

Jesus Juva

DR. RONALD H. LOVE  
CHRISTOLOGICAL TITLES  
LESSON SEVENTEEN  
HIGH PRIEST

“Who knows whether it is so?”

Jesse Owens panicked. How could he owe \$114,000 in back taxes? Soon there would be a court trial condemning him to a long prison term. An issue Owens realized he had to accept, failing to oversee his business ventures. He had not scrutinized the character of the men who represented him, wrongly trusting his business partners to file his personal income tax returns.

Ashamed. Afraid. Anxious. Owens grabbed his jacket and rushed into the kitchen to kiss Ruth, his wife, good-bye. Not even pausing to explain, taking the stairs three and four at a time, he yelled over his shoulder that he would be back tomorrow. Thirty-five minutes later he was at Chicago’s O’Hare Airport with a round-trip ticket to his boyhood home in Alabama.

Oakville was no longer a community of share cropper fields; over the years it had developed into a town. Buildings now stood in place of pastures. Despondent, Owens worried that he would never be able to find that plot of earth where his family’s shack once stood. Frantically, he ran about the town, darting here, dashing there, zigzagging his way across town, desperate to find that place he once called home. Then somehow he just knew...he just knew...he was standing on the spot where he once lived. The fifty-three year old man, an Olympic track star, fell to his knees. He dug his hands into the dirt he once farmed, and started to pray. He prayed in such agony that he sensed only one last drop of blood was left in his spirit. Then he realized, “True prayer means nothing else but giving the final drop of your soul’s blood to reach God.”

At one point all of us are going to find ourselves in a seemingly hopeless and helpless situation. The problem, we believe, exceeds our emotional and physical resources. Other times we will be all consumed by the guilt of our sin and the mismanagement of our lives, thinking there can be no redemption for a wayward soul. The situation defies a solution. Apprehensive, we await our doom.

Condemnation would be our precarious lot except we have a High Priest who has taken upon himself our sin, our guilt, our remorse, the problems of our own making. When we confront these problems that defy description and are overwhelmed by a transgression that leaves us numb, there is a sense of security and well-being in knowing Jesus is our High Priest who guides and forgives us. The trials and tribulations of life will not subdue us, for we have Jesus as our pastor.

It is only in the book of Hebrews that the Christological title of High Priest is applied to Jesus. The authorship of Hebrews remains unknown and has been strongly debated through the centuries. The position of this author resides with those who maintain Hebrews was written by a woman, perhaps Priscilla. This would make Hebrews the only book in the Bible penned by a female. Sexism aside, her maternal understanding is reflected in the theology associated with Jesus as our High Priest.

In Judaism God is distant, unapproachable, a name that can be neither written nor spoken. God is the lawgiver. Though most of the dictates are ones of liberation and justice, a number institute ritualistic practices with an accompanying fear of violation. In the oversight of this religion only the High Priest could approach God, and then only one day in the year. On the Day of Atonement the High Priest would enter the inner sanctum of the Temple, the Holy of Holies, and make a sin offering on behalf of all the people of Israel. The High Priest was mortal, thus before sacrificing for the nation he had to first make a sacrifice for the cleansing of his own soul. The sacrifice was only temporal for it had to be repeated yearly. It is for these two reasons this act of atonement was an insufficient means of grace.

Priscilla, as this theologian will designate the author of Hebrews, demonstrated that Jesus was the embodiment of the new High Priest whose act of atonement was both final and complete. Priscilla establishes that Jesus is both perfectly divine and perfectly human. Confessing his divinity she writes, "He reflects the glory of God and bears the

very stamp of his nature.” (Heb 1:3) Attesting to his humanity she summarizes of Jesus, “It is fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (Heb 2:10) Jesus is the perfect priest because he is one and at the same time perfectly divine and perfectly human; he can bring together man and God because he is man and God. The High Priest who stands in the Holy of Holies is no longer a mere mortal, but God Himself.

Having established that Jesus is both man and God, Priscilla declares that his act of atonement is ultimate and everlasting. She writes, “Furthermore the priests were many in numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he who holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it is fitting we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once and for all when he offered himself.” (Heb 7:23-27) The Holy of Holies need never be entered again, for in Christ the sacrifice made on our behalf is everlasting.

The Latin word for “priest” is “*pontifex*,” which means “bridge-builder.” Jesus is not only the bridge-builder, he is himself the bridge between man and God. He is the High Priest who intercedes on our behalf.

Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, was always fearful of the state of his soul, condemned to hell at worst, assigned to purgatory at best. To amend his sins he made a pilgrimage to Rome. In the Holy City he embarked upon every ritual of redemption sanctioned by the Vatican. One such appointment was climbing Pilate’s stairs on hand and knees, kissing each one while reciting the *Pater Noster*. Each step acted as an indulgence that would lessen one’s time in purgatory. Luther elected not to engage in this exercise for himself, but for another. He bemoaned that both his parents were still living so the merits would be lost on them, so he directed his work for the release of Grandpa Heine. At the top of the steps Luther raised himself to his feet and in disillusionment of what he had just done exclaimed, “Who knows whether it is so?” A

question of who could possibly know if this made any difference, and certainly doubtful that it did. It was one of Luther's final acts before declaring the theological doctrine of justification by grace alone, and the denouncement of the Catholic view of works-righteousness.

With Jesus as our High Priest we need only pray "giving the final drop of your soul's blood to reach God," to know we are forgiven and accepted, redeemed and sanctified. RECONCILED

Soli Deo Gloria,

Ron Love