

Evening Service | 26th Dec | Hebrew 4:14-5:9

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Date: 26 December 2021

Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] Now, we're going to read from Hebrews chapter 4, verse 14, and into chapter 5. We're going to be thinking about Jesus, our great high priest.

And just to stick with Psalm 13 for a moment, what we have there is David the king lamenting, feeling that sense of isolation from his God, feeling surrounded by his enemies, yet praising God and trusting in God's constant covenant love.

And then we come to Jesus in his life, and there we find too a king who knew what it was to feel a sense of forsakenness, surrounded by enemies, but still trusting and faithful and obedient.

And one of the things about Jesus being our great high priest is his ability to identify with us in trouble and suffering. And the fact that Jesus can sing this psalm, and would have sung this psalm, speaks powerfully of the sense to which Jesus took on full humanity and identified with us, so that we too can sing psalms like Psalm 13 with trust and with hope and with praise, even when we find ourselves lamenting.

But let's turn now in God's word to the book of Hebrews chapter 4. We're going to read from verse 14 to chapter 5 and verse 9.

[1:37] So let's hear the word of God together. 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.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin.

Let us 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. Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are 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 called by God, just as Aaron was. 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.

[2:58] And he says in another place, You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. During the days of Jesus' 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. Son 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, and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Amen. So we're thinking about Jesus, our great high priest. It'd be really helpful if you have your Bible to hand. So we're going to be thinking about the mystery at the heart of our faith, the incarnation, and what that has to say.

Today we've been thinking about Jesus, our great king, for the last few weeks in church. Today, Jesus, our great high priest. Because I think it's important that while we recognize and often our experience of Christmas is a time of great joy and happiness, when life is difficult, even at Christmas, sometimes especially at Christmas, one of the things that can happen for people who are suffering and they're surrounded by joy is it's easy to feel far more alone than ever.

it's easy to feel far more cut off from people than ever. So Hebrews 4, verses 14 to 16, where we're going to spend our time, provides wonderful comfort because it says for Christians, the very opposite is true.

[4 : 31] It reminds us of Christ in heaven and the reality that he is just as open and tender towards sinners as he was when he walked on the earth.

The great mystery of our faith. G.I. Packer puts it this way, the baby born at Bethlehem was God made man. He who made man was learning what it felt like to be a man.

And I want us to think about this coming of Jesus and the journey that he made from the glory of heaven and to think about its significance. When we come to a text like this, to think about Jesus, our great high priest.

To think about what makes Jesus a great high priest and what difference does it make to our faith? What makes him great, what difference does it make? Very briefly, what difference, what makes Jesus a great high priest?

If you have your Bibles and if you look at the beginning of chapter 5, our author identifies key aspects for those in the Old Testament who are called to be priests.

[5 : 36] So verse 1, we discover that they were selected from among the people. Their task was to represent the people in matters related to God. Principally, they were to offer sacrifices for sin.

And we discover in verse 2 a certain quality that the high priest was able to deal gently because of weakness. And then in verse 5, in verse 4 and verse 5, we discover too that people were appointed not on their own determination but because they were appointed by God.

So we have these qualities of the Old Testament priest but we also discover some limitations. In chapter 5, verse 3, we discover that every Old Testament high priest was a sinner offering sacrifices for the people but also for themselves.

And then if we were to skip forward to chapter 7 and verse 23, another fundamental limit of the high priest says there, 723, there have been many of those priests since death prevented them from continuing in office.

So they were all sinners and they all died. and that's where Jesus is better. One of the great themes of the book of Hebrews, Jesus is better.

[6 : 58] Jesus is better because he is eternal and the sinless son of God who was appointed by his father as our high priest. Now, to get to our text, three reasons from our text why Jesus is our great high priest.

The first, let's call it solidarity. Jesus standing for and standing with his people. In verses 14 to 16 we have an anchor verse which is verse 15 and then we see two implications from the anchor verse in verses 14 and 16.

And verse 15 centers on solidarity. Jesus standing with and for his people. And we see this in three ways.

we see Jesus sympathy in weakness. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weakness.

And this takes us straight to the incarnation. God becoming man. God taking on human flesh. What does that mean for Jesus?

[8 : 08] It means he volunteers to know this humiliation, to be born in a low place, a low birth and a low condition for that to be the pattern of his life.

One of humility and humiliation. The incarnation is showing us the depth of Jesus' humility and love. And the incarnation is necessary for Jesus to truly represent us. So remember the high priest has to be from among the people.

