

Jesus is Greater
Hebrews 4:14-16 and 5:1-14

1. Who is the Great High Priest?

2. What does the High Priest do?

3. How are we to respond?



West Valley Church
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Hebrews: Jesus is Greater
Chapter Five
Chapter 4:14-16, chapter 5:1-14

Intro video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzqTFNfeDnE&t=108s>

You know, this isn't the first time I've preached the Sunday after April preached. The last time this happened, Pastor Roger was actually there. At our church in Kansas City, we have a special evening service, called Word and Table, where the resident seminarians, and others who would like to, are invited to preach. The service is course for those who sign up, we select a passage from the book of the Bible that our professor has selected for the season, and we preach to the congregation and then are offered feedback and critique. Alongside the professor of the course, our senior pastor also attends the evening service. After April preached her sermon, our senior pastor spent quite a few moments, off to the side with her, encouraging her and remarking on how well she did. You may be able to tell already where this tangent is going. Our professor and our senior pastor are both very busy people, and heavily involved in different ministries. Our professor, a leader in New Testament studies, was away at a theology conference the same week our senior pastor was away on a missions trip to Cuba, which also happened to be same week that I was preaching.

They both were participating in the mission of God at the time, but I am still convinced that they heard April preach, and had already made up their mind that she was the better preacher of the family, and then fled the state and even the country. Their opinion is unknown, but that fact about the better family preacher remains true, and it is one of my favorite facts about our family to share. Both April and I are extremely blessed to be surrounded by a church family that not only loves us, but also supports our individual and collective call to ministry.

Pray: God, thank you so much for sending your Son, to die on the cross and to be resurrected and to restore our relationship with you. May we listen and respond to your word today.

Last week, April preached on finding rest in God and listening to God with an unhardened heart. We are to listen by not just hearing the words of God, but also respond to God by participating in the mission of God and by living with unhardened hearts.

This morning we are going to talk little more about listening and responding. We want to listen to and respond to how Jesus lived His life, who Jesus is, and what that means for us. The Bible is full of accounts of who Jesus is and what Jesus does. The Old Testament

foreshadows the New, prophesying Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection. This account focuses in on the person Jesus was and the salvation Jesus brought.

The letter to the Hebrews was written by believers for believers and primarily sought to strengthen and exhort the early Christian community to persevere in its faith. While strengthening and encouraging, the author of Hebrews provides a deep description of the person and work of Christ, as well as the salvation that Christ brings.

This Jewish, newly converted community had heard Jesus was returning after His resurrection. After waiting for some time now, they get anxious. The complete history of God's people tells us that getting anxious while waiting for God is nothing new for God's people. The author of the letter to this group may have been trying to prevent another "golden calf" moment, or an abandonment of Christianity and a reversion back to Judaism.

This community needed to be reminded of who Jesus is, what Jesus does, and to be called back into a response to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

This letter is for all of us. Sure, we are not newly converted Jewish Christians, but we definitely need to be reminded of who Jesus is and what Jesus does and to be called to respond to Jesus' life and sacrifice.

The points of the letter are focused through the Jewish heritage of the people the letter is written to, but the points still apply for us today.

If you have your bulletin, I have broken up a large passage of scripture into three sections, asking three different questions, and have provided space for you to respond to those questions.

The first question is:

1. Who is the Great High Priest?

And the section of scripture is Hebrews 4:14-16...

¹⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested^[d] as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

In this section of Scripture, Jesus is described as "The Great high priest". Jesus is the Hebrew's high priest, he is humanities high priest. In Judaism, the High Priest was given the

most authority and was responsible for ritualistically cleansing the Jewish people through sacrifices and offerings.

So, you can see why the author of this letter would call Jesus a “High Priest”, to refocus this group of converts who may be thinking of returning to the practices of their heritage.

This group may already be looking to worship in their old customs, in that case, they would go to a High Priest, who would perform rituals and cleanse sin through animal sacrifice.

The author declares Jesus as the High Priest to disperse any thoughts of returning to old sacrifices, because their High Priest, Jesus, has already made a sacrifice for not just their sin, but for all the sins of humanity.

Jesus is referred to as the high priest in this letter, but He is not any ordinary High Priest. Jesus is the great high priest.

Listen to the scripture again:

⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested^[d] as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

“Since, then” also translated as therefore, we are called to listen and participate in the mission of God, hear these words of who Jesus, the great High Priest, is.

