

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## What Christ is to us: Great High Priest and Advocate

In the year 1500 BC, or thereabouts, the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt. The ruler of Egypt, entitled 'Pharaoh', was a very hard man. His philosophy was to grind the Israelites into the dust. He set increasingly harder targets for their work performance. If they succeeded, he raised the target even higher. If they failed, he cruelly punished them.

All this was 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. God had told them that they were very special to Him; different to all the other nations. They were to have a unique relationship with God. He would look after them. He would take care of them. He would do everything for them.

If all this was true, how could their God allow this detestable Pharaoh, and this foreign nation, Egypt, to exert such terrible power over Israel? Why was he allowed to keep them in slavery? Some of the older ones could still remember hearing about the 'good old days', long before. The Pharaoh of that former time, a stern but apparently fair man, took the good advice of a godly, brilliant young Israelite called Joseph. Joseph had warned Pharaoh that hard times were coming (Genesis 41:25-32). He recommended that Pharaoh should make judicious plans to cope with the difficulties that would arise (Genesis 41:33-36). Pharaoh was very wise. He said, "Righto, Joseph! You have foreseen the difficulty. You do whatever is necessary" (Genesis 41:37-57). And he did, earning high ranking office, responsible directly to Pharaoh. Read Genesis 39:1-41:57 for the details.

Sadly, those glory days had gone. The present Pharaoh had no sympathy at all for any Israelite. He piled on the agony. Eventually, God raised up another godly, brilliant leader, Moses. On God's instructions, Moses gave Pharaoh several opportunities to liberate the Israelites (Exodus 5:1-6:13), with the warning that if Pharaoh did not respond, God would severely punish Egypt (Exodus 7:1-13). Pharaoh's blanket refusal resulted in the well known series of ten increasingly severe plagues (Exodus 7:14-12:36). They culminated in the final one, the plague of death upon the eldest son in each Egyptian home (Exodus 12:29-30). 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. For further details, read Exodus 1-12.

This, then, is the picture so far. Under Moses' guidance, the people of Israel had been liberated from the Egyptian tyrant. They would ultimately live a new life in Canaan, the land promised to them by God. Many long, weary days and years lay ahead for them before they would get there. However would they 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 through 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 (Exodus 6:12). When he demurred, God brought in Aaron, Moses' brother, to share the burden (Exodus 6:28-30). Communications were essential 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 their high priest.

God kept His word. He cared for His people through the forty long, difficult years of the wilderness experience God brought them into Canaan, as He said He would. Now, let us turn our thoughts to the New Testament, and Christianity.

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 ... rose again the third day according to the scriptures*" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). As typified in the Passover Lamb in Egypt, God has accepted the death of Christ on our behalf (1 Corinthians 5:7). 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, care for us, throughout life's journey.

Let us think back for a moment to Moses and Aaron. They both did their jobs well. Between them they provided that vital two-way 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 (Hebrews 3:1).

Now, there is something extremely important that we must be very clear about. It is not to be considered normal for a Christian to commit sins. It is 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. He will need succour, 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 great High Priest in heaven (Hebrews 4:14). From first trusting Him as Saviour, we enjoy the thought expressed in 1 Peter 5:7, "*Cast all your care upon 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 comes again and takes us to heaven to be with Him for ever. 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 13:1-17 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. "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, disillusioned. Like the disciples, we shall need to have the dust and heat of the journey washed away. Jesus washed His disciples' feet with actual, physical water. After washing their feet, Jesus said, (John 13:14) "*If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.*"

In the Bible, water is often used as a symbol of the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. As we read our Bible, privately or with one another, the Lord uses His word to provide the comfort and refreshment we need. 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 13:1-17 illustrates a major spiritual truth taught in the Epistle to the Hebrews. This is the great book about the Lord Jesus as our great High Priest. Hebrews 1 teaches us that He is really God. He is great enough in person to deal with God. Hebrews 2 teaches us that He is really man. He is lowly and gracious enough to deal with us human beings. Hebrews 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 Hebrews 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 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.*"
- Read Hebrews 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? 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.*

Joseph M Scriven (1820-1886)

The Christian poet Joseph Scriven, who composed those words, certainly knew what is involved in the Lord Jesus being our great high 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, 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 learn things about Him and 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 John 13:8, the Lord Jesus said to Peter, *"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."* What did He mean? *"Part with Me?"* The answer is 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 Bible, describes and amplifies what this involves. From the end of Hebrews 2 and the beginning of Hebrews 3, up to the end of Hebrews 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 Hebrews 8 onwards to almost the end of Hebrews 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 mentioned 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 we allow it. 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 1 John 2:1, *"If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous One."* The situation can be summed up in this way.

When we trusted Christ as our Saviour we were brought into the family of God. We became His personal children. He is our Father. Nothing can break that link of family relationship. However, our link of personal communion can be and is broken when we sin. If we sin, it is put as normal that, as soon as we are aware of it, we repent and confess our sin. Then, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

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. God the Father accepts the advocacy of His Son on our behalf. The distinction is

plain: Our link of family relationship with God as Father is secure, maintained for ever intact, on the basis of the work of Christ at Calvary on our behalf. But, 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, the barrier is removed. What peace floods into our souls! Our link of communion, disturbed when we sin, is restored. The joy of communion is ours once more. We can avail ourselves once more of the Lord's priestly grace as we continue our pilgrim journey home to heaven.

Let us bear in mind 1 Corinthians 10:11, "*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition.*" Let us learn the lessons, and apply them to our own lives.

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