



Hebrews 4:14-5:10

I was reading in the newspaper that ESPN pulled Hank William's Monday Night Football Theme song because he made some comments about President Obama and an aid that was inappropriate. He shouldn't have made those comments and I am going to miss his song. So here is a tribute to hank for me. Let's sing it together, "Are ya readdddddy for soooooome Hebrewwwws!" Okay, let's begin.

At the end of Luke's gospel, Jesus meets up with some disciples after his resurrection, who are going to Emmaus. As they mourn the loss of Jesus, whom they did not recognize, Jesus reveals his identity. He tells them that from the time of Moses, to the time of the prophets, the Scripture spoke about him (Luke 24:24). In other words, from Genesis through Malachi, the Old Testament, the Scriptures, spoke about Jesus.

That's odd. You're probably thinking that the Old Testament did not mention the story of Jesus. It talked about Adam, Abraham, Moses, Esther, but no Jesus. There was messianic prophesy, but no one named Jesus. But, believe it or not, when you read through these books, they points to Jesus. When you read about these characters, they are really symbolic of someone better who is to come, Jesus.

Though the first Adam that died in the garden brought death, the last Adam came back from the dead in the garden and brought life. Though Abraham almost sacrificed his son, God did sacrifice His on our behalf. Though Moses delivered the people from bondage of slavery in Egypt, Jesus delivers us from the bondage of sin. Though Esther was willing to give her life to save her people, Jesus did give his to save many more!

How does this relate to Hebrews 4-5? The writer is going to talk about the high priest, the spiritual leader in the service in the tabernacle. Jesus was a better high priest. The original readers of this letter were Jewish, they were struggling with their Christian faith because of persecution, and they were contemplating going back to Judaism, so they knew about the High Priest. The writer was speaking their language.

When I went to seminary, I went to a Jewish Synagogue and met with the rabbi. I asked him why Jews do not recognize Christ as the Messiah. He responded by saying that Western Christianity has stripped the Jewishness out of Jesus. You serve a "pop Jesus." He said, "you will never convert an Orthodox or Conservative Jew, though maybe a Reformed one." You see when Christians witnessed to him; they stripped Jesus of his Jewish heritage. So here, the writer is going to put the Jewishness back on Jesus by appealing to the Jewish high priest.

Let's skip down to chapter five, and look what the writer has to say about the High Priest in chapter 5: 1-6

- a. **1. For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, 4 And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.** High Priests were appointed by God:
- b. **to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.** Their Purpose was to address sin:
- c. **2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. 3 Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.** They were Mediators, they offered Animal Sacrifices to God for themselves and sins if the People:

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

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

- Christ is like a High Priest but Better
 - Jesus was also a Son:

e. :

**6 as he says also in another place,
t“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”**

- Jesus was Eternal, we will hit on Melchizedek later

Okay, with that sweeping brushstroke, let's go back to 4:14.

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.

So what does Hebrews 4:14–16 tell us about Jesus, our High Priest, and what difference he makes in our 21st-century lives.

Verse 14 tells us

1. Jesus Is Alive

Notice the emphasis on "we have." The tense is present. It doesn't say *we had* a High Priest. It does not say *we will have* a High Priest. It says, **WE HAVE** a High Priest. We possess that reality right now. You see, all the other high priests in the past lived and died, Jesus also lived and died, but he rose from the dead, never to die again. This is why the whole Old Testament system of the priesthood is over. Jesus is the final priest between man and God because he will never die. We have a priest and he is alive.

2. He Is with God Above the Heavens

Verse 14 says, he is with God above the heavens. That he "passed through the heavens" calls to mind the ascension as Jesus rose through the clouds into another realm, namely, the presence of God himself. Before Christ, the holiest place was the Most Holy Place, in the tabernacle and it could be entered only once a year by the high priest. But that was just a shadow of the true Holy Place in heaven where God dwells. This is where our High Priest lives today. He has immediate access to God in heaven day and night. Hebrews 7:25 says, "He always lives to make intercession for [us]."

Do you realize that? Jesus lives to make intercession for you. Maybe you have felt alone like no one cared. Maybe your phone does not ring like you would want. Maybe you have or are going thru some hardships. Jesus lives to make intercession for you. He does so in the presence of God. He has not forgotten you. Sometimes it feels like it, but he is praying that thru God's strength you will be able to weather the storm.

