

Catford Lectures 2009-2010

Part 12

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[00:00:00] As to the hymn books, in the medieval churches they used to chain the Bibles. Perhaps there was a reason.

Shall we begin our meeting this evening by singing hymn 178. Our great High Priest is sitting at God's right hand above, for us his hands uplifting in sympathy and love. Whilst here below in weakness we onward speed our way, in sorrow oft and sickness we sigh and groan and pray. Hymn 178.

Our great High Priest is sitting at God's right hand above, for us his hands uplifting in sympathy and love.

[00:01:18] Whilst here below in weakness we onward speed our way, in sorrow oft and sickness we sigh and groan and pray.

Through manly contemplation my soul falls on her course.

[00:02:03] Christ's mighty intercession upon his hungry souls.

My gracious High Priest, greet him, who from the cross did bleed.

Remember us, praise him, bless him, help him each hour of need.

O Jesus, blessed Saviour, we hope to see thee soon.

[00:03:06] Who once called earth its Saviour, who soon for us will come.

God's most gracious labour made thee his Son to guide.

To be thou his processor, to be for us a guide.

Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

[00:04:03] I'd like to read some scriptures from the Epistle to the Hebrews. We begin in chapter 3 with the first part of the chapter.

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to him that appointed him. Chapter 4, verse 14.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. [00:05:03] For we have not an 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. And from chapter 7, verse 24.

This man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore, he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. [00:06:03] For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. Who needeth not daily as those High Priests to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins and then for the people's? For this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men High Priests which have infirmity, but the word of the oath which was since the law maketh the Son, who is consecrated for ever. Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum. We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man. [00:07:10] And then from the book of Exodus, chapter 28.

We read verse 2 and then verses 4 and 5.

And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, for glory and for beauty. And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise-hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. And these are the garments which they shall make, a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a broided coat, a mitre, and a girdle. [00:08:14] And they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. And they shall take gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen.

How grateful we ought to be that we have in heaven a great High Priest.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, he was not a High Priest. He couldn't be. He was not a descendant of Aaron. He was not even of the tribe of Levi, but of Judah. [00:09:04] So he had no earthly right to be a priest.

But the first verse that we read together told us to consider the Apostle and High Priest of our calling, Jesus Christ, who was faithful. And that is what we are going to do with the Lord's help this evening. The Lord Jesus came from heaven as the Apostle in order to bring God his Father before mankind.

And having completed his work here on earth, he then ascended to heaven to take the place of a great High Priest on his Father's throne, ever to make intercession for us.

[00:10:13] Now, when the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of him as a great High Priest, that is typical of that epistle, where things of the old covenant are contrasted with all that is of the new covenant. And we see that the Lord Jesus is always described as being greater, better, more excellent, and in one instance even more perfect than that which was of the old covenant. But isn't that to be expected of the man, Christ Jesus, who came down from heaven?

[00:11:12] Why do we need a High Priest?

Well, we have read that he was acquainted with our infirmities. And this is typical of our character as we go through this world. We are far from perfect. We have our weaknesses of various kinds. We have, for example, physical weaknesses. They may trouble us so much that we tend to become self-centered. We forget things that are more useful to us, spiritually useful.

[00:12:06] We may be mentally weak, and that is a condition which very often makes us even more self-centered. We are unable to think about spiritual things. But you know, the weakness that we have most is something that comes from the flesh.

We have heard this afternoon of the work of Satan. And he knows just how to manipulate our flesh, which, as we know so well, is not going to help us on our way through this world. The Apostle Paul wrote in his epistle to the Galatians, [00:13:02] Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not commit the lusts of the flesh.

What a good thing it was that we had the Lord Jesus as an example. He was a man here on earth, and yet he was without sin.

