

The Perfect High Priest

Hebrews 4:14- 5:10

Remember our audience and our circumstances. Hebrews was written in the mid 60's prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Christians were experiencing great persecution. There was a temptation and movement for the Jewish followers of Christ to return to Judaism and blend back in with the culture. The writer is declaring a series of exhortations and encouragement to the Christians and those that may be intellectually following Christ, but have not put full faith in Him. It was a critical moment and tipping point in the history of Christianity. Last week Brett taught on the exhortation or warning of Hebrews 4:1-13. – SLIDE CHANGE

Hebrews 4:2-3 ²For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard **did not benefit them**, because they were **not united by faith** with those who listened.^[a] ³For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, And he quotes Psalm 95

“As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest,’”

although **his works were finished from the foundation of the world.**

Hebrews 4:11 Let us therefore **strive to enter that rest**, so that **no one may fall** by the same sort of disobedience.

What does it mean “They shall not enter my rest?” What does it mean to “enter His rest?”

Let's go back to **Genesis 2:1-3** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and **he rested on the seventh day** from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and **made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.**

God had completed His work of creation. As the author says in Hebrews they were finished from the foundation of the world. God rested after creation.

Adam and Eve were living in and experiencing His rest. But they rebelled and were expelled from His rest. The Israelites did not enter His rest in faith and died in the wilderness. So, we read the exhortation in verse 11. Therefore, (you Jewish believer tempted to return to Judaism) **strive to enter His rest in faith** so you will not fall by the same disobedience. Jesus is the heir of all things, the creator of the world, the radiance of God's glory and exact imprint of His nature. He holds the universe together.

What does it mean to enter His rest? To the Jewish Christians reading this letter and being tempted to turn back to the works of the Law or to you and me as we contemplate our own stress and anxious thoughts of our life.

- In our present life, we can be at complete peace with God.
- We can rest from pursuing works-based self righteousness.
- We can rest in freedom from guilt and fear of judgment.
- Because of our faith in Christ, we can rest in the confident assurance of our eternal salvation.

So the author ends this thought in verse 13 with the warning, saying the truth of the Word of God divides our thoughts and our hearts and we are all naked and exposed to Him who we must give account.

Now we get the encouragement. – SLIDE CHANGE

Hebrews 4:14-16 **Since then** we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

“Since then” – Since Jesus is God, Since He is better than angels, Since He is better than Moses. Since then, you who believe in Jesus as God's messiah have a Great high Priest. Of all the things I will say today, this is the message to leave with. **You have a great high priest.**

What does it mean to be a Priest?

According to Webster: someone who is authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion especially as a **mediatory agent between humans and God**

In that day, the Priests and the Temple were the center of their daily lives. It was a system some have referred to as Temple life, because their entire society revolved around the Temple and had developed since the giving of the Law for over 1,500 years. The Jewish priest was at the center of Israel's religious life serving as the mediator between God and the people. The priests were highly organized:

- Male descendants of Aaron
- Members of the tribe of Levi
- Organized into 24 rotating divisions, each serving one week at a time in Jerusalem
- The High Priest oversaw the entire Temple operation and represented Israel before God.
- The priests primary role was to offer sacrifices required by the Law. Daily sacrifices every morning and evening. It was a never ending and never completed work.
- Sin offerings, guilt offerings, thanksgiving and peace offerings.
- They oversaw the Jewish festival sacrifices during pilgrimages.
- The High Priest alone would enter the Holy of Holies and offered blood on the Day of Atonement.

But we have a GREAT High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God. Like the high priest in the Jewish custom would pass through 3 gates to enter the holy of holies. Jesus passed through the 3 heavens. The first heaven being our atmosphere. The second heaven being the cosmos. The third heaven is the place of God. See it here in, - *SLIDE CHANGE*

Hebrews 9:12 ¹² he entered **once for all into the holy places**, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of **his own blood**, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:24 ²⁴For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into **heaven itself**, now to appear **in the presence of God on our behalf**.

And speaking of God's rest,

Hebrews 12:2 ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and **is seated** at the right hand of the throne of God. – His work is completed. He is in God's Rest.

