

The Greatest Priest

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, all those who are listening online, so glad you're tuning in. My name is Jesse, and we are going to continue in our Hebrew series. This is an incredibly rich part of this book that we are entering into, and there's a lot of ground to cover today, so we're just going to jump right into it. We're in Hebrews 4. We're going to pick up in verse 14. It says this, 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, 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.

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. 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. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. And because of this, he is obligated to offer sacrifices for his own sins, just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. 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. As he says also in another place, you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Now, there's a lot to cover here, and this Melchizedek thing probably is like, who's the what, the how? We're going to get into that later on. They start to impact this later on in Hebrews. So I'm not ignoring this. It's just going to come up at a later date, in a few Sundays, okay? But important.

You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. In the days of his flesh, Jesus incarnating here on earth with us fully man, Jesus offered 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.

[2 : 1 7] Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. So I don't know if you've noticed this, but through the passage, one of the words that keeps getting repeated is priest. Priest, priest, priest, right? So if you're new to the Bible or you're kind of new checking out Christianity, this is probably a foreign concept.

And to be honest, you know what? For some of us that have been in Christianity, the priesthood, we might understand and remember it from Sunday school, but we may not like fully understand the depths and the meaning and the purpose of it. And to be honest, the idea of like priest is like, how does it apply today? That sounds a little bit cultish, but my hope is that I can show us this morning just how amazing it is that Jesus is our high priest. But first, we have to start with this.

We have to ask this question, why are priests necessary in the first place? And the answer this passage hints at is this, you and I, we need help because none of us are perfect. So in various places in this passage, this is how it describes people, weak, sinful, ignorant, wayward, which is basically like prone to wonder, like a sheep that just keeps on getting itself lost and in trouble.

Which like, wow, Bible, that's very uplifting, right? This isn't like the, this doesn't feel very edifying for us, does it? But it's honest. It's honest. It's pointing to the fact that every person, all of us, we are vulnerable to trials and temptations. I heard a guy say once, the world we live in is a harsh environment that is trying its best to kill you. Think about that. We live in a place that is too cold sometimes, too hot sometimes. There is famines that make it hard to eat. There's storms that come at us that are like tornadoes and hurricanes and these things put us in danger.

Then there's like 20,000 different microscopic diseases that can cripple or kill us, right? I'm always, until he'll say, I'm surprised that I'm healthy. Like I wake up every day, it's like, every, you hear about a new disease and you're just like, dang, that sounds awful. Another one?

[4 : 46] Now you would think like we'd be more kind to each other, right? Because of this shared hard experience that we, that we go through life with as human beings. But I mean, spend time in any relationship and you're going to get hurt. To love people is to open yourself to amazing joys, but also deep heartache.

Now I'm just scratching the surface here on the difficulties and the trials and the suffering that we faced as human beings. And the point is, is that you and I are incapable of keeping ourselves from them. We are incapable of making this perfect, pristine, comfortable, carefree, worry-free life, right? And so we face trials, we face difficulties, and in those moments often come the temptation. And oftentimes what we do, man, we have this temptation to escape. We want to escape those difficulties. We want to run from the suffering, right? We want to be unfaithful when things get hard in our relationships. We want to force our own way, regardless of its expense at other people. Now we're all weak and we all sin, but our weakness doesn't excuse our sin, right?

It doesn't minimize our sin either. In fact, when we try to minimize the gravity of sin, what we end up really doing is just minimizing the grace of God. And so what Hebrews is pointing to, what this passage is pointing to, this reality of weakness and sin that is rampant and we all share, they're just as pertinent also to the Christian. Remember, the Hebrews is writing to believers. He's writing to people in a church. And it's just pertinent for us as Christians. We're not more special than anybody else. Now the difference for the Christian is that we're just more sensitive and sensitized and aware when we do sin. God thanks a lot for that new heart and that Holy Spirit conviction, you know, kind of takes that fun away. No, but that's good for us. We actually want that. For the Christian, sin stops being as fun as it used to be. And yet, we also know that it doesn't keep us from sinning, right? All God's people said, there was great rejoicing.

