

**Jesus our great high priest**

- A sympathetic
- The pattern of priesthood seen in the priests of the Mosaic covenant
- Digresses to give us a warning
- The oath of God's mercy
- Melchizedek-priesthood of Jesus

**Jesus makes it possible to live close to God constantly**

1. Who is he?
2. What is he?
3. Where is he?
4. Whose is he?

It is entirely unnecessary that we should fail to move on in hearing the voice of God. The powerful Saviour who has been described so fully in Hebrews 1:1–14 and 2:5–18 is ready to help us. <sup>14</sup>Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold on firmly to the faith we have confessed. From this point onwards our writer will work out very thoroughly what it means to call Jesus our great high priest. (i) In Hebrews 4:14–16 he introduces us generally to the theme. Jesus is a sympathetic high priest. He makes it possible for us to live close to God. (ii) In Hebrews 5:1–10 our writer makes the point that Jesus fulfils the pattern of priesthood that we see in the priests of the Mosaic covenant. (iii) In Hebrews 5:11–6:12 he digresses to give us a warning before he finishes this part of his message. The oath of God's anger may block spiritual progress. (iv) In Hebrews 6:13–20 he points his readers to a different kind of oath: the oath of God's mercy. (v) In Hebrews 7:1–28 he continues his theme of the Melchizedek-priesthood of Jesus. Our Lord Jesus Christ has so much compassion upon us; but it seems we need a lot of convincing that this is really true. Jesus feels for us in our ignorance. He learned compassion in the school of suffering. People who have never suffered are never sympathetic. When we suffer or are oppressed with temptation Jesus says to us, 'I know what it feels like.' We shall never approach our Lord Jesus Christ boldly unless we have a sense of how much he has suffered for us, how much he feels what we feel.

We are asked to live close to God. We often use the phrase 'drawing near' to refer to prayer, but actually I think it refers to something rather more than simply saying a prayer or having a time of prayer. I would think it refers to closeness to God as a permanent lifestyle. Jesus our great high priest enables us to live close to God constantly. Hebrews 4:14 begins to open up this theme for us. Jesus makes it possible.

1. **Who is he?** He is 'Jesus the Son of God'. There is a combination here of two phrases. He is (i) Jesus; and he is (ii) the Son of God. The first word points to Jesus' humanity. 'The Son of God' is Jesus' divine title. It implies his Messiahship and even his deity. When we use it we are thinking of Jesus' divine power.

2. **What is he?** He is a great high priest, the fulfilment of everything that the priests of the Old Testament were predicting and signifying. The priests (i) gave instruction about the sacrificial system, (ii) were symbolic intercessors for the people, and (iii) offered sacrifices for the people. In all of this the priesthood pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us of the way of salvation in himself. He is our intercessor. He offers his own blood as the sacrifice for our sins.

3. **Where is he?** He has passed through the heavens. Just as the high priest passed through the various sections of the tabernacle and entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement, so Jesus has passed into the place in this universe where the character and being of God visibly shines out in 'glory'. He is the immediate, tangible, visible presence of God. There he presents himself, draws the Father's attention to his blood, and puts requests to the Father on our behalf. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. He has passed through the heavens.

4. **Whose is he?** Whom does he belong to? For whom does he do his work? Hebrews 4:14 tells us. He is ours. 'We have a great high priest...'. We respond to him by persisting in faith. 'Since we have a great high priest...let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.'

**How do we handle our weaknesses? We are to believe in the sympathy of Jesus**

Our writer is constantly telling us not to draw back from our faith but to persist in our faith. Our writer explains: <sup>15</sup> *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have Someone who has been tempted and tested in all points just as we have been, but without sin.* One of the greatest requirements in a high priest is sympathy. Men and women are full of weaknesses. The high priest must not be critical or judgemental when faced by weaknesses. Rather he must feel for the person before him, realizing that they are in the grip of weakness which is part and parcel of their nature. We all have weaknesses, bodily weaknesses, mental or intellectual weaknesses. Our weaknesses may come from our temperament or may arise from our background in poverty. Many are troubled by what they feel is sexual weakness. Romans 14:1 speaks of weaknesses of faith. Worst of all is spiritual weakness. But Jesus knows the worst thing about us – and he does not reject us! Jesus himself had weaknesses. How do we handle our weaknesses? We are to believe in the sympathy of Jesus.

**Two appeals**

• *Let us then draw near to the throne of grace*

• *Let us hold on firmly to the faith*

• *Both appeals have to be obeyed*

So – says the writer – <sup>16</sup> *Let us then draw near to the throne of grace with boldness, in order that we may receive mercy and that we may find grace to help us at the right time when we are in need.* We must note the balance here. ‘Let us hold on firmly to the faith...Let us then draw near to the throne’. **Both** of these two appeals have to be obeyed. There are always people who think they do a lot of drawing near to God but they do not hold on to faith in the one-and-only Lord Jesus Christ. They want to be religious and prayerful. They rather like piety! But they seem to think it does not matter whether we have faith in the unique Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. They want to ‘draw near to the throne’ but they do not want to ‘hold on firmly to the faith’.

But there are others who make exactly the opposite mistake. They become interested in Christian orthodox teaching (and that is fine!) but they do not do much ‘drawing near’ to God. You sometimes find churches that love Bible teaching where you have a congregation of a couple of thousand listening to ‘expository preaching’ but no one comes to the prayer meetings! This means that they want to ‘hold on firmly to the faith’ but they do not want to ‘draw near to the throne’. But this is dangerous intellectualism! People that love teaching but do not love praying are in great danger. Both of these two appeals have to be obeyed. There are two items not one! And the two items are connected! You are not really getting through to God unless you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And your holding to the faith is not really holding to the faith unless it leads you to draw near to the throne!



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