

Jesus: Our Great High Priest Forever
(Week 9)
Hebrews 4:14 - 5:6
“Our Great High Priest Forever”

Introduction

Throughout the entire history of the universe, there has never been another like Jesus. And for as long as time continues into eternity, there will never **be** another like Jesus. He is completely and eternally unique. He is The Only Begotten Son of The Father. He isn't just a mighty king. He is The King of Kings. He doesn't just give us peace. He is The Prince of Peace. He wasn't just a prophet in His time. He is The Greatest Prophet without beginning, or end. He is The Everlasting God. He wasn't just another sacrifice for sin. He was The Perfect and Ultimate Sacrifice, The Lamb of God. He isn't just mighty. He is Almighty. He is more than just a healer. He is The Great Physician. He is so much more than wise. He is Omniscient. He is more than just a leader. He is The Sovereign LORD of the universe. He wasn't just a man. He was The God/Man, who came from Heaven as The Greatest Prophet of all time. He alone holds the three supreme titles over the human race. He is The Great Prophet, Priest and King of the ages, who came from Heaven as The Greatest Prophet who ever lived and returned to Heaven as The Great High Priest, who sits at the right hand of The Father to ever make intercession for His people, The Church. When He comes again, He will be The Reigning King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who will usher lasting peace into this wicked world. These are but a select few of the many attributes of His great Name and the reasons that we offer Him our highest praise. And, as if all of this were not enough, He **loves** us with an everlasting love and was willing to die upon the cross of Calvary in our place to satisfy the wrath of God for our sins. Let us never forget, that without Him, we have nothing.

Today in our study of *Hebrews*, we come to a pivotal point in this wonderful book of scripture. It is the passage that clearly defines who Christ truly is in his role of God's Ultimate High Priest. It is from this particular passage that our sermon series drives its title: “Jesus: Our Great High Priest... Forever”. Up to this point the author has gone to great lengths to make his case for the supremacy of Christ. Using many Old Testament passages to point directly to the glory of The Lord Jesus. His favorite of them being:

“You are My Son; today I have become Your Father.”

Psalms 2:7

The reason that he keeps returning to this verse is to explain the coronation of Christ's intercessory ministry as Our Great High Priest. The “day” to which this verse describes as “today” represents that blessed Easter morning that God raised Jesus from the dead, thus declaring Him to be “The Son of God”. It was at this time that Christ officially began His duties as Our Great High Priest. He offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sins, and then, rose to return to The Father to represent us before The Throne. As you recall, the role of a prophet is to bring the people a message from God, while the role of the priests was to intercede with God on behalf of the people. So in keeping with this example, Jesus came to us from Heaven as the Ultimate Prophet, but returned to Heaven as the Ultimate Priest. When He returns to us again, He will be returning as the Ultimate King. And this, is the threefold ministry of The Lord Jesus.

For the purposes of our study here today, we will be solely focussed upon Jesus ministerial role of High Priest. As we look at **Hebrews 4:14 - 5:6**, we will break down this wonderful Scripture into three sections:

- 1. Jesus is THE Great High Priest**
- 2. Jesus is OUR Great High Priest**
- 3. Jesus is Our Great High Priest... FOREVER.**

THE Great High Priest (Vs 14)

The line of the Levitical priesthood began with Moses' brother, Aaron, who was the first official High priest of Israel (**Leviticus 8**). God had specially commanded that all those from the tribe of Levi be consecrated to Him. God had laid claim to every firstborn son of Israel when He struck down all the firstborn of Egypt during the Passover (**Numbers 3:13**). He then declared that the tribe of Levi would be

consecrated to Him as a substitute in place of all of Israel's Firstborn (**Numbers 3:12**). The order of God's ordained priests were to be chosen from among those descendants of Levi (Jacob's third son). The office of High Priest was to be a succession of men chosen by God from the tribe of Levi, while other Levites were ordained to fill supporting roles in assisting The High Priest. Only The High Priest was to preside over the sacrifices of Israel, including the most important ones of all, which occurred on The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) once a year in the month of Tishri (Israel's seventh month). The High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies with the blood of the sacrifices, the first one for himself and the second for the people. He would sprinkle the blood upon the "mercy seat" (The lid of The Ark of The Covenant) and would return to the people, having made intercession for them to God to "cover" their sin.

Verse 14 of the fourth chapter of Hebrews tells us that Jesus, The GREAT High Priest (a title that has never been, nor will ever be, given to any other High Priest), "ascended into heaven" (**vs. 14 NIV**). This is a very bad translation of the original text and actually should read:

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus The Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess."