But what happens when we sin, guys? As Christians, what happens when we, well, this is where a lot of us, many of us, me included, we get confused and disoriented and don't know where we stand with God. We have questions like, what does it mean to sin as a Christian? Does God still love me?

Is he angry or frustrated or disappointed? Is he going to start withholding his goodness and blessing from me because of my sin? Does it mean I've lost my salvation? I had a friend growing up and he got baptized like over 10 times because his understanding was to be a Christian meant you got it. He had to be perfect. You couldn't sin anymore. So every time he sinned, right, he would just go into a tailspin of woe and worry and despair. And then at some point, he would get saved again and re-baptized. You know, it's like, man, I just want to give my life to Jesus again. Got to get re-baptized. Got to get back into heaven. Now, we can look at that and chuckle at that story a little bit. But while many of us don't go as far as all of that, we still struggle in our relationship with God when we sin, if we're honest. And while we live in this body of flesh, here's the thing. You and I are going to be sinners all the way to the bitter end, right? All the way till Jesus, like, calls us home to heaven or returns. You and I are going to be sinners. Sinners that need help. And what is insidious about sin is that it affects our relationship with God because sin, what it does, it fills us with guilt and shame and fear. That is sin's design. And what do you typically do after you sin, right? What do we do? Do we immediately run to God or do we hide from him? Now, I know for me that when I've done something wrong, I feel this immediate inability to approach God or even want to approach God or unworthy to approach God. The guilt and the shame of my sin is weighing on my heart.

[9 : 32] It fills me with fear that Jesus and the Father, that somehow they no longer love me or they're up in heaven looking down in frustration and anger thinking, Jesse, again? That sin again? Or that type of sin?

Are you serious? We can feel that. I feel that. It makes me insecure about being in Jesus's presence. I feel like I have to start doing a bunch of good things to pay the penalty and earn my way back into God's good graces. Can you relate to that? Have you ever prayed a prayer like this before in your life?

Jesus, I am so sorry. I will never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, I'm going to read more. I'm going to read more. I'm going to read more. I'll pray more. I'll I'll I'll go to church more I'll give more I'll I'll I'll I'll I'll I'll I'll I'll go be a missionary in the jungles of the Amazon.

Just please forgive me. This response, what it exposes is that we want to try to earn God's forgiveness through our own works. The thought is this.

You know what? I need to fix myself so God can take me back. Let me do that work, and then I can present myself in my righteousness to God and say, Here I am.

[10 : 53] You ready? But that isn't how our relationship with God works. That's not it at all. That's not the gospel. We can't make a way to restore ourselves to God.

But here's the good news. Jesus made the way to restore sinners, which tells you something about Jesus. He is deeply relational, and his love and grace is more amazing than we could ever imagine.

He isn't up in heaven finding ways to get rid of us sinners. He fights for us to keep us, to bring us back when we wonder.

Think about the first sinners, Adam and Eve, right? What happened? God came into the garden seeking them. They were hiding.

God didn't let them hide. He called them out. They were running from God's presence because they felt the guilt and shame of the sin they sinned against God.

[11 : 54] But God found them, called them from their hiding so he could deal with their sin and show them mercy. Jesus does the same thing, guys.

He came from heaven to earth to seek and save the lost. Or as Hebrews would put it, the weak and the ignorant and the wayward sinner. And Jesus did this because sin is serious and hell is hot.

He takes sin seriously because God is a holy God. He is righteousness. He is justice. And so sin has to be punished.

God has to punish sin. But God made a way to punish our sin and yet spare us. So what he does, he created sacrifices. He accepts sacrifices for our sin to be made in our place.

Now, if you're new to church or the Bible, I'll admit, this is where things get a little weird. The whole idea of animal sacrifices, making animal sacrifices, it really seems strange to our modern sensibilities today, right?

[13 : 00] But don't worry, we don't do that anymore. All right? And we're not about to pull snakes out either. So you could just, like, rest assured. All right? But in the ancient world of the Old Testament, this is how God dealt with the sin of his people.

