

Jesus Our Priest - the Benefits

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[0 : 00] Well, tonight let's turn back to Hebrews, Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 14. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.

Let us hold fast our confession, for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize without weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. We're following on from what we looked at this morning briefly in terms of Christ Jesus being our high priest or the high priest of his people, and looking particularly at the requirements that he himself fulfilled and fulfills as requirements for a high priest, for him to be our high priest, and how that is actually something that includes all the things mentioned there in chapter 5, particularly at the beginning, where these qualifications are actually held by him in their entirety.

And we saw also the functions that he has as our high priest, the functions by which he especially deals with sin, and gave himself a sacrifice for sin and continues to make intercession for us. And Hebrews also now, as we look at this evening, tells us of some of the benefits that we have from having such a high priest. And not only benefits, but responsibilities, and things which we are charged to do, as we have this high priest, we are required or, if you like, constrained to do the things that are mentioned, such as in this verse itself, in this passage, to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.

[1 : 56] All of that is based upon having this high priest in place, and him being the kind of high priest as we saw this morning. And that's why you see, so often in these passages, like in verse 14, and since then we have.

He's really arguing from the point of view of having this great high priest in place, let us then do this. Since this is the case, then it follows that we should involve ourselves in the benefits that come to us from having this high priest.

And we'll come tonight to some other verses, as well as we did this morning, just in the passages around here, but particularly chapter 13, as well as chapter 10.

And we'll just draw some verses into this passage as well to supplement what you have there, just because they're dealing with the same issues. So there are three things.

Three things that we are required to do or to have in consequence of having this high priest. First of all, a confidence in approaching God.

[3 : 06] Secondly, a holding fast of our hope in God. And thirdly, an offering of sacrifices. We're putting that in inverted commas, and we'll see why that is in a minute.

An offering of sacrifices to God. That's on our part. He's already the sacrifice that provided us with salvation. And we're required on the basis of that to offer spiritual sacrifices or moral sacrifices in things we do.

And we'll find that in chapter 13 especially. So our confidence, first of all, in approaching God. Look at what it says here. Since we have this high priest, let us draw, then with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace.

It is absolutely crucial and central to worship that we draw near to God. That's what worship is. And that's what the Christian life really is about as well in developing our lives as Christians.

They involve, in a central place, our drawing near to God. It's something that you're conscious of doing when we come to worship God. It's not just something that you engage in in an outward ritual.

[4 : 18] There is a formality to it in public worship. And even in private worship, there's a certain pattern to your worship. But nevertheless, there is at the heart of it an actual drawing near to God.

An approaching to God. A coming to God consciously for yourself in the way that you speak, in the way that you sing praise, in the way you read your Bible, in the way you pray for His blessing. And drawing near to God is always at the heart of worship and of service, particularly that part of it that has to do with worship.

Now, we're aware of whose throne this is. When we come to worship God, we are conscious not just of drawing near to God, but drawing near to a throne, drawing near to the King of the universe, drawing near to this God who is our creator and is the great ruler of the universe.

We're conscious that that's the throne we're coming near to. It's not a human throne, though it has a human being on it. It's not a human throne as appointed by human beings.

[5 : 28] It is God's throne. And we're conscious that we need a sacrifice as we come to God. The Bible teaches us, your own conscience teaches you, that as you come near to God and are conscious of your own sin, you need something or someone to come between you and God.

Something that enables you to approach God with confidence, with assurance that you will be received. What is it that gives you that? It's having this great high priest. And you're conscious not just of the need of a sacrifice and aware that your own person and your own works will not do. You're conscious too of the way that God has provided this for us. That's the argument, isn't it? Since we have a great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God, who has passed through the heavens, a high priest who has, and that's the sense of passing through the heavens, it's a sense of victory, including his death and resurrection.

But the whole thing takes you to where Jesus now is. And the Jesus that has gone through the heavens is described like that, so that you and I can appreciate that he has gained a great victory. that he has come into the possession of his own throne in heaven, having accomplished redemption for us through his death and resurrection here.

