

The High Priest of our Profession.

The Convention Sermon preached at Fredericton, August 20, 1899, by Rev. W. H. Robinson, M. A.

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus," Hebrews 3:1.

Jesus the Son of God, the High Priest of our confession, is the golden point on which turn the glowing, awakening, hope-breathing and consolatory utterances of the great apostle in the epistle before us. For he writes in chap. 3:1, "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the chief point: We have such a high priest who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens," (R. V.). The light of divine truth that shines so brightly and intensely in the doctrinal and practical facts of this letter converges on this theme. The priesthood, with its sacrifices, was at the very core of the Mosaic dispensation. Without a priest no sacrifice could be offered, no access to God. Was it asked by these Hebrew converts—has Christainity a priest? Paul answers: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the High Priest of our confession." The apostle in this letter unfolds with marvellous power and beauty the priesthood of the new covenant, and shows its vital relation as a stable and holy walk. Note at the outset that it is believers who are thus exhorted to turn their eyes upward to the throne and gaze upon the High Priest of their profession. The one great purpose of this epistle is to reveal to these vacillating Christians, in all His glory and greatness, Jesus Christ as their High Priest, and thus to restrain from apostasy. Christ's redemptive work for us is twofold,—what he accomplished on the cross and what he is now doing for us as our Mediator on the throne.

There must be no divorce in the believer's thought and life between these two parts of Christ's work as our Redeemer. These Hebrews had come to the cross and had found peace and joy through believing. Christians they were. They had made a good beginning, but they had now come to a standstill in spiritual things. In fact we see they were already lapsing into a state of indifference and unbelief, their inner life was losing its vigor, their faith was waning, their hopes becoming dim, and we learn from the apostle's exhortations and warnings that they were in danger of still further backsliding. These Jewish Christians knew Christ on the cross as the sacrifice for sin. They had received the elementary truths of the gospel, but they had not gone on unto maturity. They had not grown in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were still babes, needing to be fed with milk and not solid food, (chap. 5:12; 6:1).

Such was the spiritual condition of these Hebrew converts. Now see how the apostle deals with these unstable, these sluggish and backslidden Christians. See how he undertakes to draw them back from their wanderings, to establish them in the divine life, to inspire with fresh hopes, and to strengthen their languishing faith. The one great essential is for them to see Christ more clearly and know him more fully as their sacrifice, but especially as their High Priest who has sat down on the right hand of God.

Paul saw clearly the disease, he also saw clearly, by the light of the Holy Spirit, the divine remedy. The sinner must see Christ as his substitute on the cross, the believer must see not only Christ dying but Christ living, Christ reigning, Christ appearing in the presence of God on his behalf. This last, the great truth that the writer sets forth with such wondrous power and fervor in the Scripture before us, and uses it with marked skill to bring these wavering and slothful believers back to a steadfast and earnest Christian life, this truth, I believe, brethren, needs to be sounded out today, and to be laid with love and power upon the heart of the churches. How large a part of our membership is in the same state spiritually as these Hebrew Christians. Some are not holding the beginning of their confidence firm unto the end, some are indifferent, some still babes in Christ, though twenty years or more have passed since their spiritual birth, others are laying again and again the "foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God," while others still are almost ready to give up the battle with sin, within and without. The same cause of weakness and declension in many cases—they do not know Jesus, the Son of God, in the completeness and efficacy of his atonement, but especially in his High Priestly office, as the one who lives to succor, to strengthen, to bring them into the presence of God and keep them there.

Christ's work as our sacrifice brings us pardon; his work as our High Priest gives us power over sin. It is the blood that brings us near to God, but it is the intercession of our Priest on the throne that keeps us near. If our lives are to be strong, joyous and steadfast, we must see and lay hold not only of Christ on Calvary, but of Christ "within the veil." Our text, in fact this whole epistle, bids us see Christ as our High Priest, in all his glory and greatness in the heavenly sanctuary.

Let us consider the High Priest of our confession— I. In His Person. If Christ Jesus as my Priest is to stand between me and the Infinite God, there are two

essential qualifications. He must be both man and God. He must possess and know the thoughts and feelings of the two parties he seeks to bring into reconciliation. Then he must touch in his nature both man and God, and touch them vitally. "If he is wholly God, he is far off from man; if wholly man, he is far off from God."