Does anyone have an idea of where the throne room in heaven might be located? Is it at the entrance? Is it tucked away, off to the side? No, it is the very center of heaven. Jesus passed through all of heaven and was placed at the right hand of God.

From that position, Jesus continues to intercede on our behalf, from there, Jesus’ sacrifice continues to renew our relationship with God, from there, we are continuously made new, even though we deserve to die.

The author declares “Let us hold fast to our confession”, the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tested just like we are tested, and is found without sin.”

Who is the High Priest? Not a figure who cleanses sin at the time of ritual, but a savior whose sacrifice continuously intercedes on our behalf, continuously bringing us back to God, even though we deserve death.

That is what we are called to hold onto, during our joyous moments and times when our faith is running thin.

Hold onto the promises of Jesus, because Jesus is every one of those names spoken in the video we watched.

The next question is:

2. What does the High Priest do?

And the scripture section is Hebrews 5:1-10.

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; ³ and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. ⁴ And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; ⁶ as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." ⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus^[a] offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹ and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰ having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The author recounts Jewish history, drawing similarities between Christ and others who you could consider "High Priests". What does Jesus, the High Priest do? He takes on the sins of the world, not through ritual, but by self-sacrifice.

And once again, the author highlights the noticeable similarities between Jesus and other High Priests, noting that Jesus was tempted as humans are and was with God on our behalf.

The author then quotes two Psalms that are about Jesus. One declares Jesus as God's son and the other commissions Jesus as the High Priest on earth.

The order of Melchizedek is a quite the story. This is addressed in chapter 7, so I won't give too many spoilers, you're going to have to come back to hear the full story.

This is referencing lineage and respects paid and to whom they were paid to, essentially all leading down to who is the Greatest High Priest. This passage is declaring Jesus as the Greatest High Priest.

The end on of this section is interesting. Although Jesus was God's son, Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered. What did Jesus suffer? Jesus suffered this world.

Jesus suffered the now corrupt world. God, Jesus' father, created the world. Jesus was born into the world, which was now corrupted by humanity.

Jesus did not come to recreate or alter creation, but to redeem it. Jesus came and suffered alongside humanity, in order to maintain his perfection and to become the Messiah, just as God had commissioned Jesus to do.

What does the High Priest do? The High Priest does what He was commissioned by God to do. The High Priest offered supplications while on earth, and then presented his own body as a sacrifice to cleanse our sins. All of this while completely human and while God's Son and all while participating in the mission of God.

3. How are we to respond?

Hebrews 5:11-14...

¹¹ About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become dull in understanding. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

This author really was a preacher, huh? We have much to say about this that it's hard to explain? A classic line, that is very true about most things.

Noticing how long the sermon has gone on, how important it is, and how notoriously impatient that community receiving the letter is, the author, the preacher throws in this section to recapture their attention, full well knowing that they may have drifted off.

The insults continue to pile on, as the preacher commands their attention, and makes sure that they are first listening, because as the letter continues, it demands their participation.

It demands their participation in the mission of God, something that they should have been doing long ago, hence the preacher referring to them as still infants, challenging them to become more mature and righteous.

There are many things and many people in our world today that demand our attention, and it has become increasingly easier to make them our High Priest, to put Jesus second and return to the leadership of the world.

Don't fall into that trap, don't get caught up in our anxiousness for Jesus' return that we begin turning to false idols for the way.

Just as the author said, hold on to your confession, the confession that Christ is Lord, for Christ intercedes for us now and forever, even though we deserve death.

Do not fall back on the things that dictated your life before you met Christ, rely on Christ alone.

How do we respond? We respond by participating in the mission of God while we wait for Christ's return.

We look for ways to become more mature, to continue in righteousness.

We remember the basic beliefs that brought us to our faith, and we build on our understanding of who Christ is.

Once we have heard the Gospel, and believed it, we then have the responsibility to go out and to continue to teach others what we have learned and share how it has transformed our life.

The Bible is somewhat informative, less informative than some give credit for, but still, informative.

Overall, in the grand narrative of the Gospel, presented in the entire Bible, the Bible is transformative.

Our lives are changed when we encounter the Gospel and begin a relationship with the one the Gospel is about.

The stories, letters, and words written are interesting, but they more so inviting. When we hear the word of God, we are called to respond, called to participate in the mission of God.

Pray: God, we thank you for your son. We thank you that we do not have a savior who is unable to sympathize with our weakness. We thank you for Jesus' constant interceding and your everlasting grace, Lord. May we hear your words, and respond. Amen