

Our Great High Priest

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

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Well, good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is great to be with you. If you are a guest or a visitor, welcome. We're glad that you're with us this morning, and you're joining us in the midst of a series in the book of Hebrews, and so we're going to be looking at the end of Hebrews 4 and the beginning of Hebrews 5 this morning. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Hebrews 4. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the chairs in front of you, or you can follow along on the screens. We'll project the passage in just a moment. And if you did come here this morning and you don't have a Bible, we would love for you to take that one in the chair. It's our gift to you. We would love for you to have that. No one will ask you what you're doing with it. We would just love for you to have it.

But we're looking at Hebrews 4 and 5, and if you were with us last week, then you remember that our passage ended with this statement that the author of Hebrews made about the Word of God and how the Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, that it pierces through bone and marrow. It divides soul and spirit. It reveals thoughts and the intentions of our hearts. It exposes us. That before God, the Word of God actually lays us bare so that those deepest corners of our heart, those far recesses of our minds, they are revealed to Him. We're exposed to God. All those things that we hide from one another, God sees. Now, that can cause a whole host of different emotions to stir up in us, right? Maybe it causes us to feel anxious. Maybe it makes us want to flee, to run away, to hide from the Lord. After all, that was Adam and Eve's inclination, right? When they had sinned against God, when they had rebelled, and they heard the voice of the Lord coming into the garden, their inclination was to hide, to flee from God.

And maybe that's how you feel at the thought of having your heart, your mind, exposed before Him. But what if that instinct, that instinct to run, to hide, to flee from the Lord, what if that instinct is completely wrong? What if instead we're supposed to do the very opposite? Well, let's read Hebrews chapter 4, beginning in verse 14. The author of Hebrews writes:

“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. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice 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.”

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. 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.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Father, we ask that you would lead and guide us now, direct our ways and help us so that we would see the glory of your Son in your word. We ask, Lord, that you would help us. We need your help so that we can see clearly, that we can hear properly, so that we can respond rightly to your word. And so we ask that you would help me as I preach and help all of us as we are attentive to your word. Be with us and lead us, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, I've never actually been inside or around the Oval Office. I've never gotten a step foot in. I went a number of years ago when my family and I took a tour of the White House. That was already off the White House tour. Maybe some of you remember when it was part of the White House tour. You could walk in or at least walk by. You could poke your head in and kind of look around a little. But we didn't get to do that. But I can imagine that that room, the Oval Office, I can imagine that if you were to go in that room, not on a tour, but you were there for a meeting, for a discussion, for debate, you were there to observe the goings-on of the people that inhabit that space, I imagine that it would stir in you a sense of worry, anxiety, fear, awe even, right? Because some of the most powerful men and women in the world are engaging in debate and discussion and making some of the most important decisions that affect national and international affairs in that very room. And so that room could cause us to feel nervous. Anxious. A little bit in awe.

And when I was thinking about that, there's a picture, a historical picture, that was running through my mind this week. And it wasn't of someone with awe or wonder or majesty as they were in that room. It was actually a picture of playfulness. You see, the picture I have in my mind, some of you maybe have seen it before as well, is that of JFK Jr. You remember you've seen these pictures of him in the White House, in the Oval Office, and he's not afraid, he's not anxious, no, he's having fun, right? He's hiding under the resolute desk, and he's got toy in hand and mischief on his face. He's not afraid. He's at complete ease. He's not worried to enter into that room. He goes freely. Now, why is that? Well, surely some of it is just pure ignorance, right? He was just a child. He had no idea. He couldn't comprehend the kind of conversations that took place in that room. But I think it was more than that, right? He was at ease. He could freely come and go into that room. He could play in that space because his father was there, because it was the place where his dad was with him, right? And so he was invited to play. He was invited to be at ease.

The Perfect Priest

He was invited into that place of power. And the author of Hebrews is telling us that we have access to a place that is far more powerful, that is far more awe-inspiring than the Oval Office. In verse 16, we're told that it's the throne of grace, the place where God dwells, and we are to approach that throne not with fear, not with anxiety, not sheepishly, but with confidence, right? Verse 16, “let us then with confidence draw near the throne of grace.” Now, I want you to think about that. We have just been told in the passage before this one that we have been exposed, that our sin is made known to God, and then we're told to

approach God with confidence. I have to tell you, that is not my first inclination, right? I mean, when we've been found out, right, kids, when you have done something wrong, right, you've hit your sibling, you've broken the window, you've stolen a cookie, right, whatever it might be, is your first inclination to run and tell "Mom, Mom, I broke a window, isn't that great", right? No, of course not, right? No, you actually hide, maybe. You run, you hope they don't notice. That's our inclination. And yet what the author of Hebrews is telling us to do is the very opposite.