Priests, like what we were learning in Hebrews, we're reading in Hebrews, they would offer animal sacrifice on behalf of God's people to atone for their sins. They would be the penalty for the sins so God could forgive and cover their sins.

And that was a big part of the priest's job. Now, the other part of the priest's job was just as important, and they would pray. Before the presence of God, they would pray for God to extend his mercy and grace and peace and favor to the people.

And that was their job. They would do that constantly. Constantly. That was their service. And this office of high priest in the nation of Israel, it was an important role.

To be a high priest was an extremely high honor. People revered them. Because they knew it was their job to stand before the presence of God on their behalf.

[14 : 10] Like it tells us here in our passage, 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.

He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. And imagine this, guys. Imagine having an army of people whose sole job every single day was continually to be your representative before God.

Calling out for his favor on your behalf. That's an amazing thing. And these priests, even though they had this special role, it didn't make them arrogant or of a higher spiritual class.

Because even though they were priests, they had, who had access to God's presence, they too were sinful and weak, it tells us here. They were also men of flesh and blood.

God didn't keep priests from the bitter trials of life. He didn't shield them from ever feeling temptation. No, they walked through life just like the rest of us. And because of that, they could deal gently with the ignorant and wayward.

[15 : 26] Because they understood. Now, we can easily make the mistake that because that was Old Testament stuff, ancient world. Hey, we don't do that. We don't do the priest thing anymore, right?

And we could also kind of think, you know, isn't it true too, Jesse, that because of Jesus, we don't need priests anymore? Don't we have direct access to Jesus? Yes, we do have direct access to Jesus.

But that does not mean the role of priest has been eliminated. Nothing could be further from the truth. We need someone to stand before God on our behalf. The high priest of the Old Testament was just a shadow of the greater high priest that we have in Jesus.

Like it says in Hebrews 4.14, Since then, we have, we have, we believers, we in the new covenant, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.

Let us hold fast our confession. The priests in the Old Testament, they played an important role, but they were just a shadow of the perfect priest that was to come, Jesus Christ.

[16 : 38] They got to go into special places in the tabernacle, in the temple, right? The holy place and the most holy place. It was off limits for the rest of God's people, but the priests got to go in there and the high priest got to go into the Holy of Holies once a year, where God's most manifest presence was.

But Jesus, our high priest, has passed through the greater and true temple into the heavens. A clearer rendering of this is that he ascended into heaven, right?

You remember that in Acts? For those of you who don't know, after Jesus died, he was with his disciples for a few weeks, and then they went out and he ascended. They just watched him rise up into heaven, and then he disappeared into the clouds.

Well, look at what the Bible says happened. Because Acts doesn't say, and after Jesus went into the clouds, this happened with him and that happened with him. But actually, we get a prophetic vision of this from Daniel, which predated him centuries.

Daniel said, I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a son of man. He doesn't realize he's looking at Jesus in this moment. And he came to the Ancient of Days, God the Father, and was presented before him.

[17 : 53] And to him, Jesus was given dominion, or rule, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion. It's never going to stop. Which shall not pass away. His kingdom, one that shall not be destroyed. This is a prophecy of Jesus' ascension.

It's predicting what Jesus did in Acts chapter 1. Jesus came back into the presence of God the Father. And so now we know from reading this, he is on the throne, and he was given power and authority and surpassing glory over every nation and every person, and that's never, ever, ever going to end.

Now, what this does, it gives us this amazing picture of Jesus as king, right? Mighty, all-powerful, all-authority. We need to have that picture of Jesus as king. That's good for us. This makes him want to give us our worship and our allegiance and to serve him and to obey him.

And that he can do everything according to his perfect will, everything that God has purposed, and that will be fulfilled because we have this almighty king seated on the throne, ruling and reigning, right?

[19 : 11] And he's on our side, or actually, we're on his side. Nothing can stand in his way. But what about when we are struggling?

What about you when you and I, life isn't going well, depression comes on us, despondency? We start to drift a little bit. We've sinned, given to that temptation yet again.

If Jesus is only our mighty king on the throne in heaven, actually, we can think that he doesn't really understand our struggles and what we're facing down here.

