

A Better High Priest

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[0 : 0 0] Please be seated. And you may like to have open the Bibles at page 972, 973. And as I said at the beginning, we're continuing our sermon series on the letter to the Hebrews.

And let's pray that God helps us to understand and apply what we learn here. God, our Father, we thank you that you speak to us by your Word, a powerful Word, and we pray that as we come to it now, your Word will indeed pierce into the inner parts of our life so that we may glorify Jesus in our lives and come at last to that eternal rest and peace.

Amen. Well, I can cope with going to the dentist. That usually doesn't bother me much at all. But what I loathe and dread is going to the optometrist.

Three years ago, I went for what I thought would be a check-up because my eyes seemed as though they were deteriorating and needed stronger lens, but found I had a bit of a problem, which is, I think, since cleared up, called central serous retinopathy, whatever that is.

But to be honest, I think I could cope with the problem rather than the analysis of the problem. For sitting in the chair of the optometrist, the bright lights invading my personal space in an excruciating way, placed on top of your eye, and it felt as though this bright light and blaring light was going right into the inner recesses of my life.

[1 : 4 0] And even as now I remember it, I'm beginning to break out in a sweat because that afternoon, seriously, I just felt claustrophobic and broke out into a sweat and I actually had to leave the optometrist for an hour to calm down, have a drink, get some cool air before I went back to complete all the analysis.

Those lights were so distressing and so painful as though they were piercing me to the core and looking deep inside me, in effect. From the beginning of this letter to the Hebrews, chapter 1, verse 1, we see that God speaks and His Word in the Old Testament still speaks to us.

His Word in the New Testament in His Son, Jesus, still speaks to us. And if there's any way of summarising this letter, it would be this, heed the Word of God.

We must pay all the more attention to it lest we drift away from it and drift away from Christian faith. And that is especially the danger that the recipients of this letter originally faced.

And we cannot fool God about whether we heed His Word or not. We cannot fool God and say, yes, God, I listen to Your Word. It's not a matter of making the right noises to God.

[2 : 5 8] You know, like you do when your mum's on the phone and she's going on and on and, yes, mum, and you're looking around doing other things. Yes, mum. You just keep her pacified. Don't you tell her that, by the way. Are you eating your vegetables?

Yes, mum. Getting enough sleep? Yes, mum. We can't fool God like that. I'm not sure that you can fool your mother either.

Because God's Word is like the optometrist's blaring light. It is going into the deepest recesses of our life, piercing to the very thing that makes us tick, to our hearts, to our minds and to our souls.

It is God's Word that cuts to the core of who we are as people. And God's Word is like the auditor of our account, the one who knows everything and pierces into our heart.

And there is coming a day when each one of us will be called to render our account before God. And we may well front up to God and say, what nice people we've been, what good people.

[4 : 07] We may well front up to God and say, what religious people, church-going, decent, honourable people we are. We may well seek to impress God, rehearsing our acts of generosity and love in this life.

We may well try and show to God that here, you see, our account is in credit. But don't be fooled, for God is not fooled. You see, God's Word knows the truth and pierces to the heart of who we are.

It is God's device for seeking into our souls, into our hearts, into our minds, our intentions, our desires. You see, God not only sees our actions, God not only hears our words, but He knows what our heart is deep inside.

And His Word is His way of not only looking into us and piercing our soul with bright and glaring light to expose us, but His Word is His means of auditing us, of assessing what is the true state of our account with God.

His Word, in effect, undresses us, lays us bare and naked before God, exposing us before Him. God is the examiner who knows all there is to know about us.

[5 : 27] And on that day, there's no hiding, there's no cover-up. Sometimes when these companies collapse, it looks as though for some time there's been some accounting cover-up, sometimes, where they pretend that everything's right with the company and the figures might be fudged a little or something like that.

There's no cover-up here with God. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of history, there's nowhere to hide. And like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of history, God knows what we've done.

We can't hide from Him. He knows what we're like. And like Adam and Eve, there'll be shame at our nakedness being exposed before His scrutiny.

The very stern warning of these opening verses of today's passage is pay attention to God's living and active Word.

It is not a dead Word. It is a Word that is living and it pierces to our very hearts, laying bare before God who we really are as people.

[6 : 36] Indeed, the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow.

