

Introduction...

Hebrews 10:11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

Have you ever considered what it was like to spend a day as a priest in Jerusalem? If you were a Jewish priest in active service at the temple, then your day began before the sun came up. You would gather with the other priests on duty and cast lots to decide which tasks you would perform on that day. You might be filling the bronze lavers with water or maybe preparing the altar for the sacrifices to come. You might be stationed at the gates, which opened at 9 am, or maybe you would blow the silver trumpets to announce the beginning of the morning service.

Of course, there was a possibility that your day had a bloodier start to it. Each morning a sacrificial lamb was slain and then salt was sprinkled on the sacrifice. Someone had to make sure the lamps were trimmed, the incense needed to be filled, burnt offering was given, the drink offering was poured out and then the trumpets were blown again. The morning service would come to an end with the singing of the Psalm of the day presented by singers (Levites) and this would be accompanied with the playing of instrumental music.

An evening service, much like this would begin at 2:30 pm and this meant you had a few hours before you would be doing this all over again. But and in between the two daily services the people were allowed to come and offer private sacrifices or offerings as needed. If you were a priest of God this was your routine every single day but there were also special days like the Sabbath. There were special feasts and celebrations, each requiring careful attention on the part of the priests. There were even some functions that only the high priest could perform, like entering into the most holy place, which was the highest honor a priest could ever hope to receive.

The responsibilities of the priests included making the sacrifices and performing the ritual of the sanctuary, burning the incense along with their intercession in the Holy Place, and teaching the people the laws and the ritual (**Deut. 33:9,10; Mal. 2:7**). According to the writer of Hebrews, these services took place day in and day out, the sacrifices were offered over and over; but at the end of the day sin remained (**Heb 10:11**).

Something needed to change and with the coming of Christ it did change. Jesus brought an end to this priestly system. He even brought an end to the temple that housed the priestly operations. He did this by stepping into the priestly role himself offering the single sacrifice of His own body as atonement for the sins of all those who believe. When His task was completed He rendered this entire priestly system obsolete and He took up the office of ***Our Great High Priest***.

Hebrews 4:14 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. 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. 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.

Transition...

In the Old Testament, God established three offices to operate within the nation of Israel; Prophets, Priests and Kings. These offices were put in place to function in the lives of the people and to help them have an ongoing relationship with God. But one of the things we learn in the New Testament is that these offices were also put in place to foreshadow the day when God's Son would take up

each of those offices on behalf of His people. The writer of Hebrews refers to the function of those three offices in the Old Testament as mere shadows and He refers to Christ as their fulfillment.

This is one of the primary points of the book of Hebrews; to show us that in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation a radical change has taken place with the coming of Jesus. Within God's plan for the redemption of His people a shift has occurred from the Old to the New, from promise to fulfillment, from shadow to substance.

Jesus has taken over the priestly office and has assumed the role of our **Great High Priest** and our task this morning is to understand the shift that has taken place. ***To do that we are going to learn 2 truths about Jesus as our High Priest, 2 ways that we respond to Jesus as our High Priest, and 1 promise made sure by Jesus our High Priest.***

Sermon Focus...

I. 2 Truths about Jesus, Our Great High Priest (V. 14)

V. 14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God...

The first thing I want us to see in this verse is that Jesus is our High Priest but He didn't come into that role in the conventional way. The high priest was distinguished from other priests by the roles and responsibilities that fell to him, but also by his family lineage. The priesthood traced its lineage back to Aaron and through Aaron's sons. If you were part of that family line then you were eligible to serve as a priest. The high priests came from the line of Zadok, Aaron's grandson and this was the established pattern up until the time of the exile.

Each High Priest was supposed to be able to trace his lineage back to the High Priestly families, but from the exile onward, the high priests were often appointed by rulers and at times the office could be attained for a sum of money.¹ This led to much corruption within the priesthood and the regular operation of the temple, which Jesus addressed during his ministry (**Luke 19:46**). The High Priests major responsibilities were to make atonement in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, to officiate in the Temple, and (at certain times) to preside over the Sanhedrin.

Now, we just read in Hebrew 4:14 that Jesus is our Great High Priest but He is not a son of Aaron, He is the Son of God. He came into this role in an unconventional way. Obviously, as the Son of God He can have and do whatever He wants but don't forget that He is also a Son of Man. Jesus' lineage is two-fold, divine and human **and one of the question that we should ask is how can a nobody from the tribe of Judah become High Priest, or better yet our Great High Priest?**

To answer this question, we need to talk about a priest named Melchizedek. First of all, Jesus is not from the priestly line of Aaron, instead His human lineage follows the kingly line of David, which we will talk about more next week. But, Jesus' entry into the priesthood didn't come from His human genealogy, it came by divine appointment.