[7 : 00] And so we approach with confidence. You see he's saying here, let us then with confidence draw near the throne of grace. And when you look at these words, you do not look to yourself.

When you think of coming near God in worship, you're not looking to yourself. Of course you come appreciating the fact that you're a sinner, that you need the sacrifice that Christ is, that you need the intercession that Jesus is constantly engaged in at the right hand of God.

But when you're told, and when we are counseled, to come with confidence, you don't look to yourself and say, how can I have confidence in coming to God?

That's not what it's about. Your confidence in worship is not self-based. Your confidence is because you're looking to him and looking at him and looking at everything that he is as your high priest, as he's described here.

Everything we saw this morning of his qualifications, of fulfilling the functions of high priest for his people. And as you look at that, not only are you required to come with confidence, and are we required to come with confidence, all who are in Christ, all who have trust in him, not only are we required to come with confidence, it would be wrong not to.

[8 : 26] It would be wrong not to come with confidence. Because basically that would mean that there's something we're not sure about in regard to Christ himself.

You don't look, again, you don't look to yourself. You don't look in such a way that says, but I'm still so full of sin, and I'm so weak, and my memory is so poor, and my understanding of scripture is so poor, and my retention of sermons is so poor.

No, you come to worship God by this new and living way that we read about in chapter 10, which he has opened up for us through what? Through your abilities?

Through your works? Through something that gives you self-confidence? No. But through Jesus and his flesh, through his death, through his work, through his priesthood, that's what gives you confidence.

That's why it's wrong not to come with confidence, to come doubting that somehow or else you shouldn't have confidence in drawing near to God.

[9 : 46] And it's repeated in a slightly different way in chapter 10, if you just flick over for a minute, chapter 10 to verse 22, where we read a few minutes ago.

Again, verse 21, you see the same argument. Since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

Let's just leave it at that without trying to look at the other parts of it which we could spend a lot of time on. Let's draw near, he says, since we have this great high priest, let us draw near. The same idea. Let's come before God. Let's draw near to God. Let's come and engage in our relationship with him. Whether it's individually or collectively in worship, but let's do it in full assurance of faith.

And you see, you mustn't then say, ah, but my faith is so poor and my faith is so weak and my faith is so prone to coming and going and lapses.

[10:52] It's not about your faith being the basis of your approach though, is it? You're not coming to God in assurance because your faith is strong, but because your faith is based on one who is strong.

Your full assurance of faith is full persuasion that he is everything you need to draw near to God. You start looking at your own faith and you're going to hesitate.

And you're not going to come with the confidence that this is actually commending to us. But when you come in the full assurance and persuasion that your high priest is absolutely everything that you need in order to approach God, in order for God to accept you, in order for God to say that he fully approves of you, don't doubt that.

Don't then go to your own faith and to your own abilities or inabilities. Let us draw near, you see, since we have this high priest, let us draw near in full assurance of faith and in respect to him and who he is and what he has done and what he continues to be and continues to do.

So that's the first thing. A confidence in approaching God, we approach God's throne on the basis of who he is, who Jesus is and also what he has done in his atoning death for us.

[12:29] And in chapter 4, we're back again there to what it says there, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

That's the purpose in coming near to him so that we can actually receive mercy and also find or obtain grace to help us in our time of need.

And you remember, we mentioned this morning that this is a passage that's set in a context of temptation and how Christ as our high priest is himself fully qualified to help us, to strengthen us, to give us his understanding so that he ministers to us when we are tempted as you find at the end of chapter 2 which we mentioned again this morning.

But here he says in regard to this high priest, we don't have in verse 15 a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.

It's what grammarians call a double negative. And when you come across a double negative which is saying here we do not have a high priest who is not able.

[13:53] The two negatives combine to make one super positive. And the super positive really is then saying to us therefore we absolutely and assuredly do have a high priest who is fully understanding of our limitations.

That's what it's saying. It's stressing for us by two negatives what's really a super positive point. When we have this high priest then we have one who is indeed fully able to empathize.