It's able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before Him, God, no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare in the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

They are severe words. We will all, one day, render our account before God and His Word, the Scriptures, is the means by which that account will be rendered and judgment made.

And there's no cover-up. That Word will expose the depths of our soul. And yet God's Word is so beautifully balanced in the Scriptures and indeed in this letter to the Hebrews, the same.

Yes, there are these stern warnings about judgment and rendering an account. There are stern exhortations not to drift away and to lose faith. But on the other hand, balanced with wonderful reassurance about the promises of God and the mercy of God and about God's rescue and salvation in Christ.

[8 : 08] You see, God's Word functions in two ways. It's like the stick to prod and cajole us into obedience and faith. But it's the carrot holding out the real promise of eternal rest and heaven.

Yes, it warns us about rendering our account before God on that day. But on the other hand, it exposes the mercy of God to us on that day where we render our account by pleading in Jesus Christ, our great High Priest.

You see, we need a priest. We need a High Priest. We need not just a Saviour who died 2,000 years ago on the cross, end of story, end of salvation. We need a priest day by day who will help us in our time of need and plead for us to God the Father.

We need a priest who will deal with our moral weakness each day. We need a priest who will offer acceptable sacrifice to God. A priest who will bring us to God. And Jesus is just such a great High Priest.

Indeed, He is perfect as a High Priest. He's passed through the heavens. After His life on earth and His resurrection from the dead, He ascended to the heavens and passed through the heavens to sit at God's right hand in glory.

[9 : 26] And yet, whilst fully divine, nonetheless, fully human. So, verse 15 tells us, we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

He is the perfect High Priest because He bridges the divine and the human. He builds the bridge from earth to heaven for us to travel over, to come into God's presence at the end of time.

When the Scriptures were, after a few centuries, translated into Latin, the word chosen to be used for priest in Latin was the word pontifex, literally bridge builder.

For that is what the Christian great High Priest, Jesus Christ, is and has done. He's built the bridge to unite humanity with God.

He Himself has built the bridge and in effect crossed over it to go back to the heavens and to sit at God's right hand. And all of that is meant to be encouragement to us to persevere in the Christian faith to the end so that one day we may cross that bridge and arrive at heavenly rest in God's presence forever.

[10 : 46] So long as, as the end of verse 14 says, we hold fast to our confession. Not our confession of sin here, but our confession of faith, what we believe in.

summarised, for example, by the creed that we've just sung, the creed that we say Sunday by Sunday, or other summaries similar to that at its most simplest, Jesus is Lord.

Notice then the qualifications of Jesus. Verse 15 says, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses.

The double negative, we do not have someone who's unable, is actually forcing us to realise we have someone who is very able to sympathise with us in our weaknesses, literally more than sympathy.

To sympathise for us is a bit simple or a bit easy. To offer sympathy might be to pat someone on the shoulder, say there, there, things will be okay sort of stuff. It's more than that.

[11 : 46] It's somebody who actually shares in the human state and the moral weakness. And then putting it positively in the second half of verse 15, we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, literally tempted as we are.

And that's probably a better translation here. The word that's used could be test or trial or tempt. Here I think tempt is the better word. Notice that temptation is not sin.

For Jesus has been tempted in every way as we are yet, verse 15 ends, without sin. Now we might think that Jesus could hardly have been tempted.

What would tempt Jesus? Power? Greed? Beautiful woman? Other things? Popularity? Prestige?

Pride? I'm sure they were all temptations that Jesus faced at some point in his life. Certainly he faced the temptation to avoid dying on a cross for our sin and to somehow claim the authority that was rightly his but without the death.

[12 : 58] But the temptations Jesus faced were in many ways greater than the ones we face. Not because there was something special about them for Jesus but because we so often capitulate before temptation.

We're tempted, we give in, we yield. The full force of temptation is felt when we resist and keep on resisting temptations to sin.

That's what Jesus did and so the full brunt of temptation he experienced and felt more so than even us. So every time you're tempted to sin to be proud or angry or unloving, to dismiss God or ignore God, not to rely on his promises or obey his commands or whatever it is, every time you're tempted to sin, consider Jesus.

He resisted sin, do likewise. He kept trusting God's promises and not the promises of the world, do likewise. He kept obeying God's commands even when they cost him his life, do likewise.