Illustration: Several weeks ago, we had William share his testimony. He found Jesus at 16 years old, but then he walked away. He was married, divorced. He gave his child up to his mom's custody. He became an alcoholic. He lost his home. He became homeless. At the age of 48 he rediscovered Jesus. He told me at a men's retreat, "I walked away, but Jesus never stopped interceding for me. Never stopped praying. Never gave up. You see, we cannot outlive Jesus. He never gives up."

3. Jesus is the Son of God

So not only is our High Priest alive, not only is he in God's presence. But he is also the son of God. This makes his blood sacrifice all the more unique in comparison to the animals.

Look at verse 15.

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus, Though Tempted, Never Gave In, and so Is Sympathetic

We learn here, in verse 15 that, in spite of how lofty our High Priest is (alive forever, in the presence of God, as the Son of God), nevertheless three other truths about him still stand:

- a. **he was tempted in all the kinds of ways we are**
- b. **he never gave in and sinned; and**
- c. **he is therefore sympathetic with us in our weaknesses.**

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Illustration: I read online, there was a man who put up a sign in his yard that read: "Puppies for Sale." Among those who came to inquire was a young boy. "Please, Mister," he said, "I'd like to buy one of your puppies if they don't cost too much." "Well, son, they're \$25." The boy looked crushed. "I've only got two dollars and five cents. Could I see them anyway?" "Of course. Maybe we can work something out," said the man.

The lad's eyes danced at the sight of those five little balls of fur. "I heard that one has a bad leg," he said. "Yes, I'm afraid she'll be crippled for life." "Well, that's the puppy I want. Could I pay for her a little at a time?" The man responded, "But she'll always have a limp." Smiling bravely, the boy pulled up one pant leg, revealing a brace. "I don't walk good either." Then, looking at the puppy sympathetically, he continued, "I guess she'll need a lot of love and help. It's not so easy being crippled."

"Here, take her," said the man. "I know you'll give her a good home. And just forget the money."

Likewise, Jesus can sympathize with our weakness, yet he did not sin.

Fifty years ago, C.S. Lewis imagined someone objecting here: "If Jesus never sinned, then he doesn't know what temptation is like. He lived a sheltered life and is out of touch with how strong temptation can be." Here is what Lewis wrote in response to that objection:

A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is . . . A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in . . . Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means—the only complete realist.

Jesus can sympathize with us in our pain and our dying, because he experienced excruciating pain and entered all the way into death. And he can sympathize with us in our allurements to sin, because he was tempted—

- to lie (to save his life)
- and to steal (to help his poor mother when his father died)
- and to covet (all the nice things that Zacchaeus owned)
- and to take revenge (when he was wrongly accused)
- and to lust (when Mary wiped his feet with her hair)
- and to pout with self-pity (when his disciples fell asleep in his last hour of trial)
- and to murmur at God (when John the Baptist died at the whim of a dancing girl)
- and to gloat over his accusers (when they couldn't answer his questions)

Jesus knows the battle. He fought it all the way to the end. And he defeated the monster every time. So he was tested like we are and the Bible says he is a sympathetic High Priest. He does not roll his eyes at your pain or cluck his tongue at your struggle with sin.

16 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.

So do not just Hold Fast to Your Hope, but also Draw Near to God with confidence.

Illustration: On several mornings, Machele and I are awakened in bed when a young fellow enters our bedroom. He usually walks around the bed to Machele's side.

If the trespasser had been a total stranger, his entrance would've been criminal intrusion. If he had been a friend, his entrance would've been just plain obnoxious. But it was Korban who had entered our bedroom, jumped on the bed, and boldly said, "I want in the middle." There is a beauty in my sons security in knowing he is wanted.

We are welcome in our heavenly Father's presence as well. Hebrews 4:16 tells us we can "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." We can approach Him confidently about anything—our needs and our desires—knowing that He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

"If man is man and God is God, to live without prayer is not merely an awful thing; it is an infinitely foolish thing."

Let's not be foolish and ignore the help we can find in prayer to our Father. Instead, let's approach Him with the boldness of a child who knows he is loved and wanted by his father.