He's saying that we can have confidence to approach the Lord on his throne of grace, that we have confidence, not because of something we've done, not because of our own good works, but we have confidence because of who our priest is, right? Verse 14, "we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God." And so we are invited into the throne room of God because of Jesus, our high priest. Our high priest who is like the priest of the Old Testament, but who is far superior to them. And that's what I want us to see this morning, that we are invited into God's throne room through our priest who is greater than the priest of old. Now, before pointing to his superiority, we need to see his similarities.

So in verses 1 through 4 of chapter 5, we're told that the priests of the Old Testament, they were chosen by men, and they acted on behalf of men before God, and they offered gifts, and they made sacrifices for sins, and they understood the plight of the people, and they were called by God. So that was the priest of the Old Testament, but that's actually true of Jesus as well, right? Jesus was a man. He acted on behalf of others. He offered sacrifice for sin. He understands the people's situation, and he is called by God. So we have these similarities, and they had to be there in order for Jesus to be the high priest. They had to be, the similarities had to be there. He had to be like the other priests that came before him. And yet, for all the similarities, there are some major differences, like the fact that Jesus is the perfect priest.

He's the perfect priest. He's like the others. Jesus can sympathize with our weaknesses, right? That's what verse 15 said. And that's similar to the Old Testament priests, which we're told, they can deal gently with the wayward because they're beset with weakness. And so both can sympathize and understand, but the Old Testament priests did these things because they were guilty of sin. So they could sympathize, they could understand the weakness of the people because they themselves were weak. But Jesus wasn't like that. Jesus, we're told in verse 15, in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. He understands the power of temptation because he was tempted, but never gave in. This is why the Old Testament priests had to offer sacrifices for their sin as well as the sins of the people, right? In chapter 5, verse 3, we're told, he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.

Now, this is hearkening back to the Old Testament sacrificial system and specifically Leviticus 16. So in Leviticus 16, we have the Day of Atonement being described. And the Day of Atonement was the day in which the high priest would go into the presence of God and on that day he would offer sacrifice for the atonement for the sins of all the people. He would make atonement for the people. But before he could enter into the presence of God, he had to be made holy. So he had to offer sacrifice for himself. He offered sacrifice for himself, then he went into the throne room of God and he offered sacrifice for the people. This is what the high priest had to do. But Jesus doesn't have to do this. Because Jesus, though tempted, never gave in. He resisted. He's the only priest who never has to make sacrifice for himself because Christ never faltered. And yet, he knows the power of temptation. And he knows what we've experienced. We're told he sympathizes with us in our weakness. He knows your

struggles. He knows your pain. He sympathizes with us. You see, he doesn't stand over us with his arms crossed and with a wagging finger saying, how could you struggle with that again? Or why are you so weak? Or I can't believe you're still dealing with that temptation. No, that's not what he says to us. That's not sympathy. No, instead, his success against temptation, his resisting, it actually leads him to compassion for us, for you and for me. He understands the power of temptation. And so he sympathizes with us in our weakness and invites us into the throne room of God, not by scolding us, but to receive mercy and grace in our time of need. Y'all, that's amazing to think about. That in our time of need, Jesus invites us before the Father that we would find help.

The King Priest

So we don't run, we don't hide. We approach God through our perfect priest, our perfect priest who's also a king. He's the king priest. Now, this is another way that Jesus is unique because in the Old Testament, the offices of king and priest were occupied by different people. And one of the reasons for this was because the line of the priest came through Aaron and the Levitical tribe, and the office of the king came through the tribe of David. And so we have these different lines that were occupying these different offices. But what we see is that Jesus embodies both of them, and we know this for a few reasons. One is the passage before us focuses on Jesus' priestly ministry, but then it's tied to chapter 1, which we already heard Jesus is the eternal king. And so we have these two offices being brought together. They're melding together.

But we also see this explicitly in our passage. In chapter 5, verse 5, we're told "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.'" Okay, so this is quoting Psalm 2. And Psalm 2, which we already heard in chapter 1, is a psalm about the king. It's a kingship psalm. But it finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah. It finds its fulfillment in Jesus. And so what we're seeing is that this priest that we're hearing about in chapter 5 is also the king that was foretold of in Psalm 2. Now, this is further emphasized by invoking Melchizedek. So you saw that in chapter 5, verse 6 and 10: "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek," "designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek." Now, Hebrews is going to say a lot about Melchizedek in a couple of chapters, okay, in chapter 7. So I'm not going to say a lot right now. We'll just put a pin in it. We'll come back to it later. So if you're really interested in hearing about Melchizedek, come back in a couple weeks. Come back next week too, but we won't get to it for a few weeks. But for now, why this is important to us right now is that these passages are pointing to his kingship.

Okay, so Psalm 110, which is what's quoted here, is looking to the Messiah. And even in the Psalm, it's saying that the king will be a priest. And then Melchizedek himself was a priest king of Salem. And he ministered to Abram in Genesis chapter 14. And so he held both offices. And so Jesus is this unique amalgamation. He's this unique person bringing together these offices in one person. He's the king priest. And it's not just that he's unique, but what's remarkable is what he does with these offices. As he inhabits being the king, as he inhabits being the priest, he appropriates these offices not just by being perfect, not just by being the king priest, but by being the suffering priest.

