truly God.

Meanwhile we can read in the Gospels about the words and deeds of that same one. By that reading we become truly acquainted with Him. Much in His earthly life has not been recorded in the Gospels. We are told little about the long years which He spent at Nazareth until He was about thirty years old. Only one glimpse—a wonderful glimpse, it is true—is given us from those years. We cannot give anything like a complete biography of Jesus. We cannot trace with anything like completeness the chronological sequence of His words and deeds. But there is one wonderful thing about that which we do actually read about, there in the Gospels. The wonderful thing about it is that it does tell us with matchless distinctness what manner of person Jesus was. If we read the Gospels in sympathetic fashion we do come into personal contact with Jesus.

Many biographies embracing many volumes and full of the most minute and detailed information seem somehow never to present to us the real person whose life they are starting out to describe. As we read them we learn this thing and that thing that the man said and did, but somehow the man himself seems to be hidden from us; we do not really get acquainted with him when we read the learned book that recounts his life.

It is not so with the Gospels. How marvelously lifelike is the picture that they give of Jesus of Nazareth! What wonderful insight is given into the depths of His soul! There are, indeed, mysteries there. We always feel, as we read, that we are dealing with a person so mysterious that no man can ever fathom the depths of His being. Indeed the Gospels themselves, in the words of Jesus that they report, tell us that. "No one knoweth the Son but

the Father," says Jesus in the 11th chapter of Matthew. But although there are depths in the person of Jesus which no mere man can know, nevertheless the devout reader of the Gospels does acquire a knowledge of Jesus which is wonderfully rich and true. It is not merely an external knowledge; it is not merely a knowledge of this detail or that regarding the things that Jesus saw and did; but it is a knowledge of the person Himself.

We do rise from a reading of the Gospels, if we have read aright, with a true knowledge of the man Christ Jesus. Nay, we rise from a reading of the Gospels also with the knowledge that the man Christ Jesus is also very God. Always the deity of Christ shines through in the Gospel picture. It appears in the lofty claims of Jesus Himself—His claim to do things that only God can do, His claim to forgive sins, His claim to be the final judge of all the earth, His claim to have in His own being depths which only God the Father knows, His claim to be one with the Father. The deity of Jesus appears in the sovereign power of Jesus, substantiating His lofty claims. Yes, it is certainly true that the Gospels present one who was God and man in two distinct natures.

Yet they also just as clearly present one who was one person, and they enable us to know that person. Our knowledge of the person is given us by the details which the Gospels tell us about Him; it is entirely dependent upon those details; but it is something more than the sum of those details. If we read the Gospels aright we know more than this thing and that about Jesus. We know Jesus!

Knowing Jesus, we trust Him. We could not trust any other. But when we are confronted with the majestic and yet wonderfully tender and loving person who is presented to us in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, then we say, "Lord, I believe," and if we also say, "Help thou mine unbelief," we can trust Him even to answer that prayer. The Bible does more than tell us, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,

and thou shalt be saved." It also tells us who that person is in whom we are asked to believe. The Bible is not unreasonable enough to ask us to put our trust in one about whom we know nothing, but it gives us, in the Gospels, a wonderfully vivid account of the One whom it presents to us as the object of our faith. If we really read that account aright, we say that the One who is there presented to us is worthy of an utterly boundless confidence. We trust Him because we know Him to be trustworthy.

That knowledge of Jesus which is imparted to us in the Gospels is part of Jesus' prophetic work. He proclaims to us the will of God for our salvation not only by telling us this thing or that about the way of salvation, not only by telling us this thing or that that we should do, but also by presenting Himself to us in very person as the object of our faith. He offers Himself to us as our Saviour, and in thus offering Himself to us as our Saviour He is truly executing His office as a prophet. He is revealing God to us, as a true prophet reveals God—yet in a way that goes far beyond the way in which any other prophet can reveal God. His own words make that clear. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," said Jesus. Jesus, my friends, is Himself God, and His presentation to us of His own person is the very centre of His prophetic office.

That presentation of Jesus to us as our Saviour was, as we have seen, carried on by the words and deeds of Jesus during His earthly ministry. But it is very important to observe that it did not cease when His earthly ministry was over, and it is also very important to observe that that part of it which was carried on after His earthly ministry was over was just as truly carried on by Jesus Himself as was the part of it which was carried on during His earthly ministry.

