

Our Great High Priest

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Preacher: Andrew Price

- [0 : 0 0] Well, from time to time, there are certain types of people who do different roles that we need in life. For example, doctors. We need doctors from time to time, don't we?
- And when we get sick and so on. Or farmers. We need farmers to grow crops for us. Or teachers to teach kids at school or students at uni. Or even garbage collectors. We need them to empty our bins every week.
- And mechanics and accountants. Sometimes we may even need lawyers. They can actually be useful from time to time. We've got some lawyers here, don't we? But what about a high priest?
- If you ask people if they thought they needed a high priest, I'm pretty sure their answer would be, a what? No. In fact, I went online to the white pages. White pages used to come in a book.
- But it's all online now. And I went and looked up online at white pages for high priest in Doncaster. And the first three hits I turned up was High Street Physio Centre, High TN, and High Street Psychiatric Centre.
- [1 : 1 0] Presumably they thought if you were looking for a high priest, you needed psychiatric help. But the point is, there was no listing for high priest. It seems people don't think they need a high priest today.
- But the thing is, we actually do. We actually need a high priest. You see, last week ended with the truth that we will all have to give an account. So if you've got your Bibles there, have a look at the last verse from last week.
- Chapter 4, verse 13. You see, we must all give an account to God for how we have lived, for how we have treated God and one another.
- Now, how do you think you'll go on that day? I mean, have you ever sinned or ignored God? Have you ever forgotten to thank God or honour God?
- I have plenty of times. Too many, in fact. And so I actually need someone who will defend me. Someone who will speak for me. Someone who will plead for me.
- [2 : 1 7] And that's what a high priest does. A high priest is someone who stands before God and represents people to God. And to plead on their behalf for forgiveness and for help. After having a go at lawyers earlier on, a high priest is actually a bit like a lawyer.
- Who approaches the judge on your behalf. Who represents you and pleads your case for you. Whether for forgiveness or for help. Of course, we could, I guess, try and appear before God on that day.
- And represent ourselves as people sometimes try and represent themselves in the courtroom. They decide not to have a lawyer. But it rarely, if ever, goes well for them. And if it rarely goes well in a human court, how do you think it's going to go well in a heavenly court?
- Where everything in your life is laid bare before God. You see, we actually do need a high priest, whether we realise it or not. One who will appear before God for us.

Who will firstly secure our forgiveness from God so that we can become one of his people. And who can secondly enable us to come back to God. For help to persevere as one of his people.

[3 : 30] Because it's not always easy being a Christian, is it? You see, the first audience of this letter were Jews who became Christians. And they were tempted to turn from Christ back to Judaism.

And when you hear what life was like for them, you can kind of understand. Let me just paint the picture for you and give you a bit of a recap. So, turn for a moment to chapter 10, page 1212 in your Bibles.

Let me just show you the context, what they were dealing with. So, chapter 10, verse 32, top left-hand side of the page on 1212. This is what the writer says.

He says, That's amazing, isn't it?

You taking my TV? Sure, have the DVD player as well. It's incredible. But they said, Joyfully accepted your property because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

[4 : 46] So, do not throw away your confidence, he says. It will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

You see, these people had had it tough. They had already been persecuted for their faith in Christ. They had already lost lots.

And now it's happening all over again. And so, they attempted to turn away from Jesus back to Judaism, which seemed easier for them, less persecution.

And for us, it would be like being persecuted at school or uni or work for holding to God's truth as Christians and feeling the temptation to turn away from Jesus back to the way of the world, which just seems easier for us.

But the writer is saying, hang in there, persevere, it'll be worth it. And so, this whole letter is really a letter of exhortation to persevere. And part of the way he encourages them to persevere is to show them that Jesus is better than Judaism.

[5 : 53] And so, in chapter 1, we saw how he tells them that Jesus is the greatest spokesperson for God. A greater than the prophets who spoke God's word. A greater than the angels who delivered God's word.

So, don't drift from Jesus and his word in the gospel, we heard. Don't drift from Jesus back to Judaism because Jesus is better. And then we heard in chapter 2, that Jesus is also the greatest human who was made a little lower than the angels in order to sacrifice himself for our sins and free us from the fear of death.

So, don't turn away from Jesus back to Judaism with its animal sacrifices that never really work and can give you no such freedom from death. Jesus is better.

And then last week in chapter 3, we saw him encourage his readers to enter God's heavenly rest. And to be faithful like Jesus was faithful in God's house. And not to be like Israel who was unfaithful.

And this time he encouraged them, and not by showing that Jesus is better, but by giving them a warning about what happens if they don't persevere. Do you remember from last week? He says, look what happened to Israel who were unfaithful.

[7 : 03] They missed out on God's rest. So, chapter 4, verse 11, make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will perish by following their, Israel's example of disobedience.