I think the word empathize is actually better than sympathize. I hope that doesn't sound too smug or too smart. But the word sympathize to me really as it's translated there means that you have sympathy with someone but you're coming as it were from outside and you're showing sympathy for them or pity for them.

Like for example you see children in war-torn Syria and Africa in times of poverty and famine and so on. You sympathize with their circumstances but you're not actually in it.

You don't sympathize from having been there and knowing what it's like. But when you use the word empathize it has more to do with a sympathy that comes from your experience of this thing.

[15:20] And what it's saying is we most certainly do have a high priest who fully empathizes with us. Who understands our temptations and our weakness in temptation because he's been there.

That's why he took our human nature that he would be able to do this for us as it says in chapter 2 at the end of the chapter because he himself has suffered being tempted he's able to help to support those who are being tempted.

In other words when you come to think of mercy and grace in this context they are specifically directed to our circumstances of temptation.

Now you know yourselves that mercy and grace have a much wider meaning than that in the Bible but it's always important to look at the context. When you come to draw near with confidence to the

throne of grace you're coming as people as individuals who know that you failed. Who know that you've given in to temptation. Who know that you're guilty time and time again of just succumbing to the temptation and just giving in and of course you end up doing what you didn't intend to do what you should not have done.

[16 : 35] But when you come to this throne of grace you come to receive mercy. You come from the one who's on the throne to receive not only his sympathy and his empathy but mercy forgiveness and at the same time to obtain grace in time of need.

Grace is a wonderful thing grace. And it's never wasted. God never wastes his grace. God never gives you more or less grace than you need.

He doesn't give you grace today for your needs tomorrow. He doesn't give you grace for any particular circumstance and then there's a bit spare and you carry it into the next.

It's grace measured to your need. Nothing of an excess doesn't spill over and go to waste.

It's always exactly suited to your need. Paul has a verse where he speaks about this manifold grace of God.

[17 : 53] And the word manifold there in Greek really means a grace that's absolutely shaped to your need. A grace that's adapted in terms of your need and what your need is.

And that grace is always grace for your time of need. You don't receive grace that's why we're saying you don't receive grace today for tomorrow's needs because tomorrow's needs might be different to those you have today.

You'll receive grace for that need when it comes. And so when you come to approach God you ask for his grace knowing that your present need is absolutely measured exactly by God.

And when he gives you his grace it's for that need and it fits it and it's exact and it's appropriate and it's in every way what you require.

whatever your need is tonight whatever age you're at whatever your circumstances whatever difficulty you're facing whatever challenges you have in temptations whatever you're tempted to regularly whatever things you're guilty of failing in respect to temptations and being tempted you go to God for grace you go for mercy and you obtain grace and you draw near to this high priest knowing who he is and knowing how perfect he is for you and knowing that when his grace is given it's a grace that will exactly match your need.

[19 : 35] Some of the treatments that are used nowadays for types of cancer are treatments which are developed specific to the individual specific to that individual's DNA to that particular individual's need at that time over and above any other individual in the world that may have the same disease but this is a treatment whatever it is it's actually specifically being created for that individual and for that individual's makeup and you can say that that really essentially in a spiritual way is how God deals with us by his grace the grace that you receive is for you for your need for your need exactly for your spiritual DNA if you like as God looks into your soul and it's grace for every time of need and it's always grace that's suited for that need so you have a confidence you see in approaching

God a confidence not just in terms of acceptance with him and worship of him on the basis of who Christ is but confidence too that when you come to him and ask him for mercy and for grace he's not going to turn around and say I'm sorry I don't have one that's suitable for you how about this one you can adapt this one you'll find that sometimes with stuff that you buy it's not exactly whether it's a pair of trainers whether it's a suit whatever it is you've seen it and you like it and then when you go to buy it it's out of stock but there's another one here that you might be interested in you don't have that with God whatever it is you need and I need in terms of his grace and his mercy he's got it absolutely ready for you no question no alternatives no secondary offers to you it's just exactly what you need at all times so you have confidence in approaching

