

Reformed by Our Great High Priest

✦ **Called by God (vv.1-6)**

✦ **Comforted in Christ (vv.7-10)**

In the name of Jesus, **Our Great High Priest**, dearly redeemed priests and children of God:

Most Christians do not think of themselves as priests, one man in particular even though he was called by the Roman Catholic Church. His name was Martin Luther. He had left his excellent study of law because his conscience was tearing him apart. None of his friends could figure out why. Luther lived a moral life. Everyone liked him. He was respectful to his parents – at least until he decided to become a priest. That infuriated his father because being a lawyer was honorable, but a priest, not so much. And for young Luther to become an Augustinian monk under an oath of poverty really put his father over the edge. But nothing like Luther felt the first time he stood at the altar to offer Holy Communion. Later he described a panic attack that made him want to flee from the altar. His conscience screamed: “Who are you to offer up the holy body and blood of Christ?” The terrified priest had no answers. Like us, Luther desperately needed to be **Reformed by Our Great High Priest**. He needed to see how Jesus was...

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In order to understand how you are a priest connected to Christ, we have to go back many centuries to when the priesthood was first established among the ancient Jewish people. The Hebrew Christians who received this New Testament letter were very familiar with the order of high priests from 1500 B.C. beginning with Aaron, the brother of Moses. God gave a very detailed job description to Moses which he faithfully placed upon his brother Aaron. And when two of Aaron’s sons failed to follow these stipulations, God put them to death. God wanted His priests to sweat the details of holiness.

“Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.”

If you wanted to experience the separation of sin between God and man, a simple experiment would do. I would not recommend this, but it would explain. You could put on your hunting gear and camouflage boots, drive to Washington, D.C., and try to walk into the White House unannounced. You wouldn’t last three seconds before everyone knew you were there, especially the Secret Service detail with the high powered bulges under their suits. You don’t decide to visit the President like that.

And no mortal can come into the presence of the holy God dressed as natural born sinners. Suitcases full of money would not get you past the pearly gates. Whatever we might bring to God already belongs to Him. Like Luther we would have to ask how these hands which have done so much harm and failed to do so much good could possibly offer holy things to God. James said it right, **“Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”** (James 2:10 NIV) Ancient Israel needed priests as mediators to go between them and God. But first those sinful sons of Aaron had to offer sacrifices for their own sins. Then they could sacrifice for the people. Your sins first, or die.

“No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.” No one was allowed like many American pastors to say, “I felt called...,” not even God’s own Son. **“Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” And he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”** Jesus as God was **Called by God** from all eternity to serve as **Our Great High Priest**. That’s how we know we can trust Jesus no matter what any religious leader says on earth.

But Jesus was not ordained to be a priest in the order of Aaron. Relief for Luther's terror at the altar, the answer to our own panic to run from God's perfect holiness, help is found here. Jesus has a very special priesthood. He was not from the Jewish line of priests back to Aaron. Jesus was not an Augustinian monk or a priest of Rome. Jesus was ordained by God as **"a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."** This is so important, we need to get this right.

The Bible proves its claims that the Holy Spirit inspired every word as God's Word. Trusting God's Word, you can see how Jesus was foreshadowed in the priest-king named Melchizedek. Over 500 years before Moses and Aaron, Melchizedek came from Jerusalem to receive a tithe from Abraham. (Genesis 14:18-20) The Holy Spirit's commentary in Hebrews 7, says Melchizedek means **"king of righteousness,"** also **"king of Salem,"** which means **"king of peace."** (Later that city was called Jerusalem, which I understand as *Jebusite-Salem*.) **"Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever."** (Hebrews 7:3 NIV) Jesus who died and rose again, is eternal with an unending priesthood. **"Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."** (7:25 NIV)

If Luther ¹ and other Bible-believing scholars are right, Melchizedek was Noah's son. Shem was ninety-eight at the Flood, with nearly 500 years left on this earth. He would seem to be **"without beginning of days or end of life"** (Hebrews 7:3), as we see Melchizedek on the pages of Holy Scripture. As **"king of Salem and priest of God Most High,"** (Hebrews 7:1), Melchizedek was a devout believer, whose life seems to have overlapped with Abraham. Jesus' Melchizedek-priesthood helped Luther to be...

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"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." Who can fathom the love of God's eternal Son to leave His Father's throne of light, His rainbow circled throne all for earthly night, for wanderings sad and lone? To make Himself vulnerable Jesus had to trust God's promise to save Him from eternal death in hell for our sins. Beyond comprehension, Jesus submitted to the will of His heavenly Father to suffer and die for us and for that priest Luther at the altar.

Luther later discovered through his study of Scripture how Jesus **"learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him...."** Jesus had no sin of His own. He is the perfect and holy Son of God. But God had a goal for His Son to be the Priest-King Savior of all, to give His life willingly and His righteousness generously for our sins. God laid all our sins on Jesus and gave us His righteousness instead. God's gift of righteousness makes us **Comforted in Christ** who **"was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek."**

God's Word finally led Luther to reject the work-righteousness in the Roman Catholic Mass. He believed God instead of Rome. For speaking out in his office as a Doctor of the Holy Scriptures, Luther and all his followers were excommunicated by the Pope. But the Bible teaches that Roman Catholic tradition is wrong. In this same letter to the Hebrews, God the Holy Spirit tells us: **"Unlike the other high priests, [Jesus] does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself."** (Hebrews 7:27 NIV) Jesus is both Priest and Victim in our place. He gives us the holiness God's Law demands.

In comes God's forgiveness. Out goes our terror over sin. We kneel at the foot of the cross and see our Savior who came **"to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve [God] without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."** (Luke 1:74f NIV) By faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, God says, **"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."** (1 Peter 2:9 NIV) **Reformed by Our Great High Priest,** we praise our God. Amen.

¹ *Luther's Works*, American ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 2:381ff.
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