Defilement in any form never touched him. He was surrounded by it, and yet he lived a life of righteousness, a life that was sinless and pleasing to God in every respect. Wasn't he the one who truly, as we read in the epistle to the Hebrews in chapter 7, became us? That doesn't mean, for the younger ones here, that he became one of us, he became one like us. [00:14:04] It means he was absolutely suited to our need as our high priest in heaven. And when we think of our weaknesses, we may well become disgusted with ourselves, because when we find ourselves tempted by Satan, who dangles the attractions of the world and the urges in our flesh before us to try to make us give way to them so that we are distracted from the person and the glory of Christ, then we probably realise how we have dishonoured the Lord.

And that may be a very good thing. It may make us begin to exercise self-judgement. [00:15:03] But there is another difficulty. We often despair when we are realising how weak we are, and that is just what we should not do. That is the very reason why we have in heaven a great high priest. He brings our weaknesses before his God and Father, and our God and Father, and he does it, as we heard this afternoon, even before anything has happened. This afternoon we heard of Peter, and although the Lord Jesus wasn't a high priest on earth, do you remember that occasion when he said to Peter, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you. [00:16:08] He had prayed not only before Peter committed that ghastly deed of denying the Lord, but he had even prayed for him before he told Peter about it. And that is just what he does for you and for me. So we should take encouragement from that. But there is another aspect that we need to consider, and that is we must never attempt to go on in our own strength.

Ephesians 6, verse 10, Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

[00:17:06] Whatever we try in our own strength is going to fail. But if we follow the Lord and are able to act in his strength, then we have the power to overcome Satan.

Now we read in the book of Exodus that the high priests of old had certain garments, and we are going to look at these garments in the course of this lecture with this chapter in mind to see how the character and the work of the Lord Jesus are reflected in the various items of this chapter. We shan't take them in the order in which they come, we shall take them in the order in which they had to be put on the high priest. [00:18:01] So we shall begin then later in the chapter with the coat. Verse 39.

Thou shalt embroider the coat of fine linen.

The coat was white throughout.

Now, in the beginning of the chapter, we have these different materials and the colors, and they all have spiritual significance. So let's look at those first. Verse 5.

They shall take gold and blue and purple and scarlet and fine linen.

[00:19:07] Gold speaks of Christ in his divine righteousness. His deity comes to the fore in the gold. We probably have often looked at the items in the tabernacle and seen that so many of them were made of pure gold, reflecting the deity of Christ. Now, what do they do with this gold? Well, let's look at chapter 39. Verse 3.

They did beat the gold into thin plates and cut it into wires to work it in the blue and in the purple and in the scarlet and in the fine linen with cunning work. [00:20:11] So the garments that the high priest wore before he went into the holy place, not the holiest of all, were all intertwined with gold. Doesn't that show us that the Lord Jesus was God manifest in the flesh in every aspect of his character? Then we have the blue. Well, we all know that blue is the color of the sky, and that speaks of his heavenly origin. The Lord Jesus himself had said, [00:21:02] No man hath ascended into heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man. He came from the glory of the Father to this earth in order to present the Father to the people, but they wouldn't have him.

You know, there were high priests of many different characters. Some were very bad, when we think of Caiaphas and Annas, or the high priest that the Apostle Paul called a whited wall, or they could never have been called a great high priest, but our high priest is indeed a great high priest. He was the one who came from heaven. [00:22:04] He was God manifest in the flesh. If we think of the opening of John's Gospel, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, doesn't that show us that he must have come from heaven, and the Word was God.

There is his deity.

Purple is the royal color.

It's remained so in this country to the present day. Someday, if the Lord hasn't come before, there is going to be another coronation here, and the young people here will be able to witness when the royal dukes appear in purple robes. Purple was this color which Mordecai was granted to wear by the king.

[00:23:11] It was the color that Daniel was granted to wear by the king. We see the royalty, and Christ is a king.

When he stood before Pilate, Pilate asked him, Art thou a king? And the Lord Jesus said, Thou sayest it. Then we have the scarlet. Scarlet is a color of earthly grandeur. You know, if we look at the book of Revelation, we shall find there in chapter 19, in a worldly sense, that scarlet is such a color.

[00:24:07] In chapter 19, we have verse 13, where we have the Lord Jesus himself. He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. Verse 16. He hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

That at a time when he is again on this earth, truly as the ruler over the whole earth.