In the first place, Jesus provided even during His earthly ministry for the subsequent carrying on of His prophetic work. He did that by choosing and commissioning His apostles. He invested His apostles with a supernatural authority, and in the exercise of that authority they gave the New Testament books to the church. The authority of the New Testament books is not an authority independent of Jesus, but it is an authority which Jesus Himself imparted.

In the second place, Jesus not only

gave the apostles the commission in virtue of which they gave the New Testament books to the church, but also He empowered the writers of the New Testament books in their execution of the commission. He sent the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the New Testament books so that they were preserved from error and so that the resulting books are the very Word of God. Even of the very first coming of the Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter said, speaking of Jesus:

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear (Acts 2: 33).

The same thing is true of all subsequent operations of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament delights to call the Holy Spirit not only the Spirit of God but also, particularly, the Spirit of Christ or the Spirit of Jesus, or the Spirit of the Son of God. The Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father but also from the Son. That is true not only of the mysterious eternal relation between the persons of the godhead, but also of the operations of the Holy Spirit in the church. So when the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the New Testament books, so that what they wrote should be truly the Word of God, that was part of the execution of the prophetic office of Jesus Christ.

That brings us to speak of the third way in which Christ continues to execute His prophetic office after the conclusion of His earthly ministry. He executes it in the blessed ministrations of the Holy Spirit to the individual believer. We must not conceive of the relations of the persons of the Trinity to one another too much after the analogy of the relationships of finite persons. We must not apply any mechanical either-or to the question whether it is the second or the third person of the Trinity who does this or that. The New Testament does, indeed, teach the true personality of the three persons. It does make a profound distinction between them. But at the same time it teaches that where the Holy Spirit is present Christ is present. So close is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the ascended Lord from whom He comes

that where the Holy Spirit is present Christ Himself is said to be present.

Accordingly, when the Holy Spirit enlightens the mind of some still unsaved person so that he shall receive the gospel for the saving of his soul, that is not only the work of the Spirit; it is also part of Christ's execution of His prophetic office. So also when the Holy Spirit is graciously present with believers in their reading of the Bible, enabling them to understand in ever greater fullness the meaning of what they read and enabling them to receive it ever more profoundly in their hearts as well as in their minds, in order that they may practice it in their lives, that also is part of Christ's execution of His prophetic office.

Very comprehensive, then, is that office of a prophet which Christ executes as our Redeemer. The Shorter Catechism is quite right in saying that Christ as our Redeemer executes the office of a prophet not only by His word but also by His Spirit. And the Larger Catechism is quite right in emphasizing, more clearly even than does the Shorter Catechism, the wonderful comprehensiveness of that prophetic work. "Christ executeth the office of a prophet," it rightly says, "in his revealing to the Church in all ages, by his Spirit and Word, in divers ways of administration, the whole will of God, in all things concerning their edification and salvation."

But it is time now for us to turn to the second of the three offices which Christ is said in the Catechisms to execute as our Redeemer. That is Christ's office of a priest.

As we began our discussion of Christ's office of a prophet by asking what is a prophet, so it would seem to be in the interests of logical symmetry for us to begin our discussion of Christ's office of a priest by asking what is a priest.

Fortunately we have abundant materials in the Bible for obtaining an answer to that question. We not only have descriptions of priests and their activities from which we could ourselves derive a very clear notion of what the Bible regards as essential in the priestly function, but also in the Epistle to the Hebrews we have something almost akin to an actual definition:

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 thereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron (Heb. 5:1-4).

Here the fundamental nature of priesthood appears very clearly. A priest is a mediator between men and God. Men, not having direct access to God, or at least not having such direct access until it is secured for them by the priest, are dependent upon the priest's mediation in their approach to God. He represents them in God's presence. They wait without. He enters in unto God and pleads their cause.

That being so, it is natural to discover that the priest's function is twofold. First, he offers sacrifice; and, second, he engages in intercession. He offers sacrifice in order to expiate sin, and make God propitious; and then he uses the access to God thus secured in order to be an advocate in God's presence of the people of whom he is the representative. Sacrifice and intercession—those are the two chief functions of a priest, according to the Bible.