Man, Jesus, I love your kingdom, and I want to be on mission, but man, it's tough. This is too hard. It's too demanding. You just don't get it. But that's why Jesus is high priest.

Jesus as our high priest is such an important thing for us to realize. He is on the throne in heaven as king, and he is on the throne in heaven as our high priest.

[20 : 16] He's not just there to rule and reign and exercise his divine power and authority. He is there in the Father's presence, advocating for you and for me.

And he never stops doing that. He never grows tired of doing it. He wants to do it. He loves to do it because he's perfect in love.

He loves to be our representative in heaven. And he does it better than any other high priest has ever done. Unequaled. Here's the thing, guys.

Think about this. Jesus as our high priest, he brings all of our names, all of our situations, all of our needs, in every moment of our life into the throne room of heaven.

Right now it's happening. Jesus is up there doing that right now. And again, and again, and again. Tick tock, tick tock, tick tock. Never stops. What does that mean?

[21 : 21] It means you and I are always on his mind. We are always on his heart. There is not a moment where Jesus, our high priest, fails to remember you and care for you.

And that truth should be a great comfort to us. But this ministry as our high priest goes even further than we think. Verse 15 says, for we do not have, in chapter 4, 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.

So we have this amazing advocate in heaven who never stops ministering on our behalf in God's presence. But what's also true is that Jesus is our high priest who joins us in our suffering.

It says he can't not sympathize with our weakness. That's not just bad grammar. The guy uses a double negative on purpose. He is trying to amplify how impossible it is for Jesus not to sympathize with us.

He can't do that. And the question for us is, when does he sympathize with us? When does his heart go out to us? Surely it's when we're doing good.

[22 : 41] Surely it's when we're following him so well. Pump the brakes. That's not what Hebrews says. It isn't in our strength. It isn't in our righteous works, in our incredible prayer life.

No, he sympathizes with us in our weakness. When we are wayward and falter and sin.

That word sympathize, it comes from two Greek words, which means to suffer with. To sympathize means you understand what a person is going through and you're feeling it with them.

You're sharing in their experience. And what does that do? What does that do? It fills you with compassion. And that's what Jesus does.

He is in it with us. He joins us in our suffering. He's sharing in that experience. And so his heart is so full of love and compassion that it is always ever going out to us.

[23 : 44] And you know what? Even more so in our weakness. Even more so when we fail and we sin and we are wayward. And he can do that.

He can sympathize with us because it says here, he experienced everything we have. Every temptation you face, every temptation you will face, Jesus has too.

The chaos and the pain of any trial you can be in, he has been through it too. Everything we can experience, Jesus went through as well.

But you know what? He experienced deeper than we ever have because it says he was tempted but never sinned. See, often we don't feel the full weight and agony of the temptation and the trial because what we do is we give in before we get through.

We don't realize how much harder it could be because we give up. We find healthy ways to escape the trial instead of face it. We use alcohol or drugs or in a difficult marriage we run out and we have an affair.

[24 : 57] Or we just Netflix binge to just kind of like get away from it all and just pretend it's not there anymore. But Jesus pushed through and he never gave in.

probably the clearest way we see this is in the Garden of Gethsemane. This beautiful picture of Jesus' humanity, his shared experience with us and it happened on the night that he was arrested and going to be crucified and he knew it was coming.

Jesus knew it was going to happen. And it wasn't just the physical agony of being crucified which was one of the harshest inventions of being tortured to death ever conjured up in history.

It was also probably even more so the reality that God the Father was going to put all our sins on his son and then pour out his divine wrath for that.

There was going to be a moment where Jesus was going to be punished. There was going to be separation from him and God which is why he cried out why have you forsaken me?

[26 : 08] God had to at a moment forsake his son which means there was an interruption. There was an interruption in the divine relationship for the first time in eternity.

And Jesus is looking forward to that. And he's saying oh Lord may this cup of suffering pass for me. And he's praying it over and over again and he's in such agony that he is sweating drops of blood.