These are the materials, and then came the fine linen, [00:25:01] that which spoke of absolute purity. So when we have the coat, which is made of fine linen, that is what is closest to the body. The Lord Jesus was himself absolutely pure, and that made it so clear.

Above this coat came the next one, which was the ephod, the robe of the ephod, sorry, that was completely of blue.

Now here we have the heavenly character coming into view.

But this robe of blue had a hem.

[00:26:02] The hem is there in order that the garment doesn't come into contact with the earth and pick up anything from the earth. It's a mark of separation, and that becomes also so clear, I think it's in chapter 39 again.

Sorry, it's in Numbers 15, where the children of Israel are given instructions. Numbers 15 verse 38.

Speak unto the children of Israel and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations. Here, the fringe is then that which marks their separation. [00:27:02] We should see this in a moment. And that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribbon of blue.

This is an indication of the heavenly character of the people of God, separate from this world. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, our conversation, or better, our citizenship is in heaven. How often we forget that. How often we are attached to this earth, if not to this world.

And yet, we are called upon to look above. If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth, at the right hand of God. Then it says about this, And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, [00:28:02] and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them.

And that ye seek not after your own heart, and your own eyes, after which ye used to go a-whoring, that ye may remember and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.

I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord

your God.

When the people of Israel then wore their garments with this hem, with this ribbon of blue on it, they remembered that they had been released from Egypt, taken from the power of Pharaoh, guided through the Red Sea into the wilderness, [00:29:04] on the way to the Promised Land. Isn't this our experience? We have been taken from this world.

We no longer belong to it. We belong to Christ. We belong to the heavenly country.

We have been taken from Satan's power. What a privilege that is. How sad it is for anyone to be still enslaved by Satan, that he can turn them in what direction he wishes, that he is able to make them sin, and they are his servants.

And we have a loving Saviour who died [00:30:01] in order to break Satan's power and to free us from servitude under him.

We were brought through his death, through the Red Sea, into the wilderness scene, where we are now walking on our way to our home in heaven. Now we know, of course, that we already have a place there, and that in spirit we are seated in the heavenlies in Christ. But it is in this wilderness scene that we notice our infirmity, and what a help our Lord is, because there he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Then the next item is the ephod.

We go back to verse 6.

[00:31:05] The ephod contained every colour and every material that had been provided. It was the top garment, so obviously the most visible, and it must have been a most impressive sight to see Aaron when he walked from his tent in order to go into the court of the tabernacle and eventually into the first part, the holy place, in order to present sacrifices at the brazen altar and then into the first part of the tabernacle itself.

This ephod showed forth all the qualities and all the characters of Christ, all in one, his deity, his heavenly origin, [00:32:06] his royalty and majesty, his grandeur and his purity.

But there were two parts to the ephod, the front part and the rear part, and they were joined at the shoulders, held together with chains, we'll come to the point of the chains in a moment, and two settings out of gold for two precious stones.

And on one precious stone, six names were recorded of the first six sons of Jacob.

On the other one, the next six sons of Jacob. So the whole people of Israel had their names recorded [00:33:05] on the shoulders of the high priest. When he went into the holy place, he bore their names. On this place of strength, and isn't that just what our great high priest does for us, he bears us before his God and Father.

Our names are written there. They were written, they were engraved with the engraving of a signet. Now, we probably all know what a signet ring is. It has a mark on it which identifies the person wearing the ring, and he used to seal things and put his ring on it so that that marking was seen on the document. It was a mark of authority.

[00:34:02] And that is how we are represented before God in Christ. What a wonderful privilege that is too.

Then, hanging from the chains was the breastplate.

The breastplate was a kind of pocket, a fairly large one, and here again it had two purposes.

There were 12 different precious stones on the front of the breastplate, and each stone was engraved again with the name of one of Aaron's, one of Jacob's sons. The 12 tribes were not only represented then on the shoulders, the place of strength, but also nearest to the heart.

[00:35:07] This is another precious aspect, that our names are on his heart. The one who died for us, as the Apostle Paul said, Christ loved me and gave himself for me.