God and secondly we have a holding fast of our hope in God now what it says here let us he says in verse 14 let us hold fast our confession and if we ask well what is that confession you need again to flip over to chapter 10 and that tells us in verse 23 again it says since we have a great high priest over the house of God let us draw near but then he says let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he is faithful who has promised so the confession in chapter 4 we're taking it from chapter 10 that the confession means the confession of our hope what is the confession of our hope what does he mean by that well by that he means basically heaven as promised by God because you see your hope is always based on what God has promised isn't it whenever you hope in something and remember hope in the

Bible is always a positive thing it's not a thing that's maybe here one day or not here it's a hope that takes the promise of God and says I believe that and I expect that that will be mine if I have my confidence in Christ if he is mine if he's going to be indeed my saviour as I trust he will be then this will be the outcome for me I'll be in heaven I will be given heaven as a gift from God on the basis of what Christ has done that's my hope that's a positive hope not a negative hope not a sort of worldly hope where you have no real assurance that what you're hoping for will ever come to pass we all have worldly hopes we all have hopes based on certain things that we set before ourselves as goals or people have promised us or whatever and you hope that that will indeed be the outcome it may never come to that but here is God saying here is heaven for you and for you to come to possess it you need to be first made acceptable in my eyes and I've given you everything you need for that in my son as your prophet priest and king and when you trust in him and when you receive him and all that's in him then you have this hope and this hope looks forward to what I've promised you and that hope's not going to be put to shame it's not going to be disappointed it's not going to be like a worldly hope that says well you know I was promised this and you turned out and you didn't actually give me what

I promised so many things you buy like that and you come and these are the promises and there's the guarantee then when you look at the small print actually you're caught out it hasn't really just quite worked out the way you've been promised the promise was just different to what it seemed to be on the surface God is not like that every promise that God gives it's based on his own truthfulness and the fulfillment of it is indeed guaranteed by his own faithfulness so when you come to have this confession of your hope a confession that this is your destiny as a Christian that this is what is waiting for you that God has actually given you his promise and you cannot doubt God's truthfulness in giving you this promise therefore you have this confession you have this in your life as a

[25 : 42] Christian knowing that Jesus is my high priest enables me to have this hope without wavering because it's based on him and it's based on his perfection and his completeness just as my approach to God looks to Jesus and not to myself so the exercise this confession of my hope looks to Jesus not to myself that's why this great passage in Hebrews comes to summing up in chapter 12 let us run the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith let's run that race just like in the ordinary sense the runner in a race doesn't look sideways doesn't look backwards looks forward looks to what's waiting at the end of the race looks to the finishing tape and the reception of those who are going to give out the medals looking unto

Jesus the confession of our hope and of course chapter 10 added there for he is faithful who has promised and you know there's a very similar argument in chapter 8 of Romans we often go back to the words of that great chapter as well as we need to do where Paul comes from verse 31 to do his summing up really of this great treatment in chapter 8 of those things he's been dealing with what shall we then say to these things what conclusions shall we come to if God is for us who can be against us he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not with him also graciously or freely give us all things who shall bring any charge against God's elected as God who justifies who is to condemn

Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who is at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us same as as Hebrews in a sense you could just fit in the words of Hebrews into that text and saying since we therefore have such a great high priest who can be against us who can undo what God has done who can tell me I shouldn't have confidence when my confidence is based on my high priest it's all there for us how shall he not also with him freely give us all things and the argument there just like in Hebrews is this how can we doubt the God who has gone so far as to do this for us how can we doubt the Christ who has given himself as a sacrifice for us how can we doubt the father who gave his son and did not spare him so that he would spare us how dare we doubt anything that he says to us or his capacity to save us or to look after us or to see us safely home let us come with confidence let us hold fast the confession of our hope next time you ask and I'm asked whenever somebody asks us do you have a hope hope that you'll be in heaven when all of this is done let me not say and let you not say well you know how it is with us we kind of go around in circles and are afraid to be that positive what we should be able to say I have Christ as my savior therefore I have confidence in him and therefore I hold confidently to my hope and that means you don't look to yourself you don't say to the person who's asking you this or to whom you're witnessing or in conversation with as if you're presenting your own faith to them as