(1) As a man consider him. I want him for my High Priest, one in whose breast beats a human heart,—a real man like myself. He must be one "chosen from among men." But more, while I am on the way to eternal glory I must needs tread the path of suffering and of trial. I am often bowed down with sorrow and with care. I want for my High Priest one who has not only walked this earth as a man, but one who has trodden every foot of the road in which I am called to walk, one who has been bowed under the weight of life's sorrows, who has felt the suffering of temptation, one who has experienced just what I am now experiencing, one who can tenderly touch me with his hand of sympathy at every step of my journey heavenward. I have such a High Priest in Christ Jesus, my Lord. He has a human heart, he is "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." Hear the apostle as he so clearly and forcefully proclaims the humanity of our Mediator. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." "For verily he taketh not hold of angels, but he taketh hold of the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God," etc. (2:14, 16-17). In his flight from the Godhead he stopped not till he reached Bethlehem's manger. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." But still more, in order that he might truly suffer with man in every trial and conflict, God has caused our High Priest to tread the path of suffering. "For it became him in bringing many sons unto glory to make the captain (file leader) of their salvation perfect through suffering."

And again, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong-crying and tears . . . and though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered," (chap. 5:7-8). True sympathy can only come from the heart that has suffered what you have. The young mother, who has just lost her first born, wants a mother whose heart was once broken by the same sorrow to come and grasp her hand and look into her face. When Queen Victoria sent that message to widow Garfield, "My heart bleeds for you," the very wire that carried the message trembled with sympathy. The Queen on the throne had trodden that path of suffering. That, beloved, was why Jesus the Son of God, "was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," that was why he trod every inch of the way you and I have to walk, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest. One who can win your love and confidence, and bring you the sympathy and succor that you need.

"Touched with a sympathy within, He knows our feeble frame; He knows what sore temptations mean, For He has felt the same."

There are two essentials if a person is to be truly helpful to me—sympathy and power—a heart to beat in unison with mine, an arm mighty to uphold. As a man, as a man who has suffered and agonized, we find in our High Priest the sympathy we need, for in his humanity he touched man in every fibre and quivering nerve of his being. But we want a Priest Almighty to succor. Does the High Priest of our profession take hold of God?

This leads us to consider him (2) As God. As a sinner I want a Priest who is more than man, one who is immeasurably above man, one who is spotless, separate from sinners, who can go into the very presence of God and plead for me. I want for my Priest one who has power, and who has the right to absolve from sin, one strong to succor, one who is boundless in sympathy and compassion, whose patience can never be exhausted, whose love knows no change, whose depth I cannot fathom, whose height I cannot scale. I have such an one in Jesus the Son of God. See how his deity flashes forth with surpassing brightness in these passages. "God hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, by whom also he made the worlds, who being the effulgence (outshining) of his glory and the exact image of his substance and upholding all things by the word of his power," etc. (chap. 1:2-3). And again, "But unto the Son he saith, thy throne, O God, is forever and ever," (v. 8). "For such a High Priest became us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and made higher than the heavens," (chap. 7:26). He is the infinite God as well as man. That is the High Priest our hearts yearn for. You can lean your head on his bosom and feel no fear, for you feel the heart-throbs of your Elder Brother. You can lean your head on his breast and feel no fear, for you lean on Him who keeps the worlds in balance and holds the waters in the hollow of his hands. There is no other being like the man Christ Jesus—the High Priest of our profession. We do well to hold fast the two facts of the incarnation and the Deity of Christ, for they are the two great columns which support the arch of his priesthood. Unless he had become a man he could not have tasted death, nor become a Mediator for man, and unless he was God there was no efficacy in his death and no power in his intercession. Seeing then we have a great High Priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession," etc. (chap. 4:14-15).

II. Let us now turn our thoughts to our High Priest in

His Work (Office). It is the office of the High Priest to bring man to God and keep him in His presence in hallowed peace and fellowship. If it is the blood on the altar that makes us nigh to God, it is the High Priest in his ministry that keeps us nigh. We must remember that Jesus, the Son of God, is both the Victim and the Priest.

(1) Think of him for a moment as the victim on the altar. The apostle at the very threshold of his argument holds up before the eyes of these Christians, Christ as the bleeding sacrifice. He writes: "When he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right of the Majesty on high," (chap. 1:3). The same comforting and stimulating truth is again held aloft in chap. 9:26, "But now once for all in the end of the ages hath Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." The word used for the putting away of sin is most expressive—it signifies to annihilate, to so thoroughly put away it as though it had never existed. This complete purging of sin is bound up with Christ's atoning sacrifice. We are not unmindful of the fact, that one current of thought around us today sets strongly against the substitutionary aspect of Christ's redemptive work. But the author of this epistle makes that doctrine at once the corner-stone and the cap-stone of his magnificent structure. He makes no apology to his readers when he speaks of Christ's death as a sacrifice, but fearlessly proclaims it. The Holy Spirit has forever welded together the putting away of sin and Christ's death in our stead, and "what God hath joined together let not man put asunder." The question of sin then is settled, and settled irrevocably, as far as the believer's justification before God is concerned. But to be made nigh to God is one thing, to be kept nigh is another. It is one thing to stand accepted in the Beloved, it is another thing to live like a man accepted. We cannot hold our footing down here one hour, and live like saved men and women, unless we are held up by him who sits upon the Mediatorial throne. It is Christ as our High Priest that we must see and know clearly and intelligently. We see now the meaning of that passage (Romans 5:10). "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." That means His life on the throne, and by that life up there, we are saved in the fullest sense.