His name, our name, is planted on his heart.

So he, before God, carries the names of all those he has redeemed that must make us grateful that we have a high priest there in the heavens. So, we see then how precious we are to the one who gave himself for us.

[00:36:05] But there was another purpose to this breastplate. Because it was a pocket, there had to be something inside, and there were the Urim and the Thummim.

In many words, they mean lights and perfections. We do not know what they were, we do not know what they were made of, but the only thing we know about them is that they had to do with judgment or assessment. I wonder if you remember when the children of Israel returned from the Babylonian captivity, they were assembled and the priests were numbered, and there were some who claimed to be of the priesthood, [00:37:05] but they had no identification, they had no record of their belonging to the priesthood. And what did they do with them? Well, they had to wait until a priest, a high priest arose with Urim and Thummim, who had the power to decide in God's name whether they were truly priests or not. Now, we too are a holy priesthood and a royal priesthood.

And we also have the means of making judgments and assessments.

The Holy Spirit within us gives us the mind of Christ. [00:38:05] What a privilege that is too. A holy person dwelling within us, leading us into all truth, leading us into God's mind as to how things should be done, or would we pay more attention to that as assemblies? If only Christianity had paid more attention to that in the course of its history, Wildfell Hall wouldn't be sparsely populated now, it would be crammed, and so would every other so-called place of worship. We see how weak we are. We are even unable to put into practice the things that God has in mind for us. [00:39:05] Well, we have our great high priest there in heaven, and we have read various things about him in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Let's return to that. Chapter 4, verse 14.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

We have professed that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[00:40:04] We have professed that we wish to follow him. Now, do we do it?

Let us hold fast our profession.

How easily it is to let things slip. Items of the truth which perhaps don't appeal to us, irritate us perhaps, and yet it is the word of God, it is the truth, how we need to be aware of what the Lord would have done in his church. Let us hold firm our profession.

For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. When he was here, he saw suffering on every side, [00:41:04] and that suffering made him feel it too. He felt, especially when Lazarus died, he wept.

Or when he looked down on Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how would I have gathered you, as a hen gathereth its hens under her wings, but ye would not. Therefore, he knew what human infirmity was, and so he knows what your situation is.

He knows what your position is. He knows where you need his intercession, and he makes intercession for you.

And then it says, Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, [00:42:02] that we may obtain mercy and find grace in time of need. Do we do that?

We probably fail to do it all too often. When temptation looms up before us, is our first reaction, turn to the Lord, bring the matter before him, remember he has already made intercession for us.

Do you remember that well-known hymn, What a Friend We Have in Jesus?

O, what joy we often forfeit!

O, what needless pain we bear! All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. [00:43:01] Beloved brethren, we ought to be much more aware that our great High Priest is simply waiting for us to turn to him in all our needs.

Chapter 7, we have a wonderful description or characterization of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 24 tells us, This man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

He has been speaking, the writer of this epistle, has been speaking about the Aaronic Priesthood and there was a great difference.

The priests of the Aaronic Priesthood, they died. They had to be replaced. [00:44:03] Not only that, when they brought sacrifices, they had to bring sacrifices for themselves and for the people.

These sacrifices were repeated time and time again. But as we read later in chapter 10, It is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to put away sin.

But by one offering he hath perfected for ever them who are sanctified. What a privileged position we are in as believers, as those redeemed by his precious blood. One offering, sanctified for ever.

And after he had made this one offering, [00:45:01] he sat down for ever in the right hand of the Majesty on high. That is our High Priest. Well here it says, Such an High Priest became us, who is holy.

Corresponding to God in every single aspect, he is holy.

Where there can be no thought of sin, where judgment must be passed upon sin.

That is the character of holiness. He was harmless.

The meaning here of harmless is he was absolutely true. There was no thought of deception or guile in him. [00:46:05] When they asked him who he was, he said, Just what I've been telling you right from the beginning, nothing else.

The Son of God who came down from heaven, undefiled, in spite of the sin all round him. Yet he was not affected by that apart from in his heart, what he saw, and separate from sinners.

