

Our Great High Priest

Hebrews

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We turn in the word of God to Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 14. Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 14.

14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

Thus far we read the word of God.

Our theme then is quite simply, "Our Great High Priest." Our Great High Priest. The apostle is writing, as we have seen, to professing Jewish Christians and warning them of the evident danger of shrinking back into unbelieving Christ-rejecting Judaism in order to avoid the persecution that owning the Lord Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, as Lord and Christ would entail. Judaism was a protected religion. Once it became clear that Christianity was distinct from it, then Christianity did not have legal protection within the Roman Empire. Once it became apparent that Christianity was not simply a subdivision of Judaism, then the situation radically changed and the Christians, the Jewish Christians, were therefore vulnerable, both from their fellow countrymen and from the Gentile authorities. And the apostle is therefore establishing the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ, that Christ is no mere add-on or specialist extra, but is altogether glorious and of the very essence of the true religion is the profession of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has shown Christ's superiority over the angels through whom the law was given at Sinai in the first two chapters. He has shown the superiority of Christ to Moses, to whom the law was given, in chapter 3 and up to verse 13 of chapter 4. And now, in verse 14, right on to chapter 10, verse 18, the apostle is showing the superiority of Christ to Aaron and his sons and the whole priesthood of the tribe of Levi. So this verse marks the beginning of a new and the longest section showing Christ's superiority. It must be borne in mind that the chapter and verse numbers were not there originally, it's simply they were added much later to be able to find our way around the scriptures, and that verse 14 of this chapter represents the beginning of a new section stretching on, as we say, into chapter 10. And the apostle in due course shows that Christ is superior as a high priest in his permanence, in his effectiveness, in that he offered himself, in his

completeness. He shows Christ's superiority over the priesthood of Aaron and his sons in all these things.

Now, the verses 14 to 16 are an introduction and we were going to take all three verses in one go, but it is evident that verse 14 has sufficient in it for us for today. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." Firstly, the excellency of Christ as our great high priest. The excellency of Christ as our great high priest. The verse begins, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest." The "seeing then" refers back to verse 10, "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his." We saw, when we looked at these verses, that they refer to Christ, or this verse, verse 10, it refers to Christ, that throughout the chapter, or chapter 3 and here in chapter 4, the plural is used, that when the apostle is speaking of the people of God, either now or in the wilderness in Old Testament times, he speaks of we and they, us and them throughout. There is a consistent use of the plural so that when in verse 10, he says, "he that is entered into his rest," he is not speaking of a representative individual as if this is true of every one of God's people; he's speaking of Christ himself, that he has entered into his rest. And the very fact that it says his rest, his own rest confirms this because throughout the earlier verses he is speaking of God's rest and of the necessity of us entering into God's rest. "They shall not enter into my rest." Now when he says "he that has entered into his rest," his own rest, he's using the language of God entering into his own rest and applying it to Christ entering into his own rest, having completed the work of redemption, and it's referring back to that in verse 14 when it says, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest," that is Christ who has entered into his rest as the divine Redeemer. So Christ as the accomplished Redeemer is here in view, seeing then that in Christ we have a great high priest, that God entered into his rest after creation completed and Christ entered into his rest after redemption accomplished on the first Lord's Day.

Let us consider then, under this heading, this first main point of the excellency of Christ as our great high priest, consider the initial description of Christ. He is called a great high priest. Now the word great here, the word rendered great in English, is sometimes rendered chief and it's used of the heads of the orders of the priests when we read of the chief priests. The chief priests, but there is only one high priest. So in the priesthood of the house of Levi, there was the high priest and then among the priests, there were the chief priests, but Christ is here called the chief, the great high priest. In other words, a description is here given of Christ that is not given of anyone else. There was the high priest, there was the chief priest, but he is the chief, the great high priest. He is stressing the uniqueness of Christ. There is no priest like this priest and this immediately tells us that Christ is above and superior to any other priest, legitimate or illegitimate, that there has ever been on the face of the earth. There is no priest like Christ.

