

Jesus Our Perfect Priest

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] Turn to Hebrews 4, page 1203, page 1203 in the church's Bibles.

I'm starting at verse 12. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, 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 sympathize with our weaknesses.

We have one who has been tempted in every way. Just as we are, yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

[1 : 11] Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in the matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are gone astray, since 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. No one takes this honor upon himself. He must be called by God, just as Aaron was.

So Christ also did not take upon 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.

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death. And he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, 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 the high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Thanks very much, Ross, for reading.

[2 : 40] So keep your Bibles there at Hebrews chapter 4 and chapter 5. And we'll be referring to a couple of other sections in Hebrews as well.

But we're going to pray first and ask for God's help. Let's pray. For the word of God is living and active.

Sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Our God, our prayer is this.

That your word would now challenge us. That it would penetrate deep into our lives.

[3 : 47] Right to the very heart. And we pray for two things. One, that it would show us who we are and what we are like.

Not what others think or what we think of ourselves, but what you think of us. And what you see in us. And secondly, we pray that your word would also show us the wonder of who Jesus is.

And that in bringing those two together, we may be amazed that Jesus is our high priest.

So speak to us afresh by the power of your spirit. Amen. Amen. And we ask this in Jesus' name for his glory.

Amen. Amen. Well, I'm sure you're all familiar with Mick Wallace. You all know who Mick Wallace is.

[4 : 56] That flamboyant, independent Wexford TD. He loves his colourful shirts. Refuses to wear a tie and a jacket in Dáil Éireann. Well, he also loves the opportunity to have a good go at the government and at the banks.

Well, this week, he stood in the door, very emotional, guilty and ashamed. His life has been uncovered and laid bare before the nation.

The tax revenue has been investigating his financial affairs and it seems he's made an error of judgment. Apparently, he forgot to declare all that he owed.

And he now faces a settlement of over two million. And the investigation is set to continue. Not surprisingly, he is seeking legal advice on the matter.

Now, while we might stand back and yet again condemn and wag our finger at our politicians and complain about them, let's remember that our lives are also under investigation.

[6 : 11] Look at chapter 4, verse 13. Nothing in all creation.

Nothing is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered. Everything is laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

You know, there's not one area of our life that God does not know about. He's heard everything that we've ever said. He has seen everything that we have ever done.

He knows everything that we have thought. And he perceives the motive behind it all. There's not one corner of our lives, not one second of our existence, that we have somehow managed to cover up or hide from God.

And if that's not troubling enough, look at the rest of verse 13, the last line. It is to him, God, that we must give an account.

[7 : 32] One day our number is going to be called and we're going to have to explain our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. Not before Dole Aaron or the rest of the country, but before the judge of the universe.

Or as it says in Hebrews 9, verse 27, we're destined to die once and after that to face the judgment. What do you think about that?

Well, there may be lots of things we're going to be very proud to talk about. I mean, all those good and random things that we've done to people and said. But I reckon there's going to be an awful lot that we're going to be very ashamed of.

All those skeletons. In fact, we dread the thought of our lives being uncovered and laid bare.

That's why we spend a large majority of our time actually trying to fix our own guilt or we try and run from our guilt. And we go one of two ways.

[8 : 43] Either we go down the religious route, which is to try and live a good moral life and somehow by doing good things we're going to balance out the bad and we'll kind of slightly get above and we'll be all right.

Or we go down the irreligious path where we just continue living an immoral kind of life, convincing ourselves, well, you know what? We're really answerable to no one.

So let's just keep doing what we like. But whichever path we take, it doesn't deal with our guilt. It's still there. It still remains. It still nags away.

And we still face the fact of one day standing before God, chapter 4, verse 13, who is the supreme judge to whom we must give an account.

Mick Wallace is not the only one who needs help. We all need help. But it's not a lawyer we need. We need a priest.

[9 : 46] And thankfully, we do have a priest. Chapter 4, verse 14. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith that we profess.

Our priest, our helper, is Jesus, the Son of God. He's our mediator. He's the one who's going to stand in for us. Jesus is the one who can help us when we have to stand before God and give an account of our life.

That's why it says at the end of verse 14, we hold firmly to the faith we profess. We mustn't try and fix our own guilt.

We mustn't run away from our guilt. Instead, we hold on to the faith. The faith that we have in Jesus.

This is God's provision for his people. Chapter 5, verse 4. No one takes this honour upon himself. He must be called by God, just as Aaron was.

[11 : 05] So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, You are my son. Today I have become your father.

Jesus was the one appointed by God, chosen by God, sent by God into this world for people like you and me to stand in for us to be our priests.

Well, what makes this Jesus better and greater than any other priest? Because we can go to lots of places and find lots of priests. We can even invent our own kind if we want.

But what makes Jesus better and greater? Well, three things simply. First, Jesus is our powerful priest. Go back to verse 14 of chapter 4.

Jesus is our powerful priest. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.

[12:10] The fact that Jesus, and the phrase there, has gone through the heavens or gone into heaven means he is in a position of all power and all authority.