The picture given here would have been obvious to the believing Jew, but to us, who are not as familiar with the work of the High Priest at the tabernacle of Moses, it needs some explanation. You see, *The Bible* speaks of "the heavens" in three separate and distinct ways. There is the "First Heaven" which describes the atmosphere around the earth. It is the place where our weather is formed and also serves as a shield from the harmful radiation of the sun. The "Second Heaven" is a term used to describe what we call "outer space", where the sun, moon, planets, and stars exist. The "Third Heaven" refers to the celestial abode of God Himself. It is a place that no mortal has ever seen and lies somewhere in a spiritual dimension beyond our reach. Jesus, in His journey to be our Great intercessory High Priest, traveled from this earth after His resurrection from the dead through all three of these "heavens" to sit down at the right hand of God The Father. No other priest can claim such a marvelous journey, and that is why Jesus is the Ultimate or "Great" High Priest.

It is amazing just how incredibly that God has "pictured" this remarkable journey of Christ in the Tabernacle of Moses. You see, The Tabernacle was comprised of three sections. First, there was the outer court, which was a kind of "fenced-in space", enclosed with a wall of material fashioned into heavy curtains. Inside this wall was the tent of meeting which covered the Holy Place containing the lamps and the table of shewbread, as well as, the altar of incense. And beyond that, a thick veil covered the entrance to "The Most Holy Place" which was where the Ark of The Covenant was kept. On the Day of Atonement, The High Priest would make his sacrifices outside of the Tabernacle, then he would go through all three of these entrances leading him ultimately into the Most Holy Place to sprinkle the blood upon the mercy seat of The Ark. This Ark was a representation of The Throne of God, and therefore, this "journey" that the High Priest made each year actually was a representation of the journey that Christ would make to intercede for us at The Throne of God! He left this earth and went "through the heavens" so that He could present His own blood at the throne of God as the all time propitiation for our sins. He is indeed The Great High Priest, and all those High Priests, who came before Him, were merely types and shadows of what He would ultimately do on our behalf! There is none other like Jesus. He is no ordinary High Priest. He is The Son of God, The Great High Priest, who has gone through the heavens to represent us before the throne!

OUR Great High Priest (vs. 4:15-5:3)

" For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with 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." **Hebrews 4:15-16**

Jesus is not only The Great High Priest, but He is also **OUR** Great High Priest. To those who put their faith in Him, He is our representative before the Throne of God. He is more than qualified to do so, because He was made to become "one of us", as it were. He, like us, knows what it means to be tempted to sin. A lot of folks misinterpret the actual meaning of this truth. They mistakenly believe that it would

have been possible for Jesus to sin, that He could have somehow “failed” in His mission here on earth. **Nothing** could be further from the truth. Jesus was always fully God and fully man. He was tempted to sin, but never even once did He entertain the notion of giving in to those temptations. As God, He is repulsed by sin, not enticed by it. The fact that He was unable to sin is actually proof of His divine nature. If He “could have” sinned, then He would not have been God. But, in His humanity He was subjected to the most intense forms of temptation that anyone has ever faced. Please allow me to explain.

As frail human beings, there is only so much temptation that we are able to withstand before we would finally give in. Simply put, we just aren’t strong enough to resist intense temptation. We definitely have our limitations, when it comes to saying “no” to sin. While it is true that God allows us to be tempted in order to “try us”, it is equally true that He always sets limits on just how much that His children are allowed to be tested.

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

1 Corinthians 10:13

You see, although God doesn’t Himself tempt us (**James 1:13**), He does allow us to be tempted so that we can “crucify our flesh” to eradicate sin’s dominion over us. He has given us the power of His Holy Spirit to resist temptation, and He will not allow us to be tempted beyond a certain level to which we would surely fail. That is why, my friends, when a child of God sins, they truly have no excuse for it! For God doesn’t allow us to be tempted to the degree that we could not have victory.

Jesus, however, had no such limitations put upon His levels of temptation. Satan was allowed to throw everything but the kitchen sink at The LORD (in a matter of speaking), but he couldn’t even make a dent. Jesus, being God, could NOT be enticed into sin. Sin repulsed Him. This was living proof that He was none other than God Himself, in the flesh. He was, therefore, the only One who was or ever will be qualified to die in our stead. All the other High Priests had to make sacrifices for themselves, as well as, the people, for they too were sinners (**vs. 5:2-3**), but not Jesus. He was the Great High Priest, who never sinned, and therefore, the sacrifice that He offered for our sin was acceptable to God to forgive the sins of all mankind. He knew what it was like to be tempted even more than we are, and yet, He overcame every single temptation. He can sympathize with us, because He experienced what we experience, but He is superior to us in the fact that He defeated what we never could.

Since we have such an awesome High Priest who sympathizes with us, we now, because of His journey “through the heavens” as our substitute sacrifice, can boldly follow Him to the very throne room of God! (**vs. 16**). You see, when Jesus died upon the cross, the heavy veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom (**Mark 15:38**). *This is VERY significant.* It means that we no longer need any other priest to intercede for us with God. Now that Christ has become **OUR** Great high Priest, He has given us full access to the throne room of God.

