

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Turn your bibles with me to Hebrews 4

We are continuing our verse-by-verse study through this letter that was written to a group of Jewish believers who were contemplating going back to Judaism, going back to following a list of do's and don'ts

And so for the past couple of weeks, we have seen the writer use the Old Testament to demonstrate to these Jewish believers – and us today, that Jesus is greater to anything that they were thinking about returning to

He has demonstrated -

That Jesus is greater than angels

That Jesus is greater than the prophets

That Jesus is greater than Moses

And for the last few weeks in our midweek study, we have seen the writer of Hebrews warn this group of Jewish believers that by failing to enter into His rest (remember - Jesus is our rest), he is warning that they are on the verge of doing the same mistake that their ancestors did when they failed to enter into the Promised Land because of their unbelief.

In our text this evening –

The writer is going to shift to one of the most important parts of the Jewish system

He is going to focus on the temple service and the priesthood

It is the topic that he will devote the biggest portion of his letter to – to demonstrate to them that Jesus is greater than their entire religious system.

Let's pray...

[Heb 4:14-16 NKJV] 14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast [our] confession.

When I first became a Christian – btw – it was 31 years ago yesterday (October 25th)

I remember a family member asking me the following questions –

So, who do you confess to now?

And how do you know that when you confess your sins – that they are actually forgiven?

How do you know that God actually heard you?

And as a baby Christian – it was hard to answer those questions.

Because growing up – I was taught that the man in the booth – he had access to God
If I told him what I did, he would what I would have to do so that God would be ok with
me and then I knew I was good until the following week.

The reason I bring this up is – this is exactly what this group of Jewish believers is
going through.

They would have been asked by their friends –

“ok, you have given your life to Jesus”

But what about the function of the High Priest?

Remember, under the Old Covenant –

The High Priest represented God before the people

And the High Priest who also represented the people before God

The high priest was the mediator because before Jesus died on the cross – no one
had direct access to God

So the Jewish family and friends would question these guys –

“Who represents God to you”

“Who represents you before God Almighty”

Our high priest has special robes, and our high priest burns incense and he offers sacrifices in this majestic ginormous temple (keep in mind that the book of Hebrews was written before the destruction of the temple)

We got all of this – what do you have?

Keep in mind also that the early church didn't meet in buildings – they met in homes.

They were home fellowships

It wasn't until later that they started congregating in buildings.

So these Jewish believers would start questioning their decision – they would begin to be stumped, “did we really leave all that for this???”

So the writer of the book of Hebrews responds with – let me tell you about your High Priest.

And when you know who your High Priest is and what your High Priest is in Christ, you will know that you are richer than anything anyone has and you will never be impressed by another high priest for the rest of your life.

So, in verse 14 – the writer of Hebrews compares the high priests that have served before with the superiority of Jesus

Aaron – the first high priest and the faithful high priests that followed Aaron – they were good. But Jesus is great!!!!

What makes Jesus greater as a High Priest???

This great High Priest has “passed through the heavens.”

In the cosmology of the times, there were three heavens;

- the atmosphere was the first heaven,
- the stars were the second heaven,
- and the spiritual realm of God was the third heaven.

When the writer says that our great high priest has passed through the heavens, he means that He has entered into the very throne room of the Father, in His presence.

Jesus as our High Priest has an access that no other high priest has ever had.

The closest, the earthly high priests ever came to having access to God – was once a year,

when he would enter in to the Holy of holies on the Day of Atonement and approach the presence of God above the ark of the covenant.

He would only be able to enter into the holy of holies after offering a sacrifice for his own sin.

Remember, the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and in the Temple – it was only supposed to be a model of the heavenly scene.

Our High Priest isn't operating in the context of the model – He is in the glory of heaven

He sits at the right hand of the Father and He pleads our case and intercedes for us directly to the Father.

[1Jo 2:1 NKJV] 1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Under the Old Covenant – if I sinned – I had to go to the sheep farm and get a sheep and take it to go get sacrificed for the covering of what I did

It was supposed to show the people the seriousness of their disobedience – that the shedding of blood was required.