(2) Let us consider Him then as the One who has passed within the veil." Now hear the apostle as he presents this truth and seeks to strengthen and encourage the hearts of these suffering Hebrews. Speaking of the Christian's hope, he says, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the Forerunner even Jesus is for us entered," etc. (6:19-20).

That is the bringing in of a "better hope," for our High Priest was entered within the veil, and has taken the soul's anchor with Him to guard and keep it securely. The flukes of the believer's anchor take hold of the Rock of Ages which is within the veil in the heavenly sanctuary. That is safe anchorage ground.

(a) Our High Priest has opened the way into the Holiest once for all. For 1500 years that heavy veil shut in the mercy seat, and shut out the people. The command was, "Enter not, enter not, lest ye die." The high priest of old only lifted the veil and passed within, but did not dwell there, thus showing that the way into God's immediate presence was not yet opened up. But the High Priest of our confession has rent the veil from top to bottom, and has gone within to abide. He has entered as our Forerunner. That way is opened, and never can be closed.

(b) Every follower of Christ then has the right to enter in—yea more is invited to enter boldly. There is now no veil between the believer and his God. The Christian's true place of worship is ever within the veil. There is now no outer-court fellowship—no worshipping God at a distance, but communion close and abiding. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith," etc. (10:19). Every believer—the weakest and most unworthy under the new covenant, can go with confidence and abide where the high priest of the old, only trod once a year. The way is clear to the Holy of Holies—the very presence of God. The captain of our Salvation has passed ahead and rent the veil in twain. If, when the American fleet, in the late war, lay before Havana, Admiral Sampson, with his flagship could have sailed in to the harbor, tore up every mine and silenced every gun in the forts, it would have been an easy thing for the other ships to have followed their leader. They could have entered boldly. But what the Admiral of that fleet could not do in opening a way to deliver the oppressed, the Almighty Son of God as our Forerunner, with hands and feet and side dyed in blood, has done for our deliverance. He has entered the haven of God's presence, has met and subdued every foe, has removed every obstruction, and now invites every poor sinner to enter boldly into the harbor of abiding fellowship with Him. God's purpose then is, that while we spend these three score years and ten on earth, we should come into the innermost chamber of communion—that we should have heaven in the heart, and feel its uplifting, hallowing and sanctifying power. This matter of our communion with God is a most vital one. Our walk on earth and our strength for service depend on our fellowship with God. Much of the coldness and deadness of the believer's life, of the hollowness and formality of the services of the sanctuary, is due to the fact that Christians do not see and lay hold of the quickening truth, that God now calls every worshipper to enter within the veil, in his communion, whither his great High Priest has passed. Let a Christian but see that it is his birthright privilege to enter into the Holiest at all times, and you have lifted that soul above the world with its allurements and its fascinations. He thinks and lives in a purer and higher atmosphere. Here, beloved, is the true secret of dominion over the flesh and the world—it is the soul seeing its privileges to draw near to God and hold unbroken communion with Him, and thus be filled with His peace, and purity and love. In the old legend we are told that the ship which bore Orpheus and his companions, passed safely the home of the Sirens, for when they began to sing in their bewitching strains, Orpheus struck his harp and brought forth such sweet and inspiring music that the song of the Sirens lost its power to charm. So let the Christian's heart be filled with the

joy and re- seat and y- tation has Orpheus— members into a High Priest has passed the very (c) St- etc. Aa- the out- entered God, not the child- seat to b- and stre- and stron- in triumph "For Ch- hands—to appea- We may behalf," in our p- truth th- might "He min- He is ev- our beh- minister- and not- as the- what is- temptat- nectio- their w- to these- all He- Hear hi- this epi- from th- sheep." I well r- live an- my Hig- His ver- me. I- Father- half my- courage- and say- am Lor- that I- and sel- So the- things- glory a- triumph- is more- lives to- the cro- the fac- brethren- power- domin- (d) priest- without- Atoner- his har- through- sprink- into th- mercy- comes- the al- God's- our gr- and of- into th- for us- in the- into th- section- brethren- of Jes- Calvar- true w- staine- pleads- behalf- blood- our p- epistle- and e- has b- the ve- you c- hymn- no w- despa- Great- pence- every- our b- Isiah- a vess- Well