

Look at your great high priest

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[0 : 00] So Hebrews chapter 4 to chapter 5 verse 10. For the word of God is alive 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 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.

[1 : 14] 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 honour on by 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.

[2 : 28] 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 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.

And we turn over to chapter 9 and pick up the reading from verse 6. Verse 6 follows on from verse 1 to 5, perhaps obviously, but verse 1 to 5 tell us and describe about the construction of the tabernacle.

[3 : 38] And so the writer to the Hebrews continues after telling them that about the tabernacle. He then says, when everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry.

But only the high priest entered the inner room and that only once a year and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins of the people, for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning.

This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.

They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings, external regulations, applying until the time of the new order.

[4 : 55] But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands.

That is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but he entered the most holy place once for all by his own blood.

So obtaining eternal redemption, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

How much more then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God.

For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

[6 : 29] Amen. They say that one of the most common reasons for communication failures between couples, the source of countless relationship issues, is a serious disconnect between what men and women want out of an interaction.

Very often we're told women describe a situation, a problem, a difficulty, a bad day at work, whatever it might be, they describe that to their husbands. And what they're looking for there is empathy.

Women apparently are looking for sympathy, looking for a recognition of the distress, looking for someone who understands what's going on and empathizes with them. On the other hand, men, hearing an account of any problem, we instinctively want to offer solutions.

What could be done differently next time? How can this difficulty be resolved? Where do we go from here? We want to make the plan. I think I can say from personal experience this generalization is not entirely baseless, but these are broad strokes, aren't they?

It's not a hard and fast rule for sure. Men and women we both need at different times, perhaps to differing degrees. We both need both sympathy and solutions. Sometimes we need to work hard at understanding what people around us need from us, whether that's as husbands and wives in our wider families or as friends together.

[8 : 01] And as I've been looking at these sections of the letter to the Hebrews that are particularly calling us to focus on Jesus as our great high priest, there's lots of different dimensions of Jesus as the great high priest that we could have considered.

We could dive into the comparisons to Melchizedek. We could reflect upon all sorts of different aspects and that would be interesting to do. But these are the two that have stood out to me on this occasion and this is where we're going to focus this morning, that Jesus meets both of these needs and does so in more substantial ways and more significant situations than we've probably been thinking about over these past couple minutes.

Jesus offers sympathy and Jesus offers a solution. See, we're told here Jesus offers sympathy. Jesus is our sympathetic high priest who understands our weaknesses.

Maybe you've had one of those stress dreams. You know, when you're in some kind of a public situation, you're standing at the front of the class reporting on the homework that you've done or standing in front of the class as the teacher or giving a sales presentation at work or delivering a sermon for that matter.

You're in a public situation with everybody looking at you and you look down and realize you're completely naked. We have these stress dreams, don't we?

[9 : 23] These panics that we are laid bare. Well, the situation in verse 13 of chapter 4 is even worse than that because instead of just your body laid bare, it's absolutely everything.

Your inmost thoughts, the attitudes of your heart, uncovered, exposed. I'm pretty sure for most of us, I'm sure for all of us, our thoughts and the things that we've done supposedly in secret, we would be much more worried about people seeing that than seeing our physical form.

And it gets still worse because this nakedness is not in front of our peers but in front of the one to whom we must give an account. Before the judge of all mankind, before the creator of the universe, we are laid bare, exposed.

And it's not just a dream, it's not just a nightmare, it's reality. This is the reality in which you and I live. Not only at the end of time but right here, right now, this is the situation we are in.

The verbs here are present tense. God knows right now. We are uncovered before him right now. And God shows us a preview of what he sees.

[10:56] That's what's going on in verse 12. When God's word is preached, when we read and consider what he says, it has this impact. It bears our minds, uncovers our souls to our own understanding.

We see how far short we fall. The end of verse 12 says the word judges the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. That's judges in the sense of showing us the reality, showing us the disconnect between what we should be and what we are.

God's word is the standard and the more we look into it, the more we consider what God says, the more we see just how far short of it we fall.

God knows all of it and God shows us a preview of it in his word. Is that not terrifying? Like a double-edged sword, like the sharpest of scalpels the word can wound us deeply.

And our instinct is to avoid that pain, isn't it? Our flight reflex is triggered if somebody comes towards us with a knife. But the surgeon's intent is good.

[12:13] And so too the purpose of the Holy Spirit in the wounds that are inflicted through God's word is good. Tim Chester says the Bible uncovers us so that it can recover us with the righteousness of Christ.

It strips off our rags of pretended righteousness and wraps us around with the beauty of Christ. To be uncovered before the one to whom we must give an account is in the abstract a terrifying thing, isn't it?

We're inclined to flee. But the writer of this letter in the next few verses exhorts us to do the opposite. Instead of running away, to draw near, to hold firmly to the faith we profess, verse 14, and to approach God's throne with confidence, verse 16.