It took the life and the shedding of blood of God Himself in order to provide us with the forgiveness of sin.

So, when I sin today – I don't go looking for a sheep

I can simply stop what I am doing and say, "Lord I messed up again, forgive me of what I did and help me to learn from it so I don't do it again"

And the reason that we can have that type of relationship with God – is because of our Great High Priest

So the writer of Hebrews is saying, “Why would you now – want to leave this Great High Priest and go back to some descendant of Aaron?”

- No other High Priest was called great.
- No other High Priest... passed through the heavens.
- No other High Priest is the Son of God.

And so the writer is telling them and us to HOLD FAST to our confession – to keep a firm grip on our trust in Christ's finished Work,

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all [points] tempted as [we are, yet] without sin.

Jesus was sinless – that is a claim that no earthly high priest could ever make concerning himself.

So by Jesus taking on human flesh – He can sympathize with our weaknesses

He understands what we face in the form of temptation

He understands what we face in the form of difficulty in this fallen world

The Old Testament high priests could sympathize with the people because just like the people – he sinned – he fell short

However, our Great High Priest understood what it was like to be a man.

He was 100% God and 100% man

He understood all that we went through

He understood all the temptations that man faces

But unlike everybody else – He was sinless

And here is the important thing to grasp –

He resisted it as a man, and not as God.

To do so would have been to remove Himself from His ability to serve as our Great High Priest.

Remember in the wilderness, the very first temptation the devil hit Jesus with?

Jesus had been fasting for 40 days and was hungry.

The devil said, “If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread.”

What was Jesus’ reply? “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

You see the temptation satan offered?

He appealed to Jesus’ powers of deity –

He said, If you are the Son of GOD! Turn these stones into bread.”

But Jesus served the devil notice that He would not perform His mission through the powers of deity.

Earth had been given to man,

lost by man,

and could only be reclaimed by a man.

The writer wants his readers to realize that their personal connection to Jesus as High Priest is greater than any connection a person had to the priest of the temple.

When they cry out for help to God,

they can have the confidence of knowing that Jesus, who intercedes for them before the Father knows precisely what they are going through.

He's been there and done that – even more,

He's here now and going through it with us.

16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Here is another reason that Jesus our Great High Priest is greater than the Aaronic high priests.

We have privileges by virtue of Jesus being our High Priest

Jesus provides us with a continual access to the throne of God –

We have access to God

We have the privilege of going to God on our own

No lambs, no sacrifices, no special temple, no special robes

We have access to God at any time and at any place

And because of our Great High Priest, we can come boldly to the throne of grace

Raise your hands if you have seen the movie, The Wizard of Oz?

Remember when the group goes before the great Oz – remember how scared they all were – where even the cowardly lion passes out.

We don't come before the throne of grace like that

Because of our High Priest – not because of who we are or what we have done – we can come boldly before the throne

It doesn't mean that we can come arrogantly – “hey homes”

It means that we can come again and again and again

That we can come without reservation at any time

The people in the Old Testament didn't have that privilege – only the high priest did one man, one day out of the year – and they only had access to the model

As a believer, we have access to the real thing

Not only are we able to come boldly to the throne of grace but, when we come to the throne of grace it is always to receive mercy and grace and help us in our time of need.

[Heb 5:1-4 NKJV] 1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things [pertaining] to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. 3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer [sacrifices] for sins.

The writer continues to provide reasons here in ch 5 why Jesus is greater than the Aaronic high priests

The Jewish high priest was a man and therefore able to feel for men in their weaknesses.

They were able to identify with the people because as men, they were well acquainted with the kinds of struggles and issues people went through.

Every one of the Jewish High Priests sinned just like those whom they represented.

They had to bring an offering for themselves and then for the people.

Our High Priest –

Can identify with us because He is like us in every way except one, He is "without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

And as our High Priest – He has compassion on us – even though He never sinned
He has compassion knowing that we live in this fallen world

4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron [was].