And that is a medical thing that happens when you are in deep anguish. You have to be in a place of extreme stress to do that. And yet it says that of Jesus.

And I'm sure for Jesus in that moment as he's praying and the humanness of who he is there was a temptation to escape and not do the Father's will but you know what? He faced it down and he pushed through.

And he said not my will but yours be done. And we know the rest. He went to the cross. And what we see in that little Gethsemane moment is this amazing glimpse of how Jesus greatly suffered through the trial but never gave in.

[27 : 21] That means every temptation we fight every trial we suffer Jesus has been there and he's gone further than we ever will. We don't have to wonder if he understands.

He understands at such a deeper level guys. He knows. And so when we feel weak when we feel ready to give up when we are worn out from fighting temptation to sin we can look to our great high priest and call for help and know that he's been there and yet he's gone further.

And this is great news and great comfort for the sinner. Great comfort for the weak those facing the trial and the temptation. And it is also of immeasurable benefit to us that although he faced it all he still never sinned.

Because Jesus is not just our high priest he is our sinless high priest and here is why we need him to be our sinless high priest. Hebrews 5 7-10 In the days of his flesh Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him he was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his reverence.

And although he was a son he learned obedience through what he suffered. Now check this out. And being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.

[28 : 47] Did you hear that? And being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation for us. Jesus is our high priest who became perfect for us.

You and I we can never be perfect. We're going to disobey. We're not going to win every temptation battle we face. We will never submit and follow God through every trial no matter the cost.

But the good news is this that while we fight our sin and do our best to obey we don't have to be perfect because Jesus became perfect for us.

He is not just a high priest he joins us in the dark pit we are in. He is our sinless high priest who is able to pull us out of it. Man, if you would come up what does this mean for you and me?

Hebrews 4.16 Such a wonderful promise here guys. because Jesus is our high priest who can sympathize with us been there done that made perfect let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of anger to the throne of judgment to the throne of frustration and bitterness no to the throne of grace to the throne of God's favor to the throne of God's love to the throne of his mercy that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[30 : 34] That's the good news for us that Jesus is our high priest. Christ if you're here and not a Christian I want to just appeal to you you will never be perfect.

You can never earn your way into heaven. You can never earn God's love but he offers it to you freely. He made a way for you even though you aren't perfect because Jesus became perfect for you and he is offering you this salvation.

He is offering you the opportunity to come into the throne of his grace and experience his love and his mercy and all it takes is for you to believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and to repent of your sins.

That is it and I want to appeal to you to come today. Today is the day of salvation. Don't put it off one more day. Man, come to the throne of his grace and you will find the help you need.

Now, if you're here and you're a Christian that's true of us now. We get to draw to God. We get to draw near to Jesus with confidence knowing that he is going to receive us no matter what.

[31 : 48] No matter what. And I want to ask you what are you facing right now? Bring it to Jesus. Don't run from him. Run to him. Draw near with confidence, guys.

It is a throne of grace for you and me. And I want to do this. This isn't our normal closing but this is what I felt like we should do today. Can everyone just close their eyes? And I want to say to us in the room and maybe you're going through something.

I don't know what it is but God does. Jesus in heaven does. Maybe you're feeling weary and worn out. Maybe you're feeling alone. Maybe you're feeling depressed.

Maybe there's something that you've done that has caused you to feel guilt and shame. If that's you can I ask you to do something bold right now?

Just join me in standing and just pray a simple prayer with me. If that's you just stand where you are. Lord. This is the prayer I want to pray and I want you to pray.

[33 : 17] Jesus I need you. please join me where I'm at. Join me in my suffering. I want you to know that you're here.

And just help me. I can't do this alone. Help me. Lord thank you that you hear our cries and you answer us.

if the rest of us could stand we're going to take communion together. Communion it reminds us of how much Jesus loves us.

He went to the cross to set us free from sin. He died in our place. The bread that we're going to take it represents his body broken for us. The cup it represents his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

So with faith in these things and the truth that Jesus has gone before us has died for us and gone before us into the heavens let's eat and drink giving thanks to our Savior and great high priest.

[34 : 36] Christ.