So what makes that shift, that change of attitude from the pain and the embarrassment of being uncovered? What shifts it around to approaching with confidence? Well, it's this knowledge of the sympathy of our great high priest.

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

[13:39] So verse 2 of chapter 5 tells us one of the qualifications for being the high priest, alongside being appointed by God, the other qualification to be subject to weakness. Why?

So that the priest may deal gently with those who are going astray. Now that probably has something to tell us about those who wield God's word today, what their attitude and approach should be, what characteristics they should have, whether that's in preaching or counselling others, whether formally or informally.

If we are wielding the word in any sense, then that obligation to be gentle is surely still present as we recognize our own weakness, as we recognize that we do not speak from a place of superiority. It has that implication, but that's not the main point that the writer's making. He's telling us about the greater high priest. He's telling us what our attitude should be, not only to one who wields the word, but our attitude to the one who is himself the word, that he too knows weakness.

His sympathy, his understanding, this means we can bear any wounds we might receive, because we know the heart of the one who calls us to himself.

[14:57] Verse 7 and following then kind of fleshes out a bit more of what this looks like, shows us the true humanity of Jesus. During Jesus' life on earth, he prayed.

Doubtless that prayer, it comes to a climax in the garden of Gethsemane. There, most obviously, he offered fervent cries and tears. Here in the garden, here he surrendered fully to the Father's will. Here he endured the most intense of temptation. Here he could have turned away, but he accepted instead the cup of suffering.

He willingly, knowingly chose to be obedient. He could have turned away from the cross at any moment he chose. That whole long journey towards Jerusalem, indeed even as he hung there on the cross.

He could have turned away from it at any moment. He could have chosen a different way, but he did not. In the garden, if not before, this full understanding of what was involved in choosing to be conformed to his Father's will, in the garden, if not before, that becomes fully apparent to him, and he learned obedience.

[16:13] This shameful death that he died upon the cross surely constitutes testing, to the utmost limit, doesn't it? It's hard to imagine a worse experience, a greater testing.

In fact, you can't imagine a greater testing. When we say he was tempted in every way, we don't so much mean that he experienced each particular example of temptation that's conceivable.

There are temptations of particular circumstances, particular experiences that he did not go through. Jesus did not experience the menopause. Jesus did not experience the particular trials of being a married woman.

Jesus did not experience there are particular things that he did not go through. But what we mean is he encountered the roots of all temptations. We mean he encountered the fullness of being tempted.

He experienced the maximum force of temptation that it is possible to endure. The most that could possibly be experienced, Jesus went through it.

[17:19] T.H. Robinson points out that the fact that Jesus had powers and abilities that we don't possess only adds to the stress. It makes it worse. It makes the temptation greater because in every situation he had an alternative.

He could have snapped his fingers and been out of it like that and he did not. He was the fullest and most vivid personality this world has ever known and the very richness of his human nature exposed him all the more fully to the assaults of temptation.

Alongside that I well remember Donald MacLeod in our classes pointing out that Christ's sinlessness, the fact that Jesus never sinned, that means he endured far greater temptation than you or I typically do.

Why? Because we give in all the time. We don't experience the full force of temptation because we bail out before it reaches its full. We just give up and accept the sin.

Jesus experienced temptation in all of its fullness to the maximum possible extent. There is no temptation that you can experience with which your great high priest does not sympathize.

[18:37] confidence. And the writer is telling us this in order to encourage us to come to the throne of God with confidence. Come to Jesus' throne because he understands.

Come because there we may receive mercy and find grace to help us. Whatever temptation you face, don't try and keep it covered up, hidden from God.

You can't hide it from God. You are exposed before him. So bring it to the throne of grace with confidence. Whatever struggle you're facing, come with confidence to the one who will deal gently with you.

Whenever you think you are not good enough, come to the one who loved you at your most unlovely. Whenever you think he doesn't understand, well come and see what he did.

Come and see the true reality of who he is. See, our high priest is the great high priest, better than any other because not only does he sympathize to the full, but he can also provide help.

[19:52] Not just a listening ear, but whatever help could possibly be needed. He can give it. So we have a high priest who sympathizes perfectly and we have a high priest who offers a solution in any and every situation.

Maybe it is because I'm a man, but I absolutely want sympathy. I want to be understood, but I also want solutions. I want the problem fixed. I want things to change.

I want the root of the issue addressed and Jesus has that solution. And we see his authority to provide the solution in any and every situation through this appointment as the son, verse 5, quoting again from Psalm 2.

We've thought about that in past weeks. Jesus has the authority of the divinely appointed son. He has the authority to speak in any situation, to declare the truth.

He has absolute authority. Alongside that, notice that when Jesus comes to offer a solution, he offers it as one of us.

[20:58] He identifies with his people. At Christmas, the truth of the incarnation, the truth of God come down to earth, the truth of the one who is fully God and fully man, the incarnation means he provides this solution not as a decree from far away, not as an abstract or distant proposition.