if you're presenting your ability to them or anything to do with yourself ultimately what you're saying is consider who my high priest is and consider what my bible tells me about my high priest and then ask me why shouldn't I be confident why shouldn't I hold my confession of hope without wavering as chapter 10 puts it but again the more you look to yourself the more you'll start to wobble and waver look to Jesus learn to look to that foundation that's in him and that fullness that's in him so that you'll hold fast your hope without wavering so there's a confidence in approaching God there's secondly a holding fast of our hope in God and thirdly there is an offering of sacrifices to God now if you skip forward to chapter 13 for a moment we'll just deal with this final point mostly from there talking there about how Jesus again suffered to answer to the types of the Old Testament in verse 12 he suffered outside of the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach that he endured for here we have no lasting city but we seek the city that is to come through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of his lips that acknowledge his name do not neglect to do good and to share what you have for such sacrifices are pleasing to God now that's in many ways surprising if not remarkable language because on the one hand he's saying all the sacrifices of the

[32 : 12] Old Testament that typified or represented Jesus are gone he's come and he's fulfilled them there's no need of these sacrifices anymore so what is he saying let us come and let's continually offer up sacrifices to God well of course he explains they are spiritual sacrifices and they are moral sacrifices they're our contributions by living our Christian life in a certain way our contribution in response to the sacrifice that Jesus is what is he saying let us and you could say well let me just say this in passing that the reformers made great emphasis on this that God's people together are a priesthood we're not priests individually Christ is the priest for us but he forms a priesthood what is meant by that is that God's people in a spiritual way together offer up spiritual sacrifices to God

Peter says a similar thing in his first letter we are made into a spiritual house of a spiritual priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifice to God acceptable to him through Jesus Christ your worship of God is a spiritual sacrifice it's an offering your support of the gospel materially and financially you could say that's an offering it's something you give us a sacrifice spiritually to God what he mentions here in regard to the following details where he says that we are not to neglect doing good and to share what we have that's to distribute to each other and to distribute beyond that to other people in need these are sacrifices these are spiritual things that have a moral nature to them or a spiritual nature to them but they're called sacrifices they're no longer animals like they came in the old testament you would come with your animal for yourself for your family

Christ is now our sacrifice to give us acceptance with God but on the basis of that in response to that we come with spiritual offerings sacrifices of a moral spiritual quality and kind and why are they called sacrifices then well there's one thing at least that is important in regard to that I think it's because in the old testament you were never allowed to think of offering something to God that didn't cost you offering something to God that hadn't cost yourself you had to give the best of your flock you had to give the best of the first fruits of the ground you had to give us we saw last Wednesday or Thursday it wasn't the thanksgiving service you had to give the best to God it cost you you couldn't keep it to yourself and when you come truly to serve

God it's not a contribution towards your salvation but it costs you you give away something of yourself of your time of your gifts of your goods of your money you distribute as it puts as it means here from in this word that's used here do not neglect to do good and to share what you have and it doesn't specify anything particularly it leaves it quite deliberately open and general so that we will understand from it whatever things God has given us we are never to consider not sharing them not distributing from them to others who can be helped by it and that is a sacrifice in a spiritual sense that God as it says here is well pleased with the great theologian and commentator

John Owen whose commentary on Hebrews runs to some seven or eight volumes if you really want to know Hebrews buy John Owen's commentary on Hebrews it will take you all your lifetime to go through it but one thing is guaranteed you will know the meaning of Hebrews after you have done it I am not saying I have read every word of it but it is a commentary that I truly treasure this is what he says in regard to these few verses in chapter 13 this is what he says nothing renders religion so honorable as its efficacy its power to make men good and useful and he says something quite amazing it is the great evidence of the renovation of our nature into the likeness and image of God

who is good and does good to all a demonstration of altering our center end and interest from self to God that's quite remarkable what he's saying is this religion this Christian religion as we follow it out in our lives the efficacy the ability it has to make men good and useful that he says is the great evidence that we've been changed inwardly and it's the demonstration that we have had the center of our being the aim of our being the interest of our being changed from self to God then he says this doing good and sharing are the only outward evidences and demonstrations of the renovation of the image of God in us