So he is characterized for his life on earth, and then made higher than the heavens. He has taken that supreme place in heaven, entering it as the firstborn of every creature, the one who in rank is above all.

[00:47:05] And so he had no need, as the other High Priests had had, to sacrifice every day for his own sins, and then for the people. This he did once, when he offered up himself.

And then we have in chapter 8, We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. When the Apostle Peter wrote in chapter 2 that we are a holy priesthood, [00:48:01] then he said, in that office, if we can call it an office, we offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

There we see again that there in heaven he is acting just as the priests did here on earth, bringing our sacrifices of worship and praise and thanksgiving to his God and Father. And you know, even when we are no longer here on this earth, there will be those who will be worshipping God in that way. Don't we read in Revelation of another angel who brought the prayers, [00:49:01] the worship of the saints then on earth in the censer so that the odour rose up to God.

I think that is probably what inspired a certain Mrs. Bowlby in the first half of the 19th century to write a hymn which we have in our hymn book, which we shall sing shortly, And to all our prayers and praises Christ adds his sweet perfume and he the censer raises these odours to consume.

Do we bring the worship of our hearts as priests, as holy priests?

The other members of the priesthood, they had to wear simply white. [00:50:03] They had no glorious clothing like the high priest. But there was one occasion in the year when the high priest himself did not wear this beautiful clothing. That was on the Day of Atonement when he went into the holiest of all in order to sprinkle the blood on the ark, on the seat, the mercy seat. Then he himself was dressed entirely in white, in fine white linen.

He even had breeches on. Normally the high priest did not have breeches. The scripture doesn't tell us that he had. But on this occasion, when the earthly high priest went in, it was necessary. His flesh had to be completely covered and it had to be covered in purity, [00:51:05] in that which was pure, that which spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ in all his purity.

Is that what characterises us when we come together to worship? Have we exercised self-judgement, put all aside that could be displeasing to our Lord, that could dishonour him, so that when our worship as an assembly rises up, it does so in this character, that Christ adds his sweet perfume to it and God can be well pleased.

Then we have the other occasion in the same chapter where we are called a royal priesthood. Why? [00:52:02] That we should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

The word should not be praises, it should be virtues.

Do we, as royal priests, present the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in all his wonderful virtues here on earth? We heard about humility.

No one was ever as humble as the Lord Jesus. That's a characteristic that is really foreign to us. And yet, how humble he was.

He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Oh, what an example for us [00:53:04] to show humility in all things.

I'd like to close this address also with reference to some verses from the Epistle to the Hebrews. Chapter 10 and verse 19.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having an high priest over the house of God, and having an high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart [00:54:04] in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised, and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. I'll stop there.

Is that true of our practice?

We need to look at those verses again and see exactly what it says to see whether that measures up with our walk as children of God.

[00:55:01] When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, he finished the epistle, or almost finished it, with words saying, God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ my Lord, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.

Can we really say that? Is there that separation?

Is the hem of our garment really marked by this blue ribbon showing that we are citizens of heaven?

The work of the Lord Jesus Christ separated us from the world, but have we separated ourselves from the world? [00:56:04] May the Lord grant that it be so. Let us close by singing Hymn 114. The holiest we enter in perfect peace with God, through whom we found our centre in Jesus and his blood. Though great may be our dullness in thought, though great may be our dullness in thought and word and deed, we glory in the fullness of him that meets our need. 114. The holiest we enter in perfect peace with God, [00:57:03] through whom we found our centre in Jesus and his blood.

Though great may be our dullness in thought and word and deed, we glory in the fullness of him that meets our need.

Much incense is ascending before the eternal throne, [00:58:08] God graciously is bending to heal each feeble one.

To all our pleasant praises Christ adds his sweet perfume, and he that sends the praises his orders to consume.

O God, we come with singing because thy great high priest [00:59:15] our name sturdy is bringing, nor e'er forgets the least.

For us he wears the miter, where holiness shines bright.

For us his robes are whiter than hems of solid light.