No, he enters in. Verse 1 of chapter 5 points out every high priest is selected from among the people, appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

Why did God become a man? Well, this is part of the answer. So that he could be a proper high priest, so that he would be a suitable representative. That's what a priest does.

He represents his own. He represents his people. And so like every other high priest, Christ offers gifts and sacrifices for sins and he does it as one of us.

But that's only the beginning. thing. We see him offer a solution to the biggest problem in verse 9. He's become the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, we're told. And if we want to know more about how that works, how he's uniquely qualified to solve this biggest of all of our problems, then we skip on those few chapters into chapter 9.

[22 : 16] And here we contrast the old covenant sacrifices with the new covenant and the better sacrifice. Very early on in that second section that Brian read, we see the problem with the old system that we're learning about in the evenings in Leviticus.

A key problem with that old system, only the high priest entered the inner room, the holy of holies, and that only once a year. Remember that tabernacle built according to God's design.

It has the outer courtyard where you've got the altar, relatively accessible to those wanting to worship God. You can come in and offer sacrifices on the altar. Then within the courtyard there's the main tent.

And into that tent the priests go to carry out their duties. And then inside that tent there's the divided off section. And only on the day of atonement can the high priest enter into that section.

See even this process of the priest coming into the tent and carrying out their daily duties. Yes it's part of worshipping God. Yes it's them doing what he's told them to do. Yes they get to come near to some extent.

[23 : 20] But says verse 8, the Holy Spirit was shown by this, that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning.

Day after day this priest, he enters this outer tent and he stands and looks at this curtain in front of him. The curtain beyond which he cannot pass.

Day after day he's reminded all of these sacrifices, all of this bloodshed is not enough. I still can't go in. These external regulations, they only go skin deep.

Verse 9, they cannot clear the conscience of the worshipper. And even the high priest who does get to go in, well that doesn't show the ways open, does it?

All this elaborate process, the precautions, the restrictions, the one day on which he can do it, the kinds of clothes he has to wear are prescribed. If ever there was an exception that proves the rule, well this is it.

[24 : 20] The way to the Holy of Holies is not open for business. And with all of that behind it, then comes verse 11 with its glorious contrast.

You can't do it in English word order, but the Greek puts right at the start of the sentence, Christ. But when Christ came, when the anointed one became the high priest, when the one who is son took up the mantle, everything changes.

The contrasts heap up. He went not into that tent, but into the heavenly tabernacle, of which the earthly one is just a shadow, a reflection.

That's why Moses had to build it according to the design that he was given, by the way. Because it's a picture made by human hands of a heavenly reality. The contrasts heap up.

That contrast between the earthly tent and the heavenly tent, that has nothing compared to the next contrast. Remember, the Day of Atonement, more than any other day, is awash with blood.

[25 : 25] All of these sacrifices, all of this blood drawn from the animals, dashed here and there around the sanctuary, taken right into the holiest place, and onto the horns of the altar, and so on and so on.

The Day of Atonement is awash with blood, but Christ does not come like every other high priest, bearing the blood of goats and calves. It's not the shed blood of animals that pays the price for his entry into the holiest place.

It is the blood of an infinitely more worthy sacrifice. And I mean that quite literally. Not a lot more worthy, not ten times more worthy, infinitely more worthy.

Verse 15 says again, the blood of animals. Sorry. Yes. The blood of animals provides outward cleanliness and no more.

Verse 15. And the next chapter is even more blunt. Chapter 10, verse 4. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and gaffes is secure. He is high priest not for a single lifetime, but forever.

[26 : 35] Chapter 7, verse 25. He is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

Every high priest before him died. His ability to intercede ran out. He failed. Not so our great, greater, greatest high priest who always lives to intercede for you and for me.

So fix your eyes on him. Look full in his face. There is no one else who can or who will sympathize the way that he does.

No one else who understands completely. He is the one to run to. And there is no one else who is qualified to offer the solution for your sin, whether past, present, or future.

No one else can do it. But he has done it. And in him, therefore, there is perfect security and absolute peace.

[27 : 48] Let's pray. Lord Jesus, what do we say as we reflect on these things?

How do we express our wonder at what you have done? How do we convey our thanks to you? You are infinitely more worthy.

You deserve so much more than we could ever bring. We can only bow in wonder. We can only rejoice in what you have done.

We can spend every moment of every day giving you glory. rejoicing in that solution that you have provided for us. Rejoicing in your perfect sympathy for us.

Rejoicing in what you have won for us. Rejoicing that we need not doubt because our anchor will hold. Because it is guaranteed by your blood of infinite worth.

[28 : 53] O Lord, would you fill our minds with these things. Keep us reflecting on them.

Fix our eyes upon Jesus, we pray. This Christmas, this year, for our lifetimes, for eternity, fix our eyes on him, we pray.

Amen.