Because God's word, verse 12 and 13, will judge you on that day, the day you give an account. And if you've turned away from Jesus, then that day will not be good for you.

He said, keep clinging to Christ, he's saying. That's the recap. But it's not always easy to keep clinging to Christ, is it? It's not always easy to persevere.

I'm guessing most of you heard about the murder of the Coptic Christians yesterday in Egypt. Today, ISIS has claimed responsibility for the gunmen who boarded a bus and killed 29, it's up to now, including some children.

Can you imagine how hard it must be for Christians in Egypt at the moment to keep persevering? Or Margaret Court, that once famous tennis player who gently stood up for God's truth about marriage and was crucified on social media last week.

[8 : 09] Or ourselves who struggle with unanswered prayer or just the everyday grind of life. It's not always easy persevering as a Christian until we get that heavenly rest.

And so we need help. We need a high priest who not only brings us forgiveness, but also enables us to come before God's very throne and receive help.

And that's what the writer now draws our attention to. So I just wanted to paint a picture of where we're at. We're at point one in your outlines. We'll spend most of our time on point one and verse 14 in your Bibles.

It says, Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Here the writer begins by saying, We have not just a high priest, but a great high priest. Why is Jesus a great high priest? Well, firstly, because he's already secured our forgiveness.

[9 : 11] You see, other priests would offer multiple sacrifices for sin in an earthly temple. But here the writer says, Jesus has ascended into heaven itself, verse 14. And the implication is that his work of atonement has been done.

He has secured forgiveness. It's like chapter 1, verse 3, where Jesus provided purification for our sins and then sat down at the right hand of God in heaven.

In other words, Jesus' ascent into heaven is an indication that his work of atonement has been done. He has secured forgiveness for us.

He has already made us right with God. So the writer says, Let us then hold firmly to the faith we profess. For Christ has already made us right with God.

I mean, for these readers to go back to Judaism means going back to trying to make yourself right with God by obeying the law. When Jesus has already done it for you. And that's ludicrous. It would be like your parents buying you a car, giving you the keys, and then you saying, Oh, look, I think I'll give you the keys back.

[10 : 19] I want to try and earn it myself by collecting stamps and trying to trade them in for a car. It's ridiculous and impossible. I'm not suggesting, by the way, that your parents should buy you a car.

Just for all of those hopefuls out there. But hopefully you get the point. Jesus is the great high priest because, firstly, he has gone into heaven and having secured our forgiveness.

So it's ludicrous to go backwards and try and earn it now. Instead, he says, hold firmly to the faith that has already made you right with God. But secondly, he is our great high priest because he gets how hard it can be.

See verse 15? He says, You see, Jesus gets how hard it can be to follow God.

He knows what it's like to be human, to struggle with temptation, to face weakness. In other words, he understands what it's like to be you.

[11 : 29] In fact, he says he was tempted in every way as we were. Not every specific temptation we have, but every category of temptation we have.

I mean, he wouldn't have been tempted to gossip about someone on Facebook or tweet. You know, that Peter is so shallow. He denied me three times. Hashtag or wherever it works. But he would have been tempted to gossip.

He wouldn't have been tempted to speed down the streets of Jerusalem on a camel. There was no speed limits. But he would have been tempted to disobey the authorities. He didn't face every specific temptation we do, but every category of temptation we do.

And yet he never gave in to those temptations. Now, some people have said that because of that, he doesn't fully understand us. You know, you might think it doesn't qualify him to really empathize with us.

But it's actually the reverse. You need to put your thinking caps on here. It's precisely because he did not sin that makes him fully qualified to sympathize.

[12 : 36] Let me explain. Resisting temptation actually requires work, doesn't it? When life is tough, often the easy way out is to give in to temptation.

That's why it's called the easy way out. But resisting temptation is actually harder work. And so if Jesus has always resisted, it means he never took the easy way out, but always worked harder than anyone in this room.

Because he never gave in. So he actually knows just how hard it is to walk with God, to resist temptation, you see.

More than we do. He gets it. He does. And because Jesus gets it, then it gives us confidence to come before God and ask for help. Do you see verse 16? Let us therefore, or then, approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

When I was young, our family doctor was a man who, he was a good doctor, but he was terribly unsympathetic. He grew up in Bombay in India, and he saw some pretty horrific things.

[13 : 57] And so when he came to Australia, our problems were nothing compared to what he saw. And I always got the impression every time I saw him that he thought I was faking it, you know, being a hypochondriac.

One time I went to see him, though, after going surfing, because I was out surfing on a coral break, and I stepped on some sea urchins and got a whole bunch of shell in my feet. It was really painful, and my feet had blood all over it.

It looked terrible. And at least I thought, oh, he's got to be impressed with this, surely. He's got to give me some sympathy. And when I showed him, he simply tuttered, as if to say how foolish I was.