Being human and being able to identify with men and women isn't the only qualification to being a priest.

One must be called and ordained by God.

The high priest was not self-appointed

The priesthood wasn't something a man could aspire to.

In Israel, you had to be born into the priestly tribe of Levi.

And in order to be a high priest, you had to be born into the family of Aaron.

Why was Aaron the first high priest?

Because God chose him to be the first high priest

And God the Father has appointed Jesus to be our High Priest

In other words, what the writer of the book of Hebrews is saying –

God was free to choose whether He would allow Himself to even be approached by man

And He was free to choose who would be allowed to approach Him on behalf of man

And therefore He picked Aaron

And in the same way He picked Jesus

So, if someone questioned the Jewish believers and said, "Who picked Jesus to be the High Priest?"

They could then respond – God,

in the same way He picked Aaron

[Heb 5:5-6 NKJV] 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but [it was] He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You."

After showing the qualifications of a priest in vs. 1-4, the writer shows that Christ had those qualifications.

He identified with man

He had compassion

He was appointed by God

And, as the Son of God Himself, He is more than qualified to serve as High Priest.

Now, the writer knew that this might cause some of his readers to say,

“Wait a minute – there’s only one high priesthood established in Scripture and that’s the Tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron.

Jesus was from the Tribe of Judah and the Family of Jesse!

So they might say - Jesus doesn’t qualify to be High Priest.”

So the writer dismisses this challenge by going back before the establishment of the Tribe of Levi as the priestly tribe and shows there is a higher priesthood that pre-dates and surpasses the Levitical priesthood.

That is why the writer brings up Melchizedek here in verse 6

6 As [He] also says in another [place]: "You [are] a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek";

Here is another reason why Jesus’ priesthood is greater than the Aaronic priesthoods

Through out the history of Israel the high priesthood and kingship were never combined in one person.

That means –

No priest could serve as a king,

and no king could ever officiate as a priest.

No king ever entered into the Holy of Holies and offered a sacrifice for the atonement of sin.

Only the priest could do that.

There is only one person in the Old Testament appears as both king and priest, and he is Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of the Most High God.

So the writer of Hebrews is saying,

that Jesus' priesthood is of a higher status than the priests of the Tribe of Levi because it is of a higher order – it's the order of this guy Melchizedek, who we read about in Genesis.

This is the guy who Abraham paid tithes to -

Melchizedek as we will study later on in Hebrews – is a type of Christ in the Old Testament

7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,

So here the writer provides for us an example of how Jesus met the qualifications as a High Priest

Turn your bibles with me to Matt 26

[Mat 26:36-39 NKJV] 36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. 38 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." 39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You [will]."

So, here in the gospel of Matthew – we see how Jesus empathized with us

In the Garden of Gethsemane, He struggled with the difficulty of obedience, yet He obeyed perfectly.

8 though He was a Son, [yet] He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

This does not mean that He moved from disobedience to obedience.

Rather, He learned obedience by actually obeying!

Jesus did not learn how to obey; He learned what is involved in obedience.

Jesus learned the experience of obedience, and part of that learning was enduring suffering.

9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

I had you make a note of the phrase, having been perfected

This doesn't mean that Jesus wasn't perfect

But rather, it was through His suffering that He became perfected as our Savior

He could not be our savior apart from His suffering and His death upon the cross

Because Jesus is a perfect high priest,

He has become the basis of salvation for all who obey Him,

and the obedience He commands is abiding faith in Him as Lord and Savior

10 called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"

Once again – the writer let's his readers know that Jesus as our High Priest is in a category all by Himself > than the Levitical priests

As the High Priest Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice to cover our sins.

Our sins debt is paid in full.

God now offers us pardon, peace, reconciliation, cleansing, forgiveness, and a right relationship with God in Christ.

Why would we want to go back?

And that is the question that the writer is posing to these Jewish believers and us today.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 '

May the LORD bless you and protect you.

May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you.

May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'