Now to speak to God in person, we only need to go through Jesus. He has replaced the “veil” for us. No longer do we need an earthly priest, for we have a heavenly one! Jesus is OUR Great High Priest. Just like Queen Esther was able to go into the presence of the king and not be executed for her “presumptive boldness” (**Esther 5:1-3**). Thanks to Jesus, we can go before the throne of God Himself and be fully accepted. Why? For the same reason that King Ahasuerus was happy to see Queen Esther. She was his beautiful bride, and he was in love with her! Now, thanks to Our Great High Priest, we can boldly come before the throne of God for we are the bride of Christ, and in Him, we are made beautiful to God The Father! So you see, He is not just THE Great High Priest. He is OUR Great High Priest, Who was tempted as we are, and yet, never sinned.

Our Great High Priest... FOREVER (Vs. 5:4-6)

Now, as I have previously stated during this series, the writer of *Hebrews* is an excellent preacher. He knew exactly what his Jewish readers would have been thinking as they read this passage. “How could Jesus be Our Great High Priest, when he didn’t descend from the Levites whom God had chosen to be the tribe of Priests? Wasn’t Jesus from the tribe of Judah?” Because he had, due to the guidance of The Holy Spirit, anticipated the question, he provided them with an answer in advance.

You see, Jesus wasn't the first person who was not from the tribe of Levi to ever be appointed by God as a priest. Melchizedek... now THAT was a serious "blast from the past"! I imagine that everyone in Israel had pretty much forgotten about him. He was a different kind of priest that lived during the time of Abraham. Melchizedek was a man shrouded by mystery. No one knew where he came from, or whatever became of him, for that matter. He just showed up one day out of the blue, after Abraham had defeated the armies that had carried off his nephew (**Genesis 14:18-20**). It was obvious that the man had been called by God to be a priest, and yet, we know nothing else of him. Not only that, but he served as a priest of God, before the Levites were even born!

The writer only gives us a "sneak peek" of Melchizedek in this chapter, but he will revisit the mysterious priest-king in the latter portions of this writing. The point here is that just as God appointed Melchizedek to be His priest, He had also appointed Christ to be His High Priest, even though neither was in fact a descendant of Levi. As a matter of fact, just like Melchizedek preceded Levi... so did Christ! To be even more specific, Jesus preceded Melchizedek! God had established the priesthood of Jesus to last FOREVER. The wondrous truth of the story of Jesus is that we no longer need any more High Priests, for He has now perfectly filled the role of Our Great High Priest Forever. Anyone who now claims to be a "priest" that men must go through in order to speak with God has committed a terrible blasphemy against The Great High Priest. Sadly, many churches feel the need to continue to place mere men as the go-between of the laity and The Deity. Jesus is the only go-between we need.

Many people call me up and ask me to pray for them, and I am happy to do so, but as the pastor of this church I must tell you, my prayers have no more power than yours, if you are following Jesus. The role of pastors is not to be the intermediary between God and man, we are simply charged with taking care of the flock. The word "pastor" actually means shepherd. As pastors, our job is to serve you and teach you the commands of Christ, but you certainly do not need us to talk to God on your behalf. Jesus has gone through the heavens to represent you in all things before the throne. **Cast your cares upon him for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).**

Not only do you *not* need any other priests between you and Christ, but you have been made a priest as well, if you belong to Jesus! Remember what I said earlier about the Levites, who were set apart as priests to serve the High Priest? We as believers have also been set apart to serve as priests to Our Great High Priest. Do you realize that you are a priest this morning? Just listen to what The Word of God says about The Church in **1 Peter 2:9**:

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."

So you see, my friends, we have been called to serve as priests. Which brings us to the question, "Are you living like priests in the kingdom of God?" I love the ordination services for the Levite priests in *The Old Testament*. They would first wash the priests, then dress them in their robes and anoint them with oil. These are pictures of the repentance of sin, being clothed in righteousness, and anointing of The Holy Spirit. Then they would make a sacrifice for the priest, which of course was a picture of Jesus atoning blood. And finally, they would take the blood of the sacrifice and apply it to the right ear lobe, the right thumb, and the right big toe of the men who were being ordained as priests. Now this is really good, so just listen for a moment. These things were done to symbolize that these men had been set apart to serve as priests and from that day forward, everything that they heard or allowed to have influence over them (the right ear), everything that they did (the right hand), and everywhere they went (the right foot) had been put under the blood of the sacrifice!

We too are called to live holy lives, set apart to serve as the priest of Christ. We have been washed clean from our sins, anointed by The Holy Spirit, and clothed in the robes of Jesus' righteousness. It is our responsibility, therefore, to place every voice of influence that we hear, everything that we do, and everywhere that we go under the blood of Jesus that we may be consecrated to live for Him, and Him alone. We are without excuse to continue in our sins, for we have been given the power to overcome them. We are called to serve as a holy priesthood to Our Great High Priest Forever! Is that what you signed up for when you decided to follow Jesus? He is THE Great High Priest, He is OUR Great High Priest, and He is Our Great High Priest... FOREVER! He deserves all that we have and will accept nothing less! Let us worship His Holy Name.

And ALL God's people said... TRUTH!!!