

Hebrews 4:15-5:10 “The Son as Merciful High Priest”
Leviticus 8-9
Psalm 110

February 14, 2021

Read chapter 8 through 9:1a

For seven days, Aaron and his sons remain in the tent of meeting,
“until the days of your ordination are completed.”

But *on the eighth day* Aaron enters his high priestly work.

Seven days were necessary “to make atonement for you.”

Aaron cannot enter his high priestly duties until the 8th day –
until *another day* has come.

And what does Aaron do on the 8th day?

He makes intercession for the people – in order that their sins might be covered –
that their sins might be atoned for.

Or to say it another way,

on the 8th day, Aaron enters God’s rest.

“This is the thing that the LORD commanded you to do,
that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.” (v6)

As Aaron draws near the altar, the people of God draw near the altar *in him* –
as he wears the breastplate – representing the twelve tribes.

(read chapter 9)

Fire came down from heaven – and it didn’t kill us!

It consumed the burnt offering and the fat of the peace offering!

And thus *we* have peace with God through the mediation of the high priest!

Sing Psalm 110

TPH 110A

Read Hebrews 4:15-5:10

Introduction: A Merciful High Priest (4:15-16)

In Hebrews 3-4 we saw the danger of being trapped in yesterday.

Israel’s yesterday was the rebellion in the wilderness.

They didn’t believe that God would be faithful to his promises.

They looked at the mess and the misery of their situation,

and they couldn’t believe that God would really deliver them.

So they rebelled and refused to obey God.

What is your “yesterday”?

What are the patterns and habits that draw you away from the living God?

What are the temptations that ensnare you?

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as your fathers did in the wilderness.

But Pastor, I’ve tried – and I’ve failed –

why should I think that today will be any different?

Because Today is a new day –

and by that, I do not mean some cheesy, sappy bromide

about how this time just might be different from last time!

No, Today is different – not because *you* are different –

but because Jesus, the Son of God,

is a faithful high priest who has passed through the heavens,

therefore, hold fast your confession.

Jesus, the Son of God,

is a merciful high priest who can sympathize with you in every way,

so let us draw near the throne of grace with confidence.

In 2:17-18 we saw the outline of chapters 3-5

“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect,

so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God,

to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

For because he himself has suffered when tempted,

he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

In chapters 3-4 we saw how Jesus is the faithful High Priest–

the faithful Son over the house–greater than Moses,

and through whom we enter God’s rest.

Today we will look at part 2 of this section–

how Jesus is a merciful high priest.

In order for the Son to fulfill his task as our Redeemer,

he had to experience testing through the suffering of death,

he had to be tempted as we are–yet without sin!

he had to become a merciful high priest.

Only then could he help those who are in need.

When you are tempted, you can have confidence that Jesus can help you,

because Jesus has been tempted, too.

When you hear the word “sympathize” what do you think of?

Someone who comes alongside and says “there, there! Everything will be okay!”?

That’s actually not very comforting, is it?

When you are in the middle of the *yuck* –

the last thing you want to hear is “everything will be okay!”

NO!!

IT’s NOT okay!

I don’t need that kind of sympathy!

For your comfort, Hebrews is not using a “psychological” sense of “sympathize.”

Yes, Jesus – the Son of God – has shared the experience of suffering.

But that’s not the point.

After all – *everyone* has shared the experience of suffering!

How does that make Jesus helpful?

What’s helpful is that he shared the experience of suffering and temptation,
without the result of sin!

Yet without sin.

How does Jesus help you?

The word translated “help” in verse 16 is the word that the LXX used
to translate “help” all through the OT.

And you’ve probably heard me talk about what a helper does in the OT!

A helper does for you what you could not possibly do for yourself!

In the OT, there are two helpers named.

There is God – and there is Eve.

So when Hebrews calls you to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace,
that we may receive mercy and find grace *to help* in time of need –

you better believe that this *help* isn’t just a little boost to get us over the hump!