Verses 7-10

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus 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. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 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

Christ's Purity—He Learned Obedience

But there is one last foundation for our eternal salvation. Christ became the source of eternal salvation, not only because of his sonship and eternity, but also because of his purity. And not just the purity that he brought to his ministry as the Son of God, but purity that he had to forge in the furnace of suffering.

If you ask, Did his divine dignity and his priestly eternity give him automatic purity? the answer is No. It was not automatic. Verse 8 says, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered." This does not mean he moved from being disobedient to being obedient. It means he moved from being untested **TO BEING TESTED AND PROVEN**. He moved from obeying without any suffering to obeying through unspeakable suffering. It means that the gold of his natural purity was put in the crucible and melted down with white-hot pain, so that he could learn from experience what suffering is and prove that his purity would persevere.

And did this come automatically? No. Verse 7 says that it was prayed for and begged for and cried out for and wept for with tears. This was no fake test of Christ's purity. Everything in the universe hung on this test.

Was it brief? Some take verse 7 to refer only to the battle in Gethsemane when he sweat drops of blood and pleaded with God. I don't think so. Notice the word "days" in verse 7—"In the days of His flesh." Not just a night or a day, but during all the "days of his humanity" he was wrestling and praying and begging and crying out and weeping. It was not brief. It was a lifetime of warfare against sin.

And when verse 7b says that he was praying and crying "to the One able to save Him from death," does that mean that he was mainly praying for deliverance from physical death? Was that the main aim of his praying in the days of his flesh? I don't think so, because verse 7 says "he was heard." I think that means God gave him what he asked for, and verse 8 describes the effect of that answered prayer: he learned obedience. Jesus was praying for obedience—for persevering purity.

In other words, Jesus knew that there was a death worse than death. Much worse. Physical death is bad enough and he desired that there be another way to do the Father's will than to die on the cross. But far more horrible than dying on the cross was the impurity of unbelief and disobedience. That was the great and horrible threat. So he prayed all his life against that, and he was heard by his Father and, instead of caving in to sin, he learned obedience from what he suffered.

Melchizedek: He became a source of eternal salvation because of his dignity as the Son of God and his eternity in the priesthood of Melchizedek and his purity in the crucible of incredible suffering.

Now Hebrews 7 takes up this Melchizedek idea in detail. So I am going to save most of our thoughts about it until that sermon. But let me give you a summary here. Melchizedek is mentioned two times in the Old Testament (Genesis 14:18 and Psalm 110:4), that's all. In Genesis he meets Abraham coming back from a military conquest and blesses him, and Abraham gives him tithes. The text simply says, "He was a priest of God Most High." There is no information about his parents or his ethnic origin. He appears and disappears until a thousand years later in the time of David, who quotes God as saying that the Messiah is "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." And that's it. Nothing more about Melchizedek until this writer mentions him here.

The point is this: Melchizedek became a kind of symbolic pointer to a priesthood with no beginning and no ending. That's why Psalm 110 and Hebrews 5:6 stress the word "forever"—"You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Not only does Christ have the dignity of the Son of God, but he also has the eternity of the "priestly order of Melchizedek." What Melchizedek symbolized, Christ realized. Christ really is a High Priest, as Hebrews 7:3 says, "having neither beginning of days nor end of life." He has eternity.

In the end, what this all means is that you have an amazing High Priest. You have an amazing Savior. He suffered like you. But amazingly, he grew in obedience for you because he did not want you to experience life without him. He has done the hard labor. What he wants from you is to draw near to him. How long will you keep fighting him? You have tried to handle things in your own way for too long. Turn to him and draw near. Crawl to him if you have to, just make sure you are moving in his direction. He has sacrificed everything for you, but now it is your turn.

Mohammed Ali was once told by a flight attendant to put on a seatbelt. He responded by saying, "Superman don't need no seatbelt." She looked at him, paused, and said, "yeah that's true, but Superman don't need no plane either."

Don't try to be a Superman. He also symbolizes a type of Jesus. The only son of a father, came from somewhere else, had supernatural powers, yet identified himself as a humble mild man reporter, Clark Kent. But he had a weakness. He could not conquer kryptonite. Kryptonite had the power to bring him death. Not Jesus. Nothing had the power to bring him death. He conquered it. That is why he died for you. Look to him and draw near. Let him be your High Priest, your Savior, and your superhero. And don't ever forget, he is alive and he is in God's presence, and he is praying for you.