**Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10 Our Great High Priest**

**September 21-22, 2016**

*Many people have a distorted picture of Christianity as having no message but “fire and brimstone, hell and damnation,” and reading only the first four chapters of Hebrews might seem to confirm such thinking for until now the subject matter has been largely negative – unbelievers will be doomed forever apart from God and his perfect rest and God’s word has been shown in its all-seeing and judging role. Beginning in 4:14 however the focus turns to the positive side of the gospel. Salvation does immeasurably more than merely keeping sinners out of hell. Salvation not only delivers from spiritual death, but it produces spiritual life. It should be sought not only because of the terrible consequences of rejecting it but also because of what we gain when we embrace it – we enter God’s rest because of the beauty and grace of our merciful high priest. The heart of the book of Hebrews focuses on the high priesthood of Jesus – a superior priesthood that makes the New Covenant superior to the old. He alone has done what all the priests together of the OT did not do and could never have done. In one perfect and final act of sacrifice, he opened the way to God permanently. As a result, anyone and at time may, by faith in Christ, enter into God’s presence.*

Were you raised in a religious tradition with priests? If so, what did it mean to you? If not, what do you think the purpose or function of a priest is?

*(“High priest” – the supreme religious head of his people. Aaron held this position first, and it was handed down to the firstborn son of the high priest. His special garments represented his function as mediator between God and people. No one except the high priest was allowed to enter inside the veil into the Holy Place, called the Holy of Holies, the Most Holy, which was the inner part of the temple, where the ark of the covenant rested and the Presence of God dwelt. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest of Israel entered the Most Holy Place to make atonement for the sins of the people (Lev. 16). As our greater high priest, Jesus entered into the heavenly most holy place and was mediator between us and God. He accomplished redemption through his death and resurrection and Jesus opened the way for us to enter into the fullness of God’s presence.)*

**Read Hebrews 4:14-5:10**

Why is Jesus able to sympathize with our weaknesses? What affect does this have on your relationship with Him?

*(“Compassion” – maintaining a controlled but gentle attitude in the treatment of those who are spiritually ignorant and wayward. Impatience, loathing, and indignation have no part in priestly ministry. Such moderation and gentleness come from realizing one’s own human frailty. The priest would be reminded of his own sinful humanity every time he offered sacrifices for his own sins.)*

In light of what Christ has done for us as the great High Priest, how are you encouraged to approach God?

*(“Boldly” – most ancient rulers were unapproachable by anyone but their highest advisers. In contrast, the Holy Spirit calls for all to come confidently before God’s throne to receive mercy and grace through Jesus. The ark of the covenant was viewed as the place on earth where God sat enthroned between the cherubim. Oriental thrones included a footstool – another metaphor for the ark. It was at the throne of God that Christ made atonement for sins, and it is there that grace is dispensed to believers for all the issues of life. “Grace to you” became a standard greeting among believers who celebrated this provision.*

*“Perfected” – because of the perfect righteousness of Christ and his perfect sacrifice for sin, he became the cause of salvation.* *Jesus' resurrection demonstrated that He was not a priest like Aaron, who had to atone for his own sin first. The resurrection vindicated Jesus as the Father's Holy One who bore the wrath sinners deserve, without becoming a sinner Himself)*

How did Christ’s suffering and sacrifice for humanity show that he was the perfect high priest?

*(In Gethsemane, Jesus agonized and wept, but committed himself to do the fathers will in accepting the cup of suffering which would bring his death. Anticipating bearing the burden of judgment for sin, Jesus felt its fullest pain and grief. Though he bore the penalty in silence and did not seek to deliver himself from it, he did cry out from the agony of the fury of God’s wrath poured on his perfectly holy and obedient person.*

*“Obedience” – Christ did not need to suffer in order to correct or conquer any disobedience. In his deity as the son of God, he understood obedience completely. As the incarnate Lord, he humbled himself to learn. He learned obedience for the same reason he bore temptation, to confirm his humanity and experience its sufferings to the fullest. Christ’s obedience was also necessary so that he could fulfill all righteousness and thus prove to be the perfect sacrifice to take the place of sinners. He was the perfectly righteous one whose righteousness would be imputed to sinners.)*

How and why did the writer compare Jesus to Melchizedek? (Gen 14:18-20, Heb 7:1-3)

*(“Melchizedek” – an ancient man whom God intended to serve as a picture of Jesus Christ. It was easy to see why the priesthood of Jesus would be difficult for early Jewish Christians (and us) to grasp. He was not from the lineage of Aaron, Jesus did not practice any special ministry in the temple, and he confronted the religious structure instead of joining it. In Jesus' day, the priesthood became a corrupt institution. The custom had become High Priest in those days through intrigue and politicking among the corrupt priesthood. “A priest forever” is an important contrast. Jesus' priesthood (like Melchizedek's) is unending, but no High Priest descended from Aaron ever had a forever priesthood.* *V11 “become dull of hearing” explains why the writer doesn't go into the topic of Melchizedek right away. He wants to address some critical basics before going on to more intricate topics, but their spiritual condition makes it hard to explain. He fears the discussion of Aaron and Melchizedek and Jesus will sound too academic and theoretical to his readers. At the same time, he recognizes this says more about his dull hearers than the message.*

**Read Psalm 110**

How does this OT passage describe the messiah compared to Hebrews?

***Read Leviticus 16:1-34; 17:11 (this a long passage but gives an in depth look at the Jewish sacrificial system, you can read as a group, or give a short synopsis).***

*What five words would you use to describe the ancient Jewish sacrificial system? How did Christ render these practices obsolete?*

**Read Isaiah 53:1-12**

What does this ancient prophecy say about Christ’s work on behalf of sinners?

*(In sending His son, Jesus Christ, God no longer kept himself aloof, transcendent, and separate from men. He entered into the human world and felt everything that men will ever feel in order that he might be a sympathetic, merciful, and faithful High Priest. If God had never become man, he never could have been a high priest, mediator, or an intercessor. He never could have offered the perfect and absolute sacrifice for the sins of his people, which divine justice required. The incarnation was not an option, it was a necessity, an imperative if men were to be saved. God had to come down to where we are in order to pick us up and bring us back to himself.)*

**Reflection**

In what area of your life today do you need the mercy and grace that can only be found when you “come boldly to the throne of grace”?

As the perfect high priest, how does Christ deserve your honor today? How specifically will you live to show your gratitude and reverence?

When we have sinned and are in trouble, or are dealing with the temptation to sin, we often hesitate to turn to God. We think we can handle it on our own, or we feel the need to “clean up our act” before we approach him. How can Christ’s understanding and sympathetic nature motivate you to turn to him today in times of temptation and trouble?

References: *Hebrews by John MacArthur*