This help is to do something that we couldn’t possibly do by ourselves!

So let us draw near with boldness to the throne of grace.

Because Jesus has passed through the heavens,

therefore you may have the confidence to enter the heavenlies as well!

The verb “to draw near” is the verb that is frequently used in the OT to refer to the priests
“drawing near” to God in worship.

And you are to draw near—to come into the very presence—of the living God
with confidence—with boldness.

We'll keep coming back to this idea of drawing near with boldness throughout Hebrews,
because this is the basic result of the sacrifice that Jesus has offered.

He has brought you near to God

1. The Old Priesthood of Aaron (5:1-4)

In order to appreciate this,
we need to understand something about the old priesthood.

Because, quite frankly,
in the 21st century it sounds awfully strange to hear
that you need a priest in order to bring you near to God!

I mean, hey, “God made me, God loves me,
he’s my bud”--
that whole priest business is hierarchical,
and we don’t go for that hierarchy stuff anymore!

Why would you need a priest to come near to God for you?

A. The Priest and His People

Because of sin.

We saw this chapters 3-4:
the rebels in the wilderness could not enter God’s rest
because of their unbelief.

They did not believe God’s promises, but rebelled against him,
and they died in the wilderness.

Nowadays we tend to think – hey, we all mess up – what’s the big deal?!
God loves us!

Yes, God loves us!
But sin is a hell of a big deal! (literally)

Why?

Let’s just imagine, for the sake of argument,
that God let’s sin into heaven.
So if God never actually deals with sin – if God lets everyone get away with stuff,
then in heaven there will be murderers who are trying to kill people.
In heaven there will be rapists trying to rape people.
In heaven there will be thieves stealing stuff

and liars and gossips making life miserable...
Oh – and everyone will live forever, and nothing will get resolved –
so everything will get more and more dysfunctional for all eternity...

That doesn't sound like heaven – that sounds more like hell to me...

And God *does* love the world!
So he couldn't allow that to happen!

This is why we need to talk about the priesthood!

Hebrews explains the importance of the old priesthood.

The point of the old priesthood was that we needed someone to act on our behalf,
offering gifts and sacrifices for sins.

(Read verse 1)

*For every high priest chosen from among men
is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God,
to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.*

As we saw with Moses,

Hebrews will not compare Christ with the worst of the priesthood –
but with the best.

He will take the first high priest–Aaron–in his most glorious moment:
when he entered the holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement.

There were lots of priestly rituals,
there were daily and weekly and monthly sacrifices,
but Hebrews will deal only with the most important moment
in the high priest's work–
the moment when the high priest enters the holy of Holies
in order to deal with the sins of the people.

The high priest was chosen in order to represent the people before God.

The consecration of the priests in Leviticus 8 was an elaborate ritual,
designed to set apart Aaron and his sons for this important service.

And as we saw in Leviticus 9:1, they entered that service on the eighth day.

The consecration of the priests lasted seven days–
they could only enter the presence of God on behalf of the people
on the eighth day!

Thus signifying that there must be another day beyond the seventh day
–a day when man would enter God's rest.

But the high priest was not only appointed to act on behalf of men,

he also should be seen as able to be compassionate:

² *He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.*

The sacrifices of the Day of Atonement were designed to deal with the unintentional sins of the people – those committed in ignorance.

And the high priest was well suited to the task, because he was one of the people.

Hebrews says that the high priest could deal gently with such,
but the old priesthood could not truly sympathize,
because the old high priests were beset with weakness itself.

Notice that this is not treated as a good thing (verse 3):

³ *Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.*

The old high priest was one of us in every way—including sin.

Therefore the old high priest could not bring a final salvation.

If you have a bunch of sinners offering sacrifices first for themselves,
then how can their sacrifices ultimately make you right with God?

And a sinless high priest was unthinkable, according to the Levitical system.

Every high priest was bound to offer sacrifices for himself!