So Jesus had to become one of us, truly one of us. And that's why those details in the Gospels are so important. When we read of Jesus knowing thirst and hunger and loneliness of his suffering and rejection, his shame and death, Jesus fully identifies with us because he was truly human.

and because of that in our pain as believers Jesus understands and Jesus is pain.

[9 : 20] In our suffering Jesus sympathizes and he sympathizes from experience. when people suffer whether that's an illness or grief often they will find someone else who's gone through the same sort of experience and to draw on encouragement and help and support companions in suffering.

Well here is Jesus the ultimate companion in suffering for his people. He sympathizes in our weakness.

Jesus has also been tested by temptation. Continuing in verse 15 we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are.

So again here is Jesus truly human therefore he experiences true testing true tempting and experiences those to a greater degree than we ever will.

It's so often in our own experience and I'm sure we know this we face a temptation and perhaps we resist for a while but often we don't but there comes a point often when we fold we give into that sinful desire and so the temptation then is removed because we've fallen but Jesus never falls he never folded so the intensity of the temptation only grows and builds but Jesus remained faithful and again the gospel writers don't hide this reality from us so we discover in the wilderness the devil tempting Jesus to seek comfort rather than obedience to God to pursue wealth rather than live for the kingdom of heaven and true spiritual treasure we see him being tempted to power and then in Gethsemane the night before the cross he experiences that temptation to avoid suffering to seek glory some other way so Jesus knows temptation again by personal experience and he is able to give grace and help for us when we are tempted and he sends the spirit to his people so that we might say no to sin and yes to choosing righteousness and the third thing to notice from verse 15 which is hugely significant that we have in Jesus a righteous representative so Jesus stands with us and has experienced what we have experienced and will experience yet there's a difference and it makes all the difference in the world he did not sin and that's why in chapter 7 verse 27 we have this important truth unlike the other high priests

[12:39] Jesus does not need to offer sacrifices day after day first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people he sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself so Jesus again to be to be one of us to truly represent us he needs to come under God's moral law just as we are called to obey God to love God with our heart soul mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves so too Jesus must live under that law and Jesus obeyed it and Jesus fulfilled it where we as people break it Jesus never did and as the God man then as the great high priest as he gives himself not an animal as a sacrifice as our great high priest that offering has infinite moral value because here is the God man offering himself covering our infinitely awful sin as the

God man Jesus humbled himself as a substitute to be made sin for us to be made a curse for us that we might be forgiven and know God's blessing by grace and through faith Jesus is the only person who's ever walked this earth who does not need rescue and Jesus alone of everyone who's ever walked on this earth is the one who is able to provide our rescue because he came as one of us in order to save us makes Jesus a great high priest because he represents us as one of us but beyond solidarity there's a couple of other things briefly just to notice about the ministry of Jesus the high priest verse 14 let's think about where Jesus represents us let's think about this reality therefore since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven

Jesus the son of God let's hold firmly to the faith we profess and so here's the difference another difference between Jesus as high priest and the old testament high priest they they performed their sacrifices in the temple which was a representation of heaven God's presence but where is Jesus acting he's not acting in the earthly temple Jesus actually represents us in God's presence in the presence of his father Jesus has unique access as the son of God sitting on the throne of heaven and from there he's pleading our cause from the father's right hand so there is great hope for us when we have a high priest with that unique access to the father's presence and one other thing to notice in verse 14 and then in chapter 5 as well is to think again about how long

Jesus represents us for what's the duration of his priesthood and we're reminded in verse 14 Jesus is the son of God he is eternal chapter 5 verse 6 you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek chapter 7 we didn't read it but we can go there because it's important because Jesus lives forever he is a permanent priesthood therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them there will never be a point where Jesus stops loving his people there will never be a point where Jesus stops representing his people there will never be a point where his sacrifice is not efficient and sufficient because he lives forever and serves forever it's the anchor of our faith it's the great anchor of our faith that Christ who came to be in the manger for us is now

Christ in glory as high priest for us and as our great high priest he secures for us direct access to God and we can boldly approach the throne of grace as we'll think about in a minute and that we have in Jesus full pardon of sin because of the value of his sacrifice we have the right to eternal life we have all the blessings of salvation that come to us in the gospel because of Jesus serving us as our great high priest so it's a reminder to us love the book of Hebrews because it's always reminding us to look at Jesus and to hold on to Jesus and here it is again to just hold on to Jesus

Christ who is our anchor and to recognize when we read the gospels and we read of a man of incredible love and compassion and mercy a God who loved to draw people in to welcome it's the same