And then without a word, he got some tweezers and a scalpel and hacked at my foot, oblivious to my groans, might I add. And then he said, finished.

I went and paid my bill and never returned. You see, if someone is unsympathetic, then you're less likely to go to them for help again, aren't you?

[15 : 00] But Jesus gets it. And that gives us confidence to approach God's throne and find mercy, forgiveness, as well as help to persevere.

Though it's not as though God is a grumpy old man and Jesus has to twist his arm to help us. Notice, no, no, that's not it. Notice it's called God's throne of grace, verse 16.

God is gracious and loves to give both mercy to forgive and help to persevere. But notice it's help in our time of need or literally timely help.

In other words, the help comes just at the right time. Often it's at the last minute so that we're forced to trust God. But this is the right time in God's eyes.

You see, the help comes at the right time as God sees it, not as we see it. If we wanted help when, you know, according to what we thought was right, we'd have help straight away and we'd never be forced to trust God again.

[16 : 04] It'd just come automatically straight away. And that would mean we would never grow in our faith and trust. At the moment, we're struggling to get our third child in particular to clean her room.

When we ask her to clean her room, she walks through the door, sees the mess, and collapses on the floor crying, can you help me? It's too messy. We reply, and who made the mess?

Now, we deliberately don't help her straight away. Why? Well, if we did, then do you think she'd ever learn to clean it herself? If we always clean it up for her as soon as she asks, then she'll never grow in maturity.

She'll be an adult and we'll get a phone call saying, can you come over and clean my room? No, we wait and help her at the right time so that she might grow and mature.

Now, the promise of help here in verse 16 is genuine. It is real. And it will come, but it is according to God's timing, not ours, so that we might grow and persevere.

[17 : 13] But the point is, Jesus is our great high priest. Firstly, because he has gone into heaven itself and secured our forgiveness. And then secondly, because he gets how hard it is to persevere as a Christian.

He understands what it's like to be you. And so that gives us confidence to keep coming back to God for forgiveness when we mess up and for help to keep persevering to a heavenly rest.

Now, all this is great news, but there is a problem, especially for our readers. You see, our readers were Jews and they knew that to be a high priest, you had to have certain qualifications, which brings us to point two, which will be a very brief point.

Now, there are several qualifications to be a high priest, and I've listed them on the next slide. So on the next slide, there's four qualifications there. So first, you had to be one of the people to represent the people.

Second, you had to offer sacrifices for sins of the people. Third, you had to know what it's like to be one of the people so you could deal gently or sympathize with them. And fourthly, you needed to be called by God.

[18 : 20] There was one other qualification, which was about being part of a priestly line, which the writer will come back to in chapter seven. But for now, see if you can recognize, we'll keep that slide up, see if you can recognize these four qualifications as I read the first four verses of chapter five.

He goes on in verse one of chapter five, every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters relating to God and to offer gifts and sacrifice for sins.

He is to be able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and 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.

And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when he is called by God, just as Aaron was. Did you spot those four qualifications?

One of the people to represent the people. He had to deal gently. He had to offer sacrifices for sin. And he had to be called by God. They're the qualifications that a high priest needs to have.

[19 : 36] And if Jesus is our great high priest, then he needs to meet those qualifications. And that's exactly what the writer now goes on to show. So point three, verse five. He starts with being called by God.

Verse five. In the same way, Christ did not take on 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. Here the writer starts with the qualification of being called by God.

And he says that Jesus was called by God. He was called by God through the Old Testament scriptures. And to prove it, he quotes those Old Testament scriptures for us in verse six.

And the first quote is from Psalm two. The second quote is from Psalm 110, our second reading. Now on the slide, both Psalms, so the next slide, both Psalms are about God's promised King, the Messiah.

[20 : 41] And again, you're going to need to put your thinking caps on here for a moment. Both Psalms are about God's King, the Messiah, the Christ. And he begins, by pointing out that Jesus is the son of God.

So we'll click next. Next slide. Okay. So he starts off by saying Jesus is the son of God. And Psalm two declares that the King was also called the son of God.

So if we click next, so Jesus is the son and Psalm two is about the son of God. And so that means that Jesus is, if we click next, the King.

Okay. You with me so far? Jesus, the son, Psalm two is about the son of God and the King. Jesus is the King. Now, the next step is, well, Psalm 110 is also about the King.

So if we click next, so if we click next, Jesus is the King. So Psalm 10 is also about Jesus. And in Psalm 10, it's not just about the King.

[21 : 42] It's also about how the King is a priest. So click next. Okay. And so if Jesus is the King of Psalm 110, and Psalm 110 is about a King who is also a priest, then the conclusion is next slide, that Jesus is the priest as well.