B. The Humility of the High Priest

But even this weak and ineffectual high priesthood was an honor (v4):

⁴ *And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.*

And no one would dare take this priesthood to himself,
unless he was called by God, just as Aaron was.

So in spite of his weakness and sinfulness,
the high priesthood was the highest position that a sinful man could occupy.

He alone could enter the holy of Holies and bring the sacrifices for sins.

But he could only do this if God called him to the task.

To arrogate this to himself would be the height of pride and folly.

2. The New Priesthood of the Son (5:5-10)

B. The Humility of the Son

And so of course we see that Christ did not exalt himself either.

⁵ *So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,*

*“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;*

Once again we start from the similarity!
As we saw in chapter 3, the Son was “just like” Moses—and yet so much greater!
The message has come to us “just as” it came to the fathers in the wilderness,
but with greater power and efficacy!
Even so the Christ—the Messiah—is just like the high priest,
who did not exalt himself to the post,
but was called by God.

When was Jesus called to this high priesthood?
Hebrews roots Jesus’ high priesthood in his sonship.
And as we’ve seen,
in one sense—in his deity—Jesus is the Son of God from all eternity (1:2-3)
in another sense—in his humanity—Jesus is the Son of God from his birth,
from his conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary!
but in a third sense—in his exaltation—Jesus is the Son of God
from his resurrection.

He is the exalted Son, the eschatological Son, because he has become
all that Adam was supposed to be—
all that Israel was supposed to be—
all that David was supposed to be.

That is all very familiar to Hebrews’ audience.
This is the message that Peter and Paul had preached.

But Hebrews recognizes that there is
something more that the Psalms said about the Messiah—
something else that is crucial to this eschatological Sonship.

Because just as Psalm 2 says “you are my Son, today I have begotten you,”
so also Psalm 110 says “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

⁶ *as he says also in another place,*

*“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”*

In other words,
because he is the Son of God
he is able to become the merciful and faithful high priest.

The language of “sonship” is usually royal language.
Kings are called “sons of God”—not priests.

But that is the problem with the Levitical priesthood.
The problem with the Levitical priesthood is that the high priest is not the Son of God.

Hebrews started off by saying that Jesus is “like” Aaron, because he did not exalt himself,
but was called to the high priesthood,
but Jesus is a different order than Aaron.
In Christ, the priesthood is united with the kingship,
because the Christ is the Son of God.

And Psalm 110 is the key to this.
Because Psalm 110 uses the image of a Melchizedekian priesthood.
We’ll talk more about this when we get to chapter 7,
but for now, it is enough to say that Melchizedek was both a king and a priest.

In other words, in the order of Melchizedek we have a true “hierarchy.”
Did you know that hier-archy is simply “high priest” backwards?
High priest in Greek is “arche hierus”
Flip that.
“Hierus - arche” (priest-rule)
So hierarchy is what happens when you turn a chief priest into a priest-chief!

And this is actually at the very heart of the book of Hebrews.
Our high priest is also our king, Jesus.
Hebrews 1-2 establishes Jesus as the Son of God,
the ruler of all things, and the one under whom God has subjected the age to come

Just as Hebrews rooted the rule of Christ in his eschatological sonship—
the inheritance that he received at his exaltation—
so also Hebrews roots Jesus’ high priestly office in that same exaltation.

(v7)
*In the days of his flesh (during his earthly life),
he offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears,
to him who was able to save him from death,
and he was heard because of his reverence.*

This sounds a bit strange at first.
He cried out to him who was able to save him from death—
and he was heard?
But didn’t Jesus die?

Yes!

So did God save Jesus from death?

Yes.

Jesus died.

But he did not remain dead.

He was delivered from the power of death,
and was raised from the dead.

Verses 8-10 are crucial for understanding the whole of Hebrews:

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.”

What did he learn from his suffering?

Obedience.

He learned from what he suffered *obedience*.

Israel was the son of God.

Why then did the wilderness generation fall in the wilderness?

Because of unbelief (3:19).

This is also called “disobedience” (3:18).