There is none to compare to him and this gets to the very heart, the very root of the Hebrews problem, or at least the problem of those, they weren't all but those who were wobbling on the edge of apostasy, those who were dilly-dallying with Christ-rejecting Judaism. How distressing for the apostle to see professing Christians beginning to fraternize with the enemies of Christ, that the prospect of a more comfortable life, a quiet

life, the lure of that, was becoming so great in their hearts and minds that they could consider abandoning professing the name of Christ and so the apostle immediately declared Christ to be far above any earthly priest under the sun. And if that is so, he is certainly superior to that crowd of worldlings posing at the temple in Jerusalem. But now he shows more of the detail of that excellency, who he is. He calls him Jesus, the Son of God. There's the initial description, a great high priest, but then who he is, Jesus, the Son of God. What a magnificent expression. A unique expression. Jesus, the Son of God. His name was called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. He came as the Savior. He was known as Jesus of Nazareth. And he still is Jesus. The one who has passed through the heavens is still that same Jesus who was crucified by the Jews. Their unbelieving countrymen had crucified Jesus of Nazareth, whom God raised up. They're not to appease the enemies of the Lord of Glory. They're not to blend in with those who despise Jesus of Nazareth. He is still Jesus. He is still that same Jesus. Christ did not merely appear to be a man. The divine word did not simply enter into the body of the human Jesus and then forsake him as some of the heretics said and still do. He is still Jesus. He still is God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever.

He is still Jesus. but then he is the Son of God. Jesus, the Son of God. In chapter 1 and verse 3, we read, "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." The brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of his person. Christ's eternal Sonship indicates that he has identity of nature and equality of perfections with the Father.

Even the unbelieving Jews grasp this in John chapter 5. John chapter 5 and verse 17, "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." They understood that his claim to be the Son of God meant a claim to be equal with the Father, equal with the Father in his nature and in his attributes and his perfections.

Christ was eternally the Son of God. He became a man without ceasing to be the Son of God. He is exalted in glory and is still God and man. All the attributes of the Father are the attributes of the Son and yet this is our great high priest. This is the one who intercedes for believers. This is the one who is at the right hand of God. This is the one whom these people profess. And this is the one they were now in danger of denying as they reverted back, reverted back to acknowledging the corrupt version of a now redundant priesthood in Jerusalem. That priesthood in Jerusalem, even when it was legitimate, was to point forward to this great high priest. The blood of the sacrifices giving a ceremonial purity could never take away sin but the priesthood and the sacrifices pointed forward to Christ, the great high priest who offered himself as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

So we see who he is but where is he now? Where is he now? He is said to have passed into the heavens, or passed through the heavens, that is, to the heaven of heavens, to the immediate presence of God. Perhaps some of the Jewish professing Christians made

much of the fact that the Lord Jesus is not visible, "We can't see him. The Aaronic priesthood, we can see it. It's tangible." There they are in Jerusalem with their magnificent robes and the aura as they go into the holy place behind the veil and come back out. There is a visible splendor to it all. But the Lord Jesus is not visible. Why is he not visible? Because he has passed through the heavens and is at the right hand of God and ever liveth to make intercession for his people. This is a glorious invisibility. Blessed be God that Christ is invisible because he has ascended to the right hand of the Father, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Be thankful that Christ is invisible, that he has risen from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God and ever liveth to make intercession for us.

And Christ is working hitherto, not only as the Creator at the creation completed, sustaining and governing the creation, but Christ is also now, as the Redeemer, interceding and applying by the Holy Spirit his completed work of redemption as the Redeemer of God's elect. And so in chapter 7, verse 24, "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost," that is, to the end, forever, "that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Christ will not stop interceding, therefore those who are his will be saved eternally to the end.

In chapter 9 verse 24, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." He is at the right hand of God. The Hebrews were hankering after this visible earthly priesthood, earthly temple, whatever form, well, because they could see it. But faith in Christ is faith in an unseen Savior who is far glorious, far more glorious than any of these things.