He resolutely relied on God, do likewise. Unlike Adam and Eve who in that original garden of Eden were tempted by the serpent and therefore did not trust God's word and did not obey his command and ate the fruit and committed the first sin.

[14 : 37] We need a priest for we face times of moral weakness regularly, more often than daily I'm sure. Temptations to sin by not trusting God or obeying his commands to us.

And Jesus is our great high priest and he knows exactly what it's like in our life. So verse 16 tells us, let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness or confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

And that's not a one-off action because the tense of the verb there in the original is to say again and again continuously approach the throne of grace with confidence that you may find mercy and grace to help in time of need.

What a benefit that is courtesy of Jesus for us. You see salvation is more than him dying on the cross for our sins. It is the offer ongoing day by day 24 hours a day 7 days a week 52 weeks a year including leap years we are offered this access to the throne of grace by Jesus our great high priest.

In the Old Testament the most holy place was the small central part of the temple. There it was felt that God's throne was above the ark of the covenant and this little space was shielded from the populace by a big curtain on one side and three walls on the other.

[16 : 10] Only once a year on the day of atonement could only one person the high priest enter that place carrying with him the blood of the day of atonement sacrifice.

But Jesus has entered heaven the real most holy place the very presence of God to the real throne of God in heaven. But not only has he gone there just one day he's there eternally but he invites us to go into the same place to enter with confidence the throne of grace.

Not to stand at a distance while the high priest went in but to enter and approach that throne of grace ourselves regularly again and again day by day and more often and to do so with confidence not a self-confident swagger up and say here am I at the throne of grace where I should be but a confidence based on Jesus and not on ourselves and that you see is the balance for the warning about rendering an account.

The invitation to come to the throne of grace with confidence in Jesus not confidence in ourselves and that's how we'll render our account successfully on the day of judgment.

Sometimes inappropriate people get appointed to various positions. You see it happen in the church all the time. Government consultants various boards jobs for the boys and all those sorts of things.

[17 : 50] In particular sometimes a father-son appointment is a pretty bad idea. There are rulers who groom their sons for ruling the nation after them not always wise. People like James Packer we wonder is he really cut out to head up the organisation succeeding his father.

The one till disaster and his involvement a bit in that perhaps makes us wonder has he really got what it takes. Sometimes father-son appointments are not really good ideas but here's one that is.

Father God appointing his son Jesus Christ to be our great high priest. he is eminently qualified for the task. What's required for a high priest? One to be appointed by God two to be able to identify with people and offer sacrifices for them and Jesus fulfills both criteria perfectly.

The general criteria given in verses one to four every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf that is they're chosen by God and the other thing they have to do to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

The high priest is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward since he himself is subject to weakness and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people and one does not presume to take this honour but takes it only when called by God just as Aaron was.

[19 : 20] Aaron was the brother of Moses nearly 1400 years before Jesus he was the first high priest in effect and the line of high priests in the tribe of Levi descended from him.

They didn't claim that as a right but were appointed by God and able to identify with sinful people because they themselves knew what it was like to be sinful on earth. Then the writer goes on to say if that's the criteria to be a high priest Jesus has what it takes.

Firstly he is appointed by God. So verses 5 and 6 show us that and in fact show that he was appointed by God way back in Old Testament times because Old Testament Psalms are quoted.

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest but was appointed by the one 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 according to the order of Melchizedek.

And verse 10 having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. So that's the first thing that qualifies Jesus to be a high priest he's appointed by God and not just in the line of Aaron he wasn't descended from Aaron but a new priestly order an eternal order in the order of Melchizedek a rather obscure character from the early part of the book of Genesis and we'll see more about him in a few weeks time when we deal with Hebrews chapter 7.

[20 : 43] verse 7. But the second thing about Jesus his ability to identify with people and offer acceptable sacrifice verses 7 to 9 say in the days of his flesh when he was fully human like us Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

Although he was a son he learned obedience through what he suffered and having been made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Now in mind here in particular is Jesus the night before he died in the garden of Gethsemane after the last supper praying with his disciples. Remember he went off and prayed and his sweat was like drips of blood so much was he in anguish as he prayed and we know he was tempted because part of his prayer was Father take this cup away from me that is help me avoid the cross that I do not need to die.

That was the temptation to avoid the cross and whenever you find Jesus saying things like get behind me Satan it's in response to the temptation to avoid the cross and die.