All the millions of sacrifices made by the priests day after day and year after year could not do what Jesus did. John tells us in his letter

1 John 2 1-2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ²He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

We have an advocate. – SLIDE CHANGE

Hebrews 4:14-16 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

Let us **hold fast** our confession. Hold Fast – To secure against loss. To hold on resolutely and refuse to let go. We got to go to the Texans game last week. Every time the ball carrier is being tackled the defensive player goes after the ball. They are seeking to punch, rip and separate the ball from the ball carrier. The writer is telling these Hebrew Christians not to let persecution or the pressures of the world tear you away from your faith in Jesus. For us, our lives are not threatened because of our faith, YET. It may be a different pressures working to separate us from our faith. CHURCH: What are the things that tear us away from our faith? Social media, secular friends, busyness, work, kids sports, the ranch, comfort, hobbies. Hold fast to your confession. Cling to the community of believers for encouragement and fellowship. Treasure the Word of God in your heart. Psalms 119:9,11. How can a young man keep his way

pure? Thy word I have treasured in my heart that I MIGHT NOT SIN AGAINST THEE.

Let us read verse 15. **Hebrews 4:15** ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Not only is He our perfect and final sacrifice for the atonement of sin, He is also a person who came in flesh and blood. You've probably seen the commercials, "He gets us." He can sympathize with us and our weakness. We covered this in chapter 2. – SLIDE CHANGE

Hebrews 2:17 ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

He had to be made like His brothers - Angels are not able to identify with us in our weakness. But Jesus can. Jesus was made "like his brethren in every respect." He experienced all that we experience. He was born a helpless baby, He was a growing child and maturing adolescent. He experienced weariness, hunger and thirst. He knew what it was like to be despised, rejected, to be lied about and falsely accused. He celebrated weddings and enjoyed His family and friends. Remember the story of Lazarus? He was the brother of Mary, who anointed Jesus' feet with oil.

John 11:33-35 ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴ And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept.

He also knew what it was like to mourn the loss of a friend. He can **sympathize** with us. He Himself experienced physical suffering and death. All this was necessary to **qualify** Him to be our **High Priest** to give His life to cover our sins. – SLIDE CHANGE

So, BE ENCOURAGED – Verse 16 says, ¹⁶ Let us then **with confidence draw near to the throne of grace**, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

This was a FANTASTIC and EXTRAORDINARY invitation. No one except the high priest could approach the holy of holies. This is not just the earthly holy of holies in the temple where God's presence was with the Ark of the Covenant. This was a New Covenant and invitation for all believers to approach the throne of grace. **Did you catch that?** The BEMA seat, the throne of judgment is transformed to the **throne of grace**. So that we may receive MERCY (NOT RECEIVING WHAT WE DESERVE) and find GRACE (RECEIVING GOODNESS WE HAVE NOT EARNED) to help us in time of need. The Greek word Eukairos – well timed, opportune moments. Just when we need Him most.

Over the break, I purchased a load of firewood. My kids remembered and reminded me of the time God met me at a time just when I needed Him most. I was in between jobs and it had been a few months and I had no real prospects. Drew was about 4 years old and was riding with me on a short trip to buy firewood. I was praying to God as I was driving, Lord how are you going to provide for me and our family? As I pulled into the drive to the small house on Gessner that sold firewood it began to rain. I knocked at the door, the guy answered with a look, “you gotta be kidding me.” It was pouring down rain. He grabbed his cowboy hat and jacket and loaded up my truck with firewood. When I asked how much I owed him, he looked me in the eye, shook his head and said “thank you.” I had just asked the Lord how He was going to provide for me and He showed up at the most opportune time. In my moment of desperation and just when I needed Him most. He provided firewood. If I can provide firewood, have confidence and draw near to my throne of grace and I will give you mercy and grace in your time of need.

We now transition into Chapter 5 tells us the qualifications for the high priest and how Jesus is uniquely qualified to be our Perfect High Priest. –
SLIDE CHANGE

Hebrews 5:1-4 For every high priest chosen from among men is **appointed** to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

Exodus 28 and several other places in Numbers and 2 Chronicles speak of the requirement that priests be chosen from the line of Aaron to mediate between men and God. Scripture is very clear that there are two requirements to become a priest who mediates between God and men.

1. A priest must be a descendant of Aaron
2. **A priest is appointed by God Himself.**

Verse 2 says, “He” - the high priest can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, those who don’t know better **since he himself is a sinful man** and can sympathize.