Adam was the first son of God.

Why did he fall into an estate of sin and misery?

Because of disobedience/unbelief.

The Son of God must learn obedience.

Obviously, as the eternal Son of God he did not need to learn obedience;
it was in order that he might become the eschatological high priest
(the last high priest)
that he had to learn obedience.

Why is Jesus a merciful high priest who can sympathize with us in our weaknesses?

Because he has endured weakness.

He has suffered.

He learned obedience the hard way.

He was God – but he became man so that he might join us to himself –
so that he might join us to God!

And so *he* was made perfect.

⁹ *And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,* ¹⁰ *being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.*

This word “perfect” does not mean “morally perfect.”

He was already sinless.

This word was regularly used in the LXX to refer to the consecration of the priests.

In Lev 8:33, it says that when the days of your perfection are completed.

Our translation says “ordination.”

But the ordination of the priest was viewed as his “perfection.”

After all, the priest needed to offer these sacrifices in order to move from the category of “ordinary Israelite” to the category of “able to offer sacrifices for others.”

His ordination – his consecration enabled him to enter his duties as high priest.

And so Jesus was “ordained” through suffering.

He was perfected as our high priest through the cross,
and thus became the source of eternal salvation.

Before Jesus – without Jesus – there simply is no way to eternal salvation!

All the OT sacrifices could only give you a “temporary salvation”!

A. The Priest and His People

Christ is similar to the OT high priest in that he was called by God,

but his identification with his people is where the difference begins to be revealed.

The Aaronic high priest was identified with his people

because he, too, was a weak and helpless sinner.

But Jesus is identified with his people

because of his suffering—because of his death,

whereby he took upon himself the penalty that his people deserved.

The high priest did this symbolically.

The high priest bore the sins of the people figuratively—

as he stood before God with the blood of the lamb upon his clothes.

But the picture of the high priest in his bloody garments,

standing before the mercy seat,

is a picture of futility.

He is covered with the blood of an animal.

He offers a sacrifice of limited power.

When he comes out of the holy of Holies he comes bearing a temporary salvation.

And so he’ll have to do this all over again next year!

But Jesus passes through the heavens – not just an earthly mercy seat,

He comes not to the footstool (heaven is your throne, earth is your footstool),

He comes to the heavenly throne of God!

The high priest was perfected through his seven-day consecration,
and entered his service on the eighth day,
becoming the source of temporary salvation to his people.

But Jesus was perfected through his eighth-day resurrection from the dead.
And thus he is designated a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

⁹ *And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.*

If you feel a little bit like “wow – pastor, that was a lot of information –
I’m not sure I quite got that!”

You’re fine!

In the same way that the last few sermons have been an exposition of chapter 2, verses 17-18,
the next few sermons will be an exposition of chapter 5, verses 8-10.

Because these verses set the foundation for the whole of chapters 7-10.
Hebrews will carefully walk us through this material
in order to show us who Jesus is – and what this means for our lives!

Having firmly grounded the priestly office of Christ in his sonship,
Hebrews will go on to explain what it means that Jesus is our great high priest.
He will show what he means by “the order of Melchizedek,”
and why Jesus ascension must be understood in terms of a priestly sacrifice.

Yes, you heard me, the *ascension* is where the sacrifice is seen.
Jesus is perfected through his death.
He is ordained and consecrated to his priestly task through the suffering of death.
But only when he ascends to the Father,
does he do the priestly work of presenting the sacrifice to God.

Conclusion:

The point of all this can be summarized very simply:
Because the Son of God is the great High Priest,
who brings you into the heavenly Holy of Holies,
therefore *you* may now come before the living God.

How do you come?
Confessing your sin.
Confessing your need for mercy!

Asking for help!

Acknowledging that you have a problem is the first step!
But then turning away from the problem – turning to Jesus –
is absolutely essential!

Do you want to live in a world like this forever?

Do you want to stay stuck in the misery forever?

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts –
do not return to yesterday!

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ – and you will be saved!