

Sermon Series on Hebrews

By John Atkinson (May 2000)

Sermon 3.

Sermon Three – Jesus our High Priest (Heb 4:14-5:11)

Jesus our Great High Priest (4:14-5:11)

- A. Our Confidence (4:14-16)
- B. The Qualities Required in High Priests (5:1-4)
- C. Christ's Qualifications as High Priest (5:5-11)

INTRODUCTION

Last week we looked at the issue of rest as a fundamental aspect of true spirituality – the kind of Spirituality that the Holy Spirit establishes in us.

Isa 63:12 *Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, Who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name,*

Isa 63:13 *Who led them through the depths? Like the horse in the wilderness, they did not stumble;*

Isa 63:14 *As the cattle which go down into the valley, **The Spirit of the LORD gave them rest.** So You led Your people, To make for Yourself a glorious name.*

We saw how the preacher to the Hebrews stressed that two things keep us from this Sabbath-rest

- A Unbelief – the refusal to believe and
- A A Hardened Heart – a heart used to refusing God.

Our Confidence. (4:14-16)

The preacher's attention now returns to the central theme of his sermon. The supremacy of Jesus. Jesus is the Supreme High Priest (the *cohen gadol*) of the Jewish People. Our confidence is based upon who Jesus is and what He accomplished for us on the cross and in the resurrection and ascension and not upon our own worthiness.

The High Priest had a dual role. One the one hand the represented God to His people, officiating at services and teaching the Word of God, and on the other hand they represented the people before God, bringing their prayers and offerings before God. This lies behind the early Christian community's decision to translate the Hebrew term for priest *cohen* by the Latin word *pontifex* - which actually means a builder of bridges.

Christ, above all, is our bridge builder. He is fully human and fully divine. He embodies both ends of the bridge in Himself.

Because of **His real humanity** He is able to empathise with our weakness and our temptations because He has lived a real human existence. The community that this sermon was aimed at needed to know that Jesus empathised with their suffering and their weakness in the face of that suffering. Now you may find **the real humanity of Jesus** a bit hard to believe. The problem is that most of the portrayals of Jesus make Him look as though His feet never quite touched the ground or that He has just had a manicure! We tend to hold onto these ideas quite stubbornly.

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Years ago, Phyllis and I went to see the film Jesus of Nazareth directed by Franco Zeffirelli. Two women were sitting in front of us. I remember that they commented on every aspect of the film throughout. As the film was about four hours long there was an intermission. So we came back, as it turned out, refreshed for the crucifixion.

The ladies in front of us ate potato crisps throughout the rest of the film which had the strange effect of making one feel like one of the onlookers. During the harrowing scene where Jesus was nailed to the cross and His body arched in pain as they drove the nail through His wrist one of the ladies protested to the other, "of course He didn't feel the pain."

While I am sure that you would not entertain such notions of denial we do **struggle to accept the full humanity of Jesus**. Yet it says that in every respect He was tempted as we are. There are two claims here.

First, He was tempted **by the same things** that tempt us. The desire for recognition, power, love, revenge – you know the list!

Second, He was tempted **in the same way** we are. A thought, or idea which finds its way in usually when we are particularly vulnerable.

James describes the process of temptation:

James 1:14 *But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.*

James 1:15 *Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.*

There is a coming together of desire and our will. The consummation of this is that desire is able to conceive and bring sin to birth. Sin pays its wage – death. It is not, as some believe, that Jesus was not able to sin. If this were the case He would not have known what it was to be truly tempted. The difference was that **Jesus was able not to sin** when tempted. The fundamental difference between Jesus' earthly life and ours is that we are not able to live without sin in our lives whereas He was able to live without sinning. He is able to empathise with us in our struggle with temptation and sin. We are confident in Jesus the Messiah because He has gone through the heavens and is now at the Father's right hand. The ascension is a very important part of the vindication of Jesus by the Father. Israel's high priests went through the curtain into the Holy of Holies once a year on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), but Jesus has, on one sufficient occasion, been brought through the barrier of death and utter spiritual alienation into the very presence of the Father. Because of Jesus we can come before God's throne with confidence (16). It is likely that this is a reference to the mercy seat that was in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. It is in the presence of Jesus, at the Father's right hand, that we receive grace and mercy.

The Qualities of a High Priest (5:1-4)

A Taken from among human beings – one of us.

A To offer both gifts and offerings for sin.

A Empathic to the suffering of others.

A The position given by God.

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The preacher returns to the Scriptures to show that Jesus was called by the Father to fulfill this role.

Hebrews 1:5 *For to which of the angels did He ever say, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"?*

Psalm 2:7 *"I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.*

Psalm 110:4 *The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."*

The Messiah's Qualifications as High Priest (5:5-11)

"Though, being a Son, He learnt obedience through the things He suffered."

The context of this suffering must surely be Gethsemane and the Cross. We know that Jesus was always obedient to His Father so why should it say' "He learnt obedience through the things that He suffered?"

Just before His arrest and the events which led Him to His death on the cross He was able to affirm this life of obedience in prayer to His Father

John 17:4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

And then He gave up His life in obedience to His Father.

*Phil 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient **to the point of death**, even death on a cross.*

How then could He learn obedience from his sufferings if it was obedience that had led Him to those sufferings in the first place?

Could it be that his humanity was prone to doubting God's provision as ours is, and like us, He also learned from each evidence of God's providential grace to trust Him even more in the next test of faith? We dare not forget that even in the close of His earthly life, after He had prayed His prayer to the Father He was still in need of trusting His Father for the ultimate – to raise Him from death.

Mat 26:36 Then Jesus came^ with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said^ to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

Mat 26:37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed.

*Mat 26:38 Then He said^ to them, "**My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death**; remain here and keep watch with Me."*

*Mat 26:39 And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "**My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.**"*

Mat 26:40 And He came^ to the disciples and found^ them sleeping, and said^ to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?"

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Mat 26:41 "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Mat 26:42 He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done."

Mat 26:43 Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

*Mat 26:44 And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying **the same thing once more.***

In Hebrews 5:7 we have, almost certainly, a reference to this crisis prayer of Jesus. If we share that reverent fear of the Lord, and copy Jesus' attitude, then we too may learn obedience from what we suffer.

Of this passage John Calvin said – "He did this for our benefit, to give us the instance and the pattern of His own submission."

The suffering of the first community to whom this sermon was addressed is answered by Jesus example. Do not turn away and harden your heart. Do not give into the rage of indigence –why should this happen to me and not to someone else. Submit yourself to God.

Example: The Hymn writer H.G Spafford.

After being in India as a missionary for a year H.G. Spafford sent for his wife and children. They travelled from England by ship. On receiving the news that the ship and his entire family was lost he wrote the words of this hymn.

When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows role
Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to know
It is well, It is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, if trials should come
Let this blest assurance control
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul

My sin – Oh the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin – not in part but the whole
Is nailed to His cross and I bear it no more
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! O my soul

For me be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live
If Jordan above me shall role
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul

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But Lord tis for Thee for Thy coming we wait
The sky not the grave is our goal:
O trump of the angel! O voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.