[18 : 06] Jesus and he is the same heart he's the same yesterday today and forever and so when we find ourselves like the folks that the author to the Hebrews is writing to in a time of need we need to think of Jesus there we need to think of Jesus our great high priest standing for us sympathizing with us interceding for us sending the spirit to us there's comfort in Jesus our great high priest let's move on to think briefly about what difference does it make for our faith so verse 15 is the anchor verse there are two implications that are tied to it and since this is true of Jesus the author says Christians should to use the language let us so two things the first let us is in verse 14 since

Jesus is our great high priest let us hold firmly to the faith we profess and again that's just to remind us that when the author says hold firmly to our faith he's not saying hold on to the fact that you have a faith in something faith in itself is worthless but it's all about the object of our faith it's the anchor of our faith so he's telling us hold on priest in the order of Melchizedek this enigmatic figure in the book of Genesis who is both priest and king that's Jesus for us Jesus who is ruling all things Jesus who controls all things who is the head of the church is Jesus who represents us Jesus who has offered himself as a sacrifice for us Jesus who intercedes for us so we are called because of who Jesus is and what he's done to hold firmly to him

I'm sure we appreciate that need and trouble and suffering will instinctively make us run somewhere we're looking to find hope somewhere from someone salvation from somewhere from someone for Christians here is a reminder to run to Jesus always to run to Jesus in light of his ministry for us think about his ministry in the past coming into the world to die for us think about his ministry in the present praying for us sending the spirit to us think about what he's prepared for us in the future eternal glory in a world made new that's why we fix our eyes on him that's why we look to him for help in times of trouble to trust him always and secondly and finally since

Jesus is our great high priest verse 16 let us 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 simply put since Jesus is our great high priest let us pray let us pray let us pray to receive God's grace grace of well timed help because when we pray are we praying to we're praying to the king of the universe it's what the psalms have been saying to us what Isaiah was saying to us we pray to the king of the universe the one with absolute control the one with perfect timing and so we are encouraged because of that to turn to him for mercy in our need and to pray through Jesus our great high priest this one who gives us bold access to the throne of grace because when we come in the name of Jesus when our faith is in Jesus and when we come into the presence of our father we do not need to fear being turned away we do not need to fear condemnation because we are loved in Jesus we are seen as righteous in

Christ and so we have bold confidence when our confidence is in Jesus in our need in our suffering sometimes we can content ourselves with drops of human sympathy and kindness and that kindness should never be downplayed it's a wonderful thing and we should be profoundly thankful that we have families and a Christian family that love and support and offer help and comfort but we always need to remember that when we run to Jesus we're running to the one who has that eternal well of sympathy and compassion that ocean of grace and comfort and compassion for us and so we're invited to trust to God's past grace to give us hope for future grace perhaps at

[23 : 35] Christmas time to recognize God's grace in sending us Jesus to trust that if he has given that great gift if he has sent his son to die for us he's not going to abandon us he's not going to forget us he's not going to give up on us rather he will be with us and for us and for us always it's a wonderful text and it's a wonderful truth that Jesus is our great high priest because we need this because there are times when life is hard when we are suffering even amidst all the joy and excitement of Christmas and when that happens we need someone to turn to we need a place of comfort and refuge and strength and that place and that person is Jesus we have that wonderful promise that there will be a day when Jesus our priest king will come back and he'll make everything new and everything sad will come untrue but until that day we're invited to keep looking to him to fix our eyes on

Jesus let's hold firmly to the faith we profess and let's approach God's throne of grace with confidence to receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need because we have Jesus our

great high priest let's pray to our father through Jesus his son is my God our father we thank you for your mercy to us in sending your son to be the savior we all need and we thank you Lord Jesus for acting and continuing to act and forever acting as our great high priest and we thank you that you are able to sympathize with us in weakness and suffering that you know what it is like to have experienced temptation but we thank you for your sinless perfection so that you could be for us a perfect representative a perfect substitute offering that perfect sacrifice

Lord Jesus we thank you that right now you are praying for your church that you ever live to intercede for your people thank you father and son that you send the spirit so that you might dwell in our hearts through faith that we might know your presence and your love and your comfort and so Lord we pray that you would help us to hold firmly to faith to know that we have bold access to your throne of grace in prayer and that we would be growing in our faith growing in our joy of belonging to you through Jesus your son keep us in your love we pray we ask it in Jesus name

Amen now we will close singing the Christmas hymn once in royal David's city so let's stand so that we can sing together heal as we log in you