The Suffering Priest

This is what makes him so remarkable. He uses his office to suffer. It's what we see in chapter 5, verses 7 through 8. The author of Hebrews says this, "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. 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." All right, there's a lot here. And I imagine there are probably a lot of questions running through your mind because of a few of the phrases we just read. And I'm going to try to answer them, right? And I'm sure it will be exhaustive. So, I'm just kidding. We won't exhaust all those questions. But I want us to look closely a little bit at this passage and notice what it says.

Jesus cried out. He offered prayers. He wept. He experienced the very opposite of glory. Right? We know he was exalted. Verse 5 says that. But he was also humiliated. He was humiliated. He suffered. Right? I mean, just think about two episodes at the end of Jesus' life in the Garden of Gethsemane. Right? In the garden, he prayed. And he sweat blood. And he cried out to God, "Let this cup pass before me." Let this cup pass. If there's any way for them to be saved, if there's any other way for forgiveness to come, let it come. But he said, "Not my will, your will be done." He was in anguish as he waited for the crucifixion. He was suffering. And then he's arrested, and he goes to the crucifixion to be crucified. And he's beaten, and he's mocked, and he's harassed. And upon the cross, he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And he prayed, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." And again, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

He suffered. And when he was tempted, he prayed. And when he was alone in the garden, he called out to the Father. And when he was on the cross, he trusted God. He suffered in a way that no one else, no other priest had before. And through his suffering, he learned obedience. And he was made perfect. Now, these are where the questions kick in, right? This is where maybe alarm bells are going off in our minds, because we hear that he learned, and we think, How is it that Jesus could learn? I mean, he was the eternal Son of God, right? Doesn't he know everything? How can he learn? Or he's made perfect. Does that mean that he wasn't perfect before?

So let's try and make sense of these two ideas. Let's try and understand what the author of Hebrews is saying here. And in trying to reconcile this, work through it, two particular theologians were helpful to me, Peter O'Brien and Amy Peeler. And Peter O'Brien, talking about this idea of learning obedience, says this. He says that "learning obedience meant coming to appreciate fully what conforming to God's will involved. As Jesus encountered his suffering, his faithfulness to God was challenged, and his unfailing obedience to the Father's will was tested again and again." Okay, so you hear what he's saying. He's saying that in all these times of suffering, the will of the Father and Jesus following that will was being challenged. He was being tempted, right? So think about when he's out in the desert, right? He's in the wilderness, and the devil is tempting him, right? What does the devil say? He says, bow down to me, and I will give you all the world, right? Don't follow God's ways, follow my ways. Satan was challenging the ways of the Lord. Or even when he was on the cross, right? The people who were at the foot of the cross, what did they say? They looked up at him and said, if you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. He saved others, why can't he save himself? And of course, in that moment, Jesus could have, right? He could have called forth his angels. He could have called forth the host of heaven. He could have done

that, right? In those moments, in those times of suffering, the will of the Father was being challenged, and yet Jesus obeyed. He was learning obedience.

Does that make sense? He was learning obedience through suffering. And because of his obedience, he was made perfect. Now, again, perfect makes it sound like he wasn't perfect before, right? But that's not what the author has in mind. Now, you see, this word perfect, it has the connotation of bringing to an end or bringing to a goal or an accomplishment. And so the theologian Amy Peeler, she puts it this way. She says, "it is not the process of moving out of imperfection, but the process of completing what was intended." And that's what Jesus was doing on the cross. He was completing and bringing to an end. He was perfecting the work of a suffering priest. That's what he was doing. He was bringing it to completion. He was perfecting it. And he does this for us.

That's the amazing thing. He does this for us. Verse 8 tells us that through his obedience, through his suffering, through his perfect work, he became the source of eternal salvation. And this is tying us back to chapter 4, where we're told that through Jesus there is mercy and grace and salvation. So that in our time of need, we don't flee from God. We don't turn our eyes away from the Father. But instead, because Jesus, our perfect, kingly, suffering priest, because of him we come boldly to the throne of God. We come with confidence before him in our need. We come boldly claiming the work of Jesus on our behalf. And when we do, we find salvation and mercy and grace. Because that's what our great high priest has won for us. That's what he has done by going to the cross, by learning obedience, by becoming perfect, by suffering for us. And so, friends, I invite you. Come to the Father. Boldly go before the throne of grace and find help in your time of need. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. Thank you that through Jesus we can come before you. That because of Jesus we can approach your throne of grace. And we ask, Lord, that you would help us to do that. We ask that we would come not claiming any works of our own, but claiming only the work of Christ and what he has done on our behalf. And so we do that. Lord Jesus, our suffering high priest, we thank you for your grace and mercy that you have given your life that we would live. And so we ask that we would live in light of that grace every day of our lives. And we pray this in Christ's name and God's people said together, Amen.