

Lenten Preaching Workshop 2021

*Christ our Priest Today, Yesterday, and
Forever: A Lenten Midweek Series*

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Outline

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 - b. The intercession of Christ for His people
 - c. Deep connection between Scriptures
 - d. At the heart of the Catechism
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3. Midweek 2: Hebrews 7:1-28
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 - a. Links to Holy Week and Easter
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Introduction

In the midweek services between Ash Wednesday and Holy Week, the preacher can take up the central focus of the gospels and of the Christian life: the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Letter to the Hebrews sets forth that atoning sacrifice in ways particularly fruitful for growth in understanding Scripture and in how the blood of Christ is the beating heart of the church's life. In this series we will explore the beautiful display of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice in Hebrews that strengthens the church's faith and restores its focus to source of its life – the body and blood of our Great High Priest.

1. Why preach Christ's priesthood now?

The world is changing more rapidly than ever, and some preachers and hearers feel it's spinning faster and more wildly than they can fathom or handle. What is not changing is the church's Lord, Jesus Christ. He is "the same today, yesterday, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). The Letter to the Hebrews was written to a people discouraged and scattered. Many of them were not meeting together, and the ones that were had become weary.

For that situation of dispersion and confusion, the writer of the Letter put forth the priesthood of Christ with great eloquence. A people racked by change had an unchanging Intercessor before the Father. He would not change and was not subject to the troubles and chances of this vale of tears. Challenges would come and go; He would remain faithful and merciful forever.

There seems no time like the present to proclaim these truths of Christ. In this series we will proclaim those truths of Christ's sacrifice and priesthood especially in light of the interconnection of the Holy Scriptures. The one Author of Scripture has richly interwoven His words, and the Letter to the Hebrews is an excellent occasion for the preacher and his hearers to grow in the knowledge of those divine interweavings.

a. The blood of Christ at the center

Our way of reading of the Bible is inseparable from our understanding of Christ. If we read the Scriptures, we should find Christ. If we know Christ, we should read the Scriptures. In one we always have the other. It is not Christ merely as a helper or an assistant that we find in the Scriptures. Instead, the Scriptures show us a crucified Christ at their center – promising a Messiah called Jesus who will save His people from their sins. If we read the Scriptures and do not find a crucified and risen Christ woven like a golden thread through everything, we have misread the Scriptures.

Thus each week of the study contains plentiful information on the Old Testament verses and passages either cited or alluded to or thematically connected to that week's reading from Hebrews. The preacher can utilize these in his sermons or simply let them inform his preaching, but either way he and his hearers will gain a better understanding of the multitude of ways Scripture connects to Scripture. He will find again the truth that *Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres*.

b. The intercession of Christ for His people

Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God and the priest presiding over that sacrifice. He is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek and Great High Priest of a people far more numerous than the kingdoms of Judah or Israel ever were. As Great High Priest, He intercedes for His people down to this day. We will find again and again that the resurrected and living Jesus is proclaimed in Hebrews as the One to whom His people can turn because He is not dead but living, not inert, mute, and withdrawn but active, speaking, and present to help in time of need. Our prayers are based on the certainty of His prayer, our intercession for others and for ourselves on His intercession constantly before the throne of grace.

This rich comfort will be explored especially in its facets in each study under the heading “Loci” or “topics,” an old way of organizing the many data of Scripture into manageable categories to which a preacher of Scripture or a reader of Scripture can return time and again. These loci are not all found in dogmatics texts, although some will be. Some are verbally more specific to Hebrews and can be utilized in interpreting this letter on its own terms. Building up a notebook for oneself of these verses and how they’re used will allow the preacher or hearer to understand better how Scripture is tied together.

c. At the heart of the Catechism

It is traditional in our churches to preach the Small Catechism in Lent, reinforcing and refreshing the knowledge of the basics of the faith. This equips the Christian better to make war on the enemy and to defend the faith against all assaults as Christ fought Satan in the wilderness in the traditional reading for the First Sunday in Lent. The Catechism shows the Christian in brief what the armor of God is and how he should bear it in battle.

There are two options for using and preaching on the Catechism in this study, only one of which will be detailed. The first option is to proclaim the different texts from Hebrews in light of the 2nd Article of the Creed. The recitation of Luther’s explanation to the 2nd Article would be done each week so that those words would be clearly impressed on the people’s memories. The second option, detailed in this study because slightly more complex, is to proclaim different parts of the Catechism according to the specifics of that week’s Hebrews text. So if sanctification comes up in Heb. 2, then the 3rd Article is recited and can be integrated into the sermon; if the terms of the old covenant are read in Heb. 8, then the Close of the Commandments is recited and can be integrated into the sermon as a summary of those terms, etc.

This structure allows both great discovery for the preacher and the hearer in moving through major sections of Hebrews and great reinforcement of the Catechism either in the 2nd Article alone or in its different connections to the different portions of Hebrews.