And so verse 7 tells us that he prayed to the one who's able to save him from death that's to God and God was able to save him from death if he chose. Jesus prayed take this cup away from me that is save me from death.

[22 : 19] But he also prayed yet not my will but yours be done. What the verse 7 finishes by saying was his reverent submission.

Yes he wanted to avoid death and be saved from it. that was the temptation and great was his anguish as he prayed. But he reverently submitted to God not my will but yours be done.

And so within a short period of time he was arrested and crucified. Here is Jesus being obedient though it cost him his life.

obedient not only to God but here is Jesus actually obeying the scriptures. We might think the Bible is for us to obey but the Bible was for Jesus to obey too because the Old Testament scriptures that Jesus had spoke of the suffering servant Messiah who needed to die for the sins of the people.

So Jesus who was the Messiah had to obey the scriptures and die for the sins of the people of the world. Verse 8 tells us he learned obedience not that he was disobedient in the past but every situation especially him dying on the cross meant that he had to learn in a new way and experience obedience though it cost him his life.

[23 : 44] Verse 9 says that having been made perfect not meaning that he was imperfect but rather that he was now perfectly equipped to be our great high priest because he was obedient unto death on the cross and the sacrifice he offers was not an animal but his own life.

You see Jesus qualifies on both accounts to be our high priest. He's appointed by God verses 5 and 6 and he was able to identify with us in our weakness as he himself prayed with cries and tears of anguish the night before he died especially.

This is a better priesthood than Old Testament priesthood not in the line of Aaron but an eternal priesthood in the order of Melchizedek. Well so what you might say?

Isn't this a bit of an obscure and convoluted argument? Do we really need to worry about this? So what? The so what is we need a priest.

We need someone to help us in our time of need. We need someone to build the bridge and bring us to God and his eternal rest that he offers us.

[25 : 03] We need a priest. We need a high priest. And Jesus is eminently and uniquely qualified to do so. Like most of you probably I'm an RACV member.

Unlike many of you I know nothing about motor mechanics. I don't even really know where you open the bonnet. If the windscreen is dirty I get my car service.

Well not quite that bad. If I ever break down which thankfully in this car I've yet to do the last thing I will ever do is open the bonnet. I wouldn't know what to find there or what to look for anyway.

But what I will do because I'm an RACV member is that I will ring them up. I have access to the RACV and I'll ring them up and they'll no doubt drop everything and come to me and save me from my car being broken down.

And as an RACV member if my car breaks down then I will make full use of the access I have to the RACV help. Why don't we as Christians live like that with God?

[26 : 14] Why are we so foolish and so stubborn? So often we live as practical atheists. We struggle on in the midst of our moral weakness and moral breakdown and refuse to make full use of the access that God gives us by Jesus the great high priest.

Christ. You see we live as though we've got no access to divine help but these verses are telling us that not only did Jesus die on the cross for us 2,000 years ago but having passed through the heavens and now at God's right hand he's our great high priest who is there inviting indeed urging us to come to his throne of grace to find help in our time of need.

The access is there for us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year for the rest of our lives and yet so often we decline to make full use of the access that is ours through Jesus the high priest and we struggle on and we yield to temptation rather than keeping on resisting it.

You see Jesus knows what it's like. It's not as though getting to the throne of grace we're going to deal with someone who has no idea of our situation. Far from it. He knows exactly what we're facing in our moral weakness.

He knows every trial and test and temptation that we face. He's perfectly equipped to be our great high priest and to offer us help in our need.

[27 : 48] It's not as though you're going to ring somebody who comes out and their ability at motor mechanics is like mine. They look at the car and say look I can't help you. When we go to Jesus and to the throne of grace he can help us because he knows exactly what is wrong.

He knows exactly what it's like and he's constantly on hand to offer us mercy and grace to help in time of need. And heaven knows we need help because God's word is so exposing.

God's word is blaring light into our inner souls shows us just how much help we need. But the stern warning of what God's word does to expose within us our sin is balanced by this gracious and merciful offer to come to God for help in time of need.

Jesus is our great high priest who's passed through the heavens and at God's right hand is awaiting our cries for help in our time of need.

So let us heed the invitation at the end of verse chapter four. Let us therefore approach and keep on approaching again and again the throne of grace with boldness so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[29 : 16] Let's make full use of that access that Jesus our great high priest grants us. Amen. Amen.