[38 : 36] I had to read that a couple of times just to again make sure that that's exactly what he was saying because you wouldn't expect doing good and sharing to be the only evidence but then when you think about it it is it doesn't matter how often you go to prayer meetings how often you sit at a communion table how often you read your bible how often you come to engage in worship if you don't do good and share what you have there's absolutely no evidence that your heart's been changed if you act selfishly then it's more than likely it's because you're still selfish and because your self has never been turned upside down and inside out that's what he's saying doing good and sharing are the only outward evidences and demonstration of the renovation of the image of God in us well something for you to take and think about further you may be not in agreement with it that's fine but that's what he said

I'm just quoting it you can just tease that out yourselves as you think about what it says one other thing and I'm just finished with this an offering of sacrifices to God there's a sacrifice of praise there's a sacrifice of these resources that we share but there's also in chapter 10 if I can take you back again there's a consideration of one another chapter 10 verse 24 to 25 let us consider how to stir up one another to love and to good works now I don't like that translation because it's not really what the text is saying what it's saying is let us consider one another so as to stir one another up to love and good works in other words the considering is not just considering how to do it the considering means to stimulate one another to have in a fellowship one with another which a church or congregation ought to be to have the kind of interaction of relationships within that congregation that actually seeks to stimulate one another to engage in love and good works let us stimulate one another is what it's saying to love and to good works it's part of what follows from what has been done for us by our great high priest and by our father the least we can do is to try to emulate that as he has shared with us the benefits of his death we are to share one another with one another and stimulate one another to love and to good works and he says here in verse 25 there not neglecting to meet together as the habit of some is but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near in other words he's saying you can fit meeting together very squarely into your needs in regard to stimulating one another it follows doesn't it it's logical if we're required to stimulate one another to love and to good works you're not going to do it if you seldom meet together and it's meeting together that he emphasizes here as the habit of some is to neglect that it was happening when he wrote this letter to the Hebrews people who were saying we're Christians but they weren't in the habit of meeting together or with other Christians just as you find some today sadly who don't think that that's all that necessary it's absolutely crucial sanctification for one thing doesn't happen on your own that's part of what happens as you belong to a body a spiritual body of Christians and what he's saying here is love and good works they're not things which you can just work out on your own we stimulate one another to love and to good works and in order to do that we do not neglect our gathering together as the habit of some may be but there's another point and so much more as you see the day drawing near what day well the day that we looked at last Sunday evening the day of the king's return the day of the king coming or this high priest coming to be revealed in all his splendor in other words what Hebrews is telling us is that your stimulation and your motivation yes it's looking back to what he has done in his death yes it's looking up to where he is now and to the intercession that he's engaged in at the right hand of God and yes it's also looking forward to the day of his coming to the day when you will meet him to the day when he's going to say to all these people well done good and faithful servant enter into the joy of your Lord now don't say if you're a Christian tonight but I'm not sure if that's me if Christ is yours that's yours and if that's yours hold it fast with confidence let's pray our gracious God we pray that you would bless to us our consideration of your word and especially your word itself enable us

Lord we pray to rejoice in the benefits that we receive from your own priesthood enable us Lord to draw near to you with confidence casting aside our self-confidence and focusing on the entirety of

what we have in our high priest help us to draw near to you in such a way help us to hold fast of confession of hope Lord enable us to realize day by day that your promises are sure that they are yea and amen in Christ Jesus that there will never be promises that will fail to come to fruition so help us Lord we pray to hold our confession of hope without wavering enable us to serve you as we seek to distribute from what you have given us and to engage in these spiritual sacrifices which we know from your word are pleasing to you help us

[45 : 36] Lord to come with relish to your worship and to distribute practically the things that we also have that help other people help us in all of these things oh Lord to fulfill all that we ought to be as your people and graciously receive our thanks now for Jesus sake Amen