To understand this a bit more, go back to chapter 1, verse 3. Here we are given a wonderful picture and description of who Jesus is.

Chapter 1, verse 3. The Son, that's Jesus, is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

He sustains all things by his powerful word. And after he had provided purification for sins, and here's the phrase we want, that he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

That position is a position of power. Or, verse 13 of chapter 1. To which of the angels did God ever say, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?

[13:28] Jesus has gone through the heavens. He's in a position of power. He is over all things. He has even conquered his enemies.

Or as we sang at the very beginning of this morning, you're the risen one, heaven's champion, and you reign, you reign over all.

And because Jesus holds all power and all authority, that means he is in a position to do something for us.

He is a powerful priest. But second, Jesus is also our perfect priest.

Chapter 4, verse 15. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.

[14:32] Was without sin. Jesus, unlike us, was absolutely pure and perfect. It doesn't mean that he hid away in isolation like some kind of monk way out in the middle of the country to avoid temptation, if that were even possible.

No, it says that we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, but was without sin. Jesus experienced temptation, but here is the difference, he never experienced what it was to sin.

He never gave in. He was perfect. I find this incredible for somebody who just messes up constantly. Imagine having a life where you never had to say sorry.

He never had to ask for forgiveness. He never lost his temper. He never had a bad thought. He never had a selfish motive. He never experienced guilt, shame, or regret.

Never. He was without sin. Now, it's crucial that we get a hold of this because if Jesus had been sinful, he would have needed a high priest and his death would never, ever help us.

[15:55] But thankfully, Jesus was perfect. Look at chapter 5, verse 8. Again, speaking of Jesus, although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.

Every temptation he faced, he obeyed. and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Now, we've got to understand verse 9 carefully. It's not to say that Jesus was somehow sinful before, that he was imperfect, and somehow he learned through kind of good ways to stop sinning and became perfect.

No, it's, we understand it like this, that Jesus suffered and experienced temptation just like you and me, but because he never gave into temptation, he became fully qualified to deal with our sin.

Or we could summarise it like this, Jesus perfectly passed the test of temptation for us. and in that sense he was made perfect.

[17:15] Every temptation that he passed, every test that was thrown at him, he passed perfectly. So he became fully qualified to be our perfect priest.

We have a perfect priest to help imperfect people like you and me. But not only is he powerful, not only is he perfect, Jesus is our eternal priest.

Go back to verse five of chapter five. It says there, so Christ also did not take upon 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, quoting Psalm 110, you are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. Well, who on earth is Melchizedek?

Well, flick over to chapter seven, verse one. We read about him in Genesis, we read about him in Psalm 110, but here we get a brief description for our help just now.

[18:31] Chapter seven, verse one. This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God most high. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.

First his name means king of righteousness, then also king of Salem means king of peace. And here's where we want to focus. Verse three, without father or mother, without genealogy. The Bible doesn't mention where Melchizedek came from, his parents. They're not there, there's no genealogy, no record. It's not to say he didn't have them, he obviously did, but it's not recorded. Without beginning of days or end of life, like the son of God, he remains a priest forever, an eternal priest. Now what the author is doing here, he's using this character of the Old Testament Melchizedek to show us that Jesus is the eternal priest.

The tradition that surrounds Melchizedek that he came, he's just had an endless life, has become a reality in Jesus. Jesus is the true priest without beginning of days or without end of life.

[19:49] He's eternal. In other words, Jesus, even though he has come, he continues to act as our high priest today.

Chapter 7, verse 25. It sums it up nicely for us here. Verse 25 of chapter 7. Therefore, Jesus is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

He's always speaking to the Father on our behalf. He is the high priest forever so we can depend on him.

We can trust on him every single day to act on our behalf. We're in desperate need of a priest and God has provided a powerful, perfect and eternal great high priest for people like us.

Now, not only has God provided us with a priest, this priest invites us to come to him. Go back to chapter 4, verse 16.

[21:16] So, we've seen that we need a priest, we've looked at what this priest is like, and then this priest invites us to come to him.

Chapter 4, verse 16. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We are to come to the powerful, perfect and eternal high priest to receive mercy and grace. That is the invitation that is being given to us today and every day.

So, let's look at these two things that we can receive. First, we are to receive mercy. We can simply summarize it like this. Mercy means not getting what we do deserve.

The truth is we do deserve God's judgment. We do deserve to pay the penalty for our sin, but Jesus, our high priest, gives us mercy.

[22:28] How on earth can he do that? How can he give us mercy when we're guilty? Well, this is a high priest who represents us. Chapter 5, verse 1.

Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

That was the role of the priest, to represent people, to stand in for them, to mediate, to go between. But the problem is, as the book unfolds for us, that all these priests throughout time have always been sinful and they always had to do something for themselves.

So we need someone greater and someone better. Look at chapter 7, verse 26. So we do have the perfect representative, one who represents us before God and stands in for us before God.