The excellency of Christ as our great high priest but then secondly, seeing the excellency of Christ is the only cure for apostatizing tendencies. Apostasy is a turning away, turning away from the truth. Seeing the excellency of Christ is the only cure for apostatizing tendencies. You say, "Well, yes, but the true people of God won't apostatize." Quite so but how are they kept? They are kept by the power of God through faith, through seeing the excellency of Christ.

The apostle speaks personally, he says, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest." They profess to be the people of God. If they were, then we have a great high priest. This is not armchair theology that's of no daily significance. We have a glorious high priest and seeking by the grace of God to pull back those who were unstable among them, they weren't all unstable, of many he was persuaded of good things, things accompanying salvation, but there were some and in seeking to show them that they must cleave to Christ and to his truth, he shows them the great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, he shows them the inadequacy of the Aaronic priesthood, the priesthood of Aaron. He shows how it couldn't save and was never meant to. But he shows that it was to point forward to Christ. He shows them Christ as the fulfiller and the infinitely superior high priest. They must see Christ. They must see that Christ is not simply an optional add-on that can be

dispensed with if it becomes inconvenient but that Christ is essential, that without Christ there is no true religion, that Christ is the all-glorious one and their only comfort in life and in death, that he is all their salvation and all their desire.

Do you witness the Roman Catholic people? I hope you do. You should. All our Protestant Reformers were converted to Christ from Roman Catholicism. Never forget that. Never take any notice of this nonsense as if they're beyond salvation. Of course they're not. No one who believes in the power of God, no one who believes in the scriptures could possibly believe any such thing. But when we witness to the truth, we must show them the excellence of Christ. Yes, we must show them the errors of Romish priestcraft, which is worse than Judaism for Romish priesthood, the Romish priesthood was never even once appointed by God. The continuing Judaistic priesthood was a redundant form of what was once appointed by God but now done away with but Romish priestcraft was never appointed by God. But it's not enough. It's not enough to say that the Romish priest is useless, which he is. They will always hold on to what they have unless they know that there is a glorious, superior priesthood in Christ.

It's true, only the work of the Holy Spirit can bring this about but the manner in which the new nature when it is given to a sinner, responds to the truth, is to lay hold of Christ. You can't expect people to give up the false and then look for the true. People will always hold on to what they have until by the grace of God they see the glory of Christ and of his truth. They must apprehend the mercy of God in Christ to such as are penitent. They must gather courage to repent of all their false hopes and come to Christ. But that's true not only for Roman Catholics, it's true for all sinners. Christ must be set forth, evidently crucified, evidently set forth, crucified among them. We must declare the wrongness of error, whether Romish or any other, but we must set forth Christ.

There is no repentance without faith in Christ. When sinners are renewed by the Spirit and they see Christ as the Savior, as one able to deliver from the wrath to come, which their sins deserve, as the all-sufficient Savior who receives sinners, then they turn from their false hopes and all their sins to Christ. Let them catch a true glimpse of Christ and of his glorious priesthood and the soul that sees Christ in his excellency as the all-sufficient high priest of his people, that soul flies to Christ as doves fly to their windows and they say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" They see that they've been a simple fool in all their false hopes and they turn from it to the Lord Jesus Christ as the pearl of great Christ. They turn from all the dross of false religion and false hopes to Christ, but they must see Christ. Repentance does not take place in a vacuum. They must see Christ to relinquish the useless false doctrine they have or false hopes. They must seek Christ.

What they have might be useless, but they'll hold on to it as better than nothing until they seek Christ as the true Savior but, you know, this holds good for all progress against sin. If we're Christians, we have a hatred of sin but why do we not hate sin more? You say, "Well, it's the work of the Holy Spirit." Yes, that's true but how does the Holy Spirit produce and increase hatred of sin within his people? The answer is that as they see the glory and excellency of Christ, so do they increase in perceiving the hatefulness of sin.