It may perhaps be said, with some degree of truth, that as a prophet is a representative of God in the presence of men, so a priest is a representative of men in the presence of God. But that formulation of the difference between the two offices is misleading if it is understood to mean that as a prophet is chosen by God to be His representative before men, so a priest is chosen by men to be their representative before God. The Epistle to the Hebrews, in the passage which we have just quoted, is careful to point out that a priest is not chosen by men at all. Like a prophet, he is chosen by God. He is a representative of men in the presence of God, but he does not take this honor unto himself, nor is he given it by those whose representative he is; but he is called to this honor by God, as was Aaron.

Well, then, if that is what a priest is, if a priest is one who approaches God in behalf of men, by offering

sacrifice and by making intercession for them, and if Christ is a priest, it follows that Christ, in the execution of the office of a priest, will be found to perform those functions. An examination of the whole Bible will show that such is actually the case, and one book of the Bible, the Epistle to the Hebrews, is concerned, almost from the beginning to the end, with showing that it is the case. Christ offered sacrifice for His people on the cross, and He makes intercession for them. He exercises, therefore, all parts of the office of a priest.

It is true, of course, that there are important differences between Christ's execution of the office of a priest and the execution of it by other priests. Other priests offer sacrifice repeatedly; Christ offered it once and for all. Other priests needed to offer sacrifice for their own sins as well as for the sins of their people; Christ, being sinless, offered sacrifice for the people's sins only. Other priests should have compassion on sinners because they are sinners too. Christ, being sinless, has compassion on sinners only because He was tempted in all points like as they are, and not at all because He Himself has sinned.

Do these differences, and others, mean that the Bible is using merely a figure of speech when it calls Christ a priest? Do they mean that it is merely using an analogy taken from human life to describe as best it may a work of Christ which really transcends all such analogies? I do not think that is the way to look at the matter at all. Exactly the opposite is the case. Far from saying that other priests are the real priests and Christ is a priest only in a figure, what we really ought to say is that Christ is the only real priest, and other priests are at best priests only in a secondary and partial sense. Very grandly does the Epistle to the Hebrews bring that out. Even the Old Testament priests, who unlike the priests in heathen religions have not usurped the priesthood but are truly appointed to be priests by God, are yet priests only in a secondary and derived sense. Their priesthood brought access to God only by pointing forward to the one true priest, who on Calvary offered the only sacrifice that can take away the guilt of sin and cause sinful men to be received by the righteous God, the one true priest who alone has constant and untroubled access to God that He may continually make intercession

for men. The priesthood of the Old Testament priests was but a shadow of what was to come, and now that the reality has been established the shadow has passed away.

We cannot possibly lay too great stress upon that fact. There is really only one priest who can bring us sinners unto God; there is only one who can present us before the throne. That one is Jesus Christ, and the means by which He presents us before the throne is His death. Then did He offer the one complete and all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. Then did He offer Himself truly as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

It should be evident even this afternoon, before we go on to unfold any further what the Bible tells us about the priestly work of Christ, that in dealing with the priestly work of Christ we are dealing with the heart of the gospel. We are dealing with the heart of the gospel because we are dealing with the cross of Christ.

Will you believe that gospel this afternoon, my friends, if you have not already believed it? As Jesus knocks at the door of your heart, will you open the door and receive Him as your Saviour and your Lord?

Bureau of Vital Statistics

Married: Miss Elizabeth Gillmore to the Rev. Marvin L. Derby of New Haven, Connecticut, June 21st, at Hamilton, Ohio.

At Bris, Virginia, Miss Phyllis Little to the Rev. Henry D. Phillips of Washington, D. C., on July 27th.

At Westminster Seminary, June 29th, Miss Elsie Schaufele to the Rev. Robert E. Nicholas.

At Los Angeles, California, Miss Kathleen Moote to the Rev. Dwight H. Poundstone, on June 14th.

Born: To Dr. and Mrs. Donald K. Blackie of Escondido, California, a daughter, Priscilla Frances, on May 27th.

To the Rev. and Mrs. Russell Dale Piper of Los Angeles, California, a son, Dale Ellis, on May 18th.

To the Rev. and Mrs. John Davies of Gresham, Wisconsin, a daughter, Beth Ann, on July 19th.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: *Ministers of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church are invited to submit notices for future instalments of this column.*)