Now, I don't know if you followed that after all my technical work, but the point is just as Aaron was called by God. So Jesus, the King is called by God through these Psalms and Psalm 110 in particular.

Now, the writer will come back to this in chapter seven, and when we look at Melchizedek, but for now, Jesus fulfills his qualification of being called by God. What about the other qualifications? Well, have a look at verse seven and eight.

During the days of Jesus's life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death. And he was heard because of his reverent submission.

Some though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. Here in verse seven, it says during the days of Jesus's life.

[22 : 58] It's literally during the days of his flesh, which is important to remember because it reminds us that Jesus was truly human. He really was one of the people.

We heard this in chapter two. And so Jesus really can represent the people. So here's another small tick, another small qualification met. What's more, as a human, Jesus really did walk in our shoes.

He really did experience suffering and temptation. So verse seven refers to the events in Jesus's life, like the garden of Gethsemane, when he was just about to die on the cross and take God's judgment for us.

And so on the next slide, we read from Matthew chapter 26, these words. So next slide. Keep going.

Matthew 26. All right. Jesus says, My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. And going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, My father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will.

[24 : 10] And he prayed a second time. And Luke puts it like this. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly. And his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

You see, Jesus knew he was about to bear God's judgment for us at the cross. And it overwhelmed him. It scared him.

And no doubt it tempted him to forsake his father's will. And yet, he resisted that temptation and said, Not as I will, but as you will.

What's more, verse 7 literally says, With loud cries, He, you know, He offered up loud cries. Such was his suffering and pain.

So on the next slide, we read that again in Matthew's Gospel, where he cried out in a loud voice, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? These events are what the writer is talking about here in verse 7, where Jesus went through this suffering for you and for me.

[25 : 17] And the point is, Jesus really does know what it's like to suffer and be tempted. He knows more than we do. And so Jesus really can sympathize with us.

He can deal gently with us, like a high priest needs to. And so tick, there's another qualification met. And because he was obedient to his father's will, even to death on a cross, then God heard his prayers and saved him out of death by raising him to life.

And so Jesus became the perfect source of salvation for us. Jesus learned obedience, it says in verse 9. And not in the sense that he had to learn to become obedient, like kids have to become obedient.

Rather, he learned what it meant for him to be obedient. He experienced what obedience meant for him. It meant going to the cross and offering himself as a sacrifice for our sin.

And by doing so, he ticks another qualification. He makes sacrifice for the sins of the people. Only the sacrifice was himself.

[26 : 26] And so the writer continues, or finishes in verse 10 by saying, he is designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Jesus really is a high priest.

He ticks all the qualifications. And so on the last slide, he is one who, sorry, next slide. He is one who is called by God.

He's one who is human, days of his flesh. He's a representative of the people. He suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane, up to the cross. So he knows how hard it is. He can sympathize with us.

And he offers sacrifice for sin, namely himself. He ticks all those qualifications, you see. He really is our great high priest.

So what does all this mean for us? Well, the first question is, is Jesus our high priest? Because we need one. We need one who will represent us before the throne of God above and secure our forgiveness and enable us to come to God time and time again for help.

[27 : 30] And so, have you put your trust in Jesus? Is he your high priest who has secured forgiveness for you and opened the way for you to come before God's throne of grace for help?

And for us who do trust in Jesus, then we have to remember that we have a great high priest who has already secured our forgiveness, who has already made us right with God.

So why would we look anywhere else? What's more, we have a high priest who enables us to come to God for timely help. We're not alone. We have constant access to God for help to persevere anytime we need it.

And so, we're to make use of it. We're to come to God often with confidence to ask for help, knowing that Jesus understands what it's like.

A guy I knew a few years ago called Dave, a few years ago, he lost his little girl not long after she was born.

[28 : 39] And at the funeral, he confessed that he stopped reading his Bible and stopped praying because the hurt was so great and his anger at God was so fierce.

Indeed, he was tempted to let go of Jesus altogether like these Hebrews were. But then he said what helped him was, these are his words, I know Jesus understands my suffering and my suffering is but a glimpse of his which he endured for me.

In other words, he knew Jesus got how he felt and that encouraged him to keep coming to God in prayer to find grace in his time of need and it was a time of need.

And help him to keep persevering. And he's still persevering to this day. In the words of a great old hymn which we're about to sing, what a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

So let's do that now. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you that the Lord Jesus is our great high priest, the one we need, the one who has gone into the heavens and secured our forgiveness for us, the one who enables us to keep coming before your throne of grace to find both mercy or forgiveness and help in our time of need.

[30 : 20] And so Father, we pray that you would help us to keep making use of our great high priest, keep coming to you in prayer through the Lord Jesus, that we might keep receiving forgiveness for the times we mess up and keep receiving help that we might persevere until we all reach that heavenly rest.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.