We must abide in the vine. We must have communion with Christ. Our antagonism to sin will be directly proportionate to our appreciation of the glory of Christ. Those sins that you should hate and yet you find that you don't hate them as much as you ought. Incredible. How can that change? Well, it won't change simply by telling yourself you should hate sin. Of course you should. You know you should. Not even the sense of guilt upon the conscience will make us hate sin. It doesn't. You know it doesn't. If you know anything about yourself, you know it doesn't. You can know something's wrong. You know you shouldn't do it. You know you'll feel dreadful after you have done it. But it doesn't stop you. Not in the end. It might rein in the sin, but it can't. It doesn't change. The only thing that prevails is when the Spirit of God increases our sense of the excellency of Christ and then, as we draw nearer to God through Christ, we become more Christ-like and Christ-loved righteousness and hate iniquity.

There is no progress in holiness whatsoever aside from fellowship with Christ. None. And that's one reason why we should study this epistle to the Hebrews, so that our sense of the glory of Christ may increase. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." That brings us thirdly, not holding fast should be unthinkable. Not holding fast should be unthinkable. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, Jesus the Son of God, who has passed into the heavens, let us hold fast our profession." That word profession, it means the acknowledgment of Christ. These Hebrews, or some of them, were thinking of giving that up. It ought to be unthinkable.

"Seeing then, let us hold fast. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, let us hold fast." If we appreciate Christ in his glory as a high priest in things pertaining to God, the idea of giving up the acknowledgment of him is unthinkable. There's no alternative but to holding fast. He's all we have. He's the Lord of glory. No matter what is entailed. No matter if we are troubled by the world on account of it. No matter all the reproach of men. And there will be if we own Christ and acknowledge him as we ought. Having said that, the troubles we are likely to endure at present are nothing more than inconveniences compared with what our forefathers went through. We have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin. But Christ is so glorious that he is worth striving unto blood. Do you believe that? Do you believe that Christ is so glorious that he is worth passing through fire and water to acknowledge in this world? Is that your view of Christ that he is more precious than your family, than your home, than your possessions, than your position in society, and your very life? Any lower view of Christ than that is a dishonor to him because he is.

Is life without the acknowledgment of Christ a non-starter for you because it should be. We get weary, don't we, as if we're swimming against the tide in an evil world. But we ought to refresh ourselves much in thinking upon Christ. Our weariness will seem as nothing if our souls are filled with the beauty and glory of the Redeemer, the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us as the people of God can say. When we see him, nothing by way of sacrificing his cause seems great and truly, nothing in the sacrifice of his cause is great because he is so great and so glorious. He fulfilled all righteousness and bore the sin of many. The Son of God did this, all the reproaches of men, the

contradiction of sinners, the wrath of God, and is now at the right hand of the Father. What more could we want than him?

There's none like him, and the people of God know that. Yes, the sense of it. Alas, it waxes and wanes within us. It ebbs and flows. Oh, that our high views of Christ could be constant as well as higher still. We can't think too gloriously of Christ. Mere creatures we can think too much of. There is no creature that we can't idolize. But we can never think too highly of Christ. And the higher we think of him, the more content will we be in him, and the more holily will we follow him. But perhaps you're not a Christian and this doesn't mean anything to you because you've never seen his beauty. You've never seen his excellence. You've heard his name for as long as you can remember but it doesn't mean anything to you. That's because you're not born again. Your heart has not been changed by the Spirit of God. And when Christians speak of the excellency of Christ, the truth is that you don't really know what they're talking about because he really is excellent. Except in some nominal, theoretical way, you've heard that he's God, he's the second person of the Trinity, that he did something that it was on the cross. You know it's the right thing to do to speak respectfully of him but that's about it. You need to see this Savior, to look upon him who is glorious, to trust in him as the great high priest, the one who was borne divine wrath in the place of sinners and who is now at the right hand of the Father. You must come to God by him. You'll never make yourself better. You'll never remove your guilt of your past sins. You'll never stop sinning. You'll never improve yourself. You'll go on increasing your guilt until you're damned forevermore. You must seek this Savior who is at the right hand of the Father and who receives all sinners who come to the Father by him.

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." Amen.