- And in verse 3, he is obligated **to offer sacrifice for his own sins** just as he does for those of the people. This comes from the Law in Leviticus 16 where it gives the instructions that the priest must first kill a bull to cover his own sins. He can then sacrifice a goat for the people.
- And in verse 4 – “**And no one takes this honor for himself**” God is the only one who appoints the priests. There are no self-appointed priests. We see in Numbers 16 where the Levite Korah and several sons of Reuben conspired to challenge the priesthood of Aaron as the only people who could access God’s presence. And God defends His choice and the ground under them split apart and swallowed them up with all their households and belongings.

In verses 5 and 6 the author tells us of Jesus’ qualifications. – SLIDE CHANGE

Hebrews 5:5-6 ⁵ So also Christ did not exalt Himself to be made a high priest, but **was appointed by Him** who said to him,

“You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; ⁶ as He says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

Jesus was not a Levite, nor a descendant of Aaron, yet He is our Great High Priest.

- Jesus was of the tribe of Judah. Therefore, He cannot be a High Priest under the Law.
- The writer then quotes Messianic Psalms 2:7 and 110:4 where God Himself appoints Jesus. You are my Son and You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.
- God appoints Jesus as a High Priest under a new priestly order. His priesthood is not based on His lineage, but on God’s oath.
- Melchizedek is recorded in Genesis 14, long before Aaron and the Law. Melchizedek is both king and priest. Melchizedek blesses Abraham and Abraham offers tithes to him. There is no record of his birth or his death.
- We will cover him more in detail in chapter 7.

Jesus is your high priest. He is our perfect high priest. The work that Jesus did for us is complete and He is seated at the right hand of God. As we read in 1 John 2, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. The need for a human priest to be our mediator is obsolete. To think we need to come to a sinful man to be our mediator is to deny Jesus as if His work is not enough. Jesus’ work is complete and He is our perfect high priest.

Let us wrap this up with verses 7 – 10. – SLIDE CHANGE

Hebrews 5:7-10⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence.⁸ Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered.⁹ And being made perfect,

He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

The author now unfolds a deeply moving truth about Jesus' experience in the days of His flesh: in the brief time where God came near. Emmanuel – God with us.

Hebrews 5:7 “In the **days of his flesh**, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with **loud cries and tears** to Him who was able to save him from death...”

Here we see Christ's agony—most clearly expressed in Gethsemane. Jesus prayed fervently. He experienced intense emotion. He wrestled with the weight of suffering. And yet, His prayers were not prayers of defeat, but of submission. He was heard **because of his reverence**.

What does this mean? It does not mean that God the Father was unaware or unmoved; it means that in His human nature, Christ experienced the full terror and anguish of facing unjust suffering and death. Yet He submitted His will to the Father's plan: **“Not my will, but yours be done.”**

Before we study verse 8 let me read Isaiah 53 who prophesized of the Messiah 700 years before Jesus. This is the Scripture that opened the eyes of one of my Jewish friends and led Him to leave an influential life as a Jew in Houston to follow Jesus.

Isaiah 53:3-5 He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows^[c] and acquainted with^[d] grief;^[e]
and as one from whom men hide their faces^[f]
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.

- **Verse 8.**⁸ Although He was a Son, He **learned obedience** through what **He suffered**.

This is not to imply that Christ ever disobeyed. Rather, it means that in the *exercise* of His obedience, in the *fulfillment* of God's will for Him, He was *perfected* in His role as High Priest. Suffering did not lead Him away from obedience—it brought the reality of His obedience into full expression.

His obedience was costly. It was real. It was the obedience unto death—death on a cross. And because of that obedience, He entered God's presence with His own blood and

- **Verse 9-10.** And being **made perfect**, He became the **source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him**,¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. - Jesus was appointed by God as our High Priest and is the source of our salvation.

Through His death and His resurrection, Jesus is our High Priest seated at the right hand of God. He is our eternal salvation, our mediator, and our REST.

What Does Jesus Want Me to Know?

- Jesus is our **perfect** High Priest. –
 - He has passed through the three heavens and seated at the right hand of God.
 - He was made like His brethren in every respect and can sympathize with our weaknesses.
 - He was appointed by God
- **He is our advocate.**
- **Hold Fast** to your confession of your faith. Not of your own strength, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. Don't let the comforts and pressures of life tear you away from your faith.
- **Draw near** to the **throne of grace**. So we may Receive mercy and Find Grace when we need Him most.
- Jesus is your High Priest and you can find REST in Him.