Chapter 7, verse 26. Such a high priest, and that's Jesus, meets our need. One who is holy, one who is blameless, who is pure, who is set apart from sinners, who is exalted above the heavens.

[23:59] Unlike the other high priests, he 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 as well, once for all, when he offered himself.

Jesus not only offers the sacrifice, but do you see that last little phrase? He offered himself. He is the sacrifice.

Now we're going to be looking at that more in detail next week. God is the sacrifice. He can see the reason why Jesus can offer us mercy and not treat us the way we deserve to be treated is because he has offered that sacrifice.

He has become the sacrifice. He's represented us and he takes that penalty for us. God is the invitation to come to him, to come to our great high priest with confidence because he's dealt with our sin and to receive this mercy day after day.

So we are to come at the invitation of the priest to receive mercy and second we are to come at his invitation to receive grace.

[25 : 26] And again we can summarize it simply as this. Mercy is not getting what we deserve. Grace means getting what we don't deserve.

And we really don't deserve anything. God owes us absolutely nothing. But Jesus our high priest gives us grace.

Well how can he do that? It doesn't make sense. How can he be given it to somebody who doesn't deserve it? Well for the simple reason that on the one hand he gives us mercy because he represents us.

He gives us grace because he identifies with us. Chapter 5 verse 7. Here's like a little summary of what it was like for Jesus to live his life.

Perhaps in particular it focuses in on his time in Gethsemane just before his death. But chapter 5 verse 7. During the days of Jesus' life on earth he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears as he went through all that struggle and that suffering of temptation.

[26 : 43] To the one who could save him from death and he was hurt because of his reverent submission. Jesus knows what it is to suffer temptation.

We're not on our own here. He knows what it is to be under extreme pressure and stress to sin and to snap.

And we've all been there. It doesn't mean that he's faced every possible kind of temptation because Jesus didn't live everybody's particular life.

But it means here that he has experienced temptation in a greater way than us because he never gave in. Let's think about this for a minute.

When you and I are tempted the pressure builds and builds like a pressure cooker and then we give in and the top just blows, doesn't it? We're kind of so good maybe we're not very good but we kind of get a little bit some days a little bit further but eventually the temptation just comes and comes and it just bursts and we let fly with expletives and words and all kinds of actions we shouldn't be doing or saying.

[28 : 00] But as soon as we give in, as soon as we sin, that temptation goes. The pressure is gone, it's off. For Jesus, because he never gave in to temptation, the temptation increased and the pressure increased.

It got greater and it got greater and it got greater. So Jesus knows temptation at levels we are never ever going to know. Therefore, chapter 4 verse 15, we have got a high priest who is able to sympathise with our weaknesses.

We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet is without sin. So Jesus knows and understands the battle of temptation.

He struggled against, he knows that fight that we're in. Therefore, he comes to us, he identifies with us and he invites us and says, come with confidence and receive that grace that you need for your life.

So that invitation for mercy and grace, that invitation is great, but we want to be people who experience this mercy and grace.

[29 : 26] we want it to really touch our lives. Well, because we've got this powerful and perfect eternal priest, we can experience his mercy and grace every single day.

And I want us to finish to think through these two steps. Two steps that we've got to take. Steps that have got to be taken simultaneously because they almost happen simultaneously.

But if we want to experience mercy and grace, we've got to take these steps. Step one, let God show you.

Let God show you. Chapter four, verse twelve. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.

It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

[30 : 38] Someone has described it like this, that it's like a surgeon's scalpel cutting straight in, cutting right the way through, exposing right to the heart. That's what God's word does.

Don't run away from it. Don't try and fix it on your own. Allow God's word to open up and show you what your life is like.

That's step one. And that means we've got to be reading. Step one, let God show you. But simultaneously, we're not to stay there and wallow in.

Step two, let God heal you. And we read verse 16 of chapter 4 again. So with this, exposing this, showing us who we are, with all of that, verse 16, let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we can receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.

That he would like a surgeon who not only sees what's wrong, it's healing. It's pouring his mercy and his grace into our lives.

[32 : 03] Healing us, washing us, cleaning us, purifying us, changing us, transforming us.

If we're to experience it, we've got to let God show us, not run away, but come to one who is going to be gentle and kind and show us and simultaneously pour his grace and mercy into our lives, to set us free from our guilt and our shame, to walk in freedom, to live the new kind of people that he has called us to.

We have a powerful, perfect, and eternal high priest. He invites us every single day to come to him. Let him show you, but let him heal you. Let's pray. Our Father God, we thank you so much for our great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God.

We thank you that we can come to you, that we can come in our weakness and in our desperate need.

[33 : 46] You will not push us away, but you will pour into our lives your mercy and your grace. Please help us to live this out through this coming week, to always come with confidence because of Jesus to his throne of grace and receive all that we need.

We praise you for you are great and you are good and we can trust you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well in a minute we're going to pick up and we're going to try and work through those two steps as we share communion together, but we're going to sing a song together which will set our focus on what we've just been looking at and towards Jesus that we have a strong and