¹ From the Talmud (Talmud Jer. *Ioma*, I.), "In the first Temple, the high-priests served, the son succeeding the father, and they were eighteen in number. But in the second Temple they got the high-priesthood for money."

Heb 5:1 For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins...⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, **but was appointed by him** 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, after the order of Melchizedek.”

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.**

Now, I’m certain that most of you didn’t come to church this morning wondering, “I sure hope Pastor Justin helps me understand that guy Melchizedek?” but this is a very important point in the discussion about Jesus’ priesthood and it ties in with this mysterious character from Abraham’s past. **Melchizedek was the king of Salem and a priest of the Most High God; he held both of these offices.** He met Abraham in Genesis 14 after the battle to rescue Lot from the five kings. Melchizedek met Abraham with bread and wine and blessed him and then Abraham gave him a tenth of all that he had.

That is all that we know of Melchizedek until **Psalm 110**, which is both a royal Psalm because it deals with David’s kingly line but it is also a Messianic Psalm. But the really odd thing about Psalm 110 is that it connects the kingly line of David (Jesus lineage) to the priestly line of Melchizedek. Then later in Zechariah (3 & 6) we see a vision where God sends His servant and this servant is called **the righteous Branch.**

Zech 6: 12 ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Behold, the man whose name is **the Branch**...¹³ It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” ’ ¹⁴ And the crown shall be in the temple of the Lord

So what does all of this mean? Melchizedek is important for two reasons: He is a priest of God from outside the line of Aaron and in him we see a pattern of one who would serve as both a priest and a king. This means that God’s plan has always been to bring together, through His Anointed Servant, the two offices of Priest and King and these offices would be held by the Messiah permanently.

The Old Covenant priesthood was intended to be temporary because it was just **‘a copy and shadow of the heavenly things (Heb 8:5).’** When God gave Moses the instructions for the temple and the instructions for the priesthood, **He gave him only the earth scale model of what was truly taking place in Heaven.** The earthly priests were acting out a ritual that would eventually be played out in Heaven itself.

When the High Priest would go into the Holy Place to make sacrifices and offerings for the people, he was simply acting out what Jesus would eventually do when **He passed through the Heavens.**

The OT High Priest came before the earth scale model of the Throne of God, but Jesus went before the actual Throne of God and He is there now, constantly reminding the Father of the sacrifice that He made for us and constantly praying to the Father on our behalf.

Brothers and sister, “we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.” We also have a Great High Priest who understands our humanity in ways that make him sympathetic to our weaknesses because He lived on earth in the flesh and during that time He experienced all of the temptations that we face, but He was without sin (**V. 15**)

Brother/Sister Jesus knows what it is like to be tempted to sin. In fact, He knows more about facing and overcoming temptation than you and I ever will. We face temptations and there are times we overcome but far too often we fail and give in. Our capacity to battle temptation is small compared to His. He has faced every temptation that we have but He never gave in to them, which means that His capacity to sympathize with us is greater than we can imagine **and if we will look at God’s word we will see His sympathy in action.**

Think about Jesus’ sympathy for the woman caught in adultery in John 8. Why didn’t He call for her to be stoned? Why didn’t He pick up the stones Himself? For one, He felt sorrow (sympathy) for her. He understood the temptation that she had given in to and rather than condemn her, He felt compassion for her and He did what only a great High Priest could do; He brought her case before His Father.

Do you realize that right at this moment Jesus is serving as your Great High Priest in Heaven. He is sitting at the father’s side asking Him to show you mercy and grace. When you are being tempted to sin, Jesus is fighting for you before the throne of God. When you fail and give in to that temptation, Jesus is ready to forgive you and cleanse your sin away. Right now, He is sitting at God’s right hand reminding the Father of His sacrifice for you and praying that the Father would restore you and give you new mercy and fresh grace.

And because He lived on this earth in the flesh Jesus knows the sorrow that sin brings. He knows the pain that sin leaves behind. He knows the guilt that you bear from past sins and the anxiety you face in your present struggles. He not only faced the temptations that we face, He also lived with sinners. He may not know our grief first-hand but He sat with those whose lives had been destroyed by sin. He ministered to those whose families were torn apart by sin. He comforted people who had to live with the fact that their sin had brought pain and heartbreak to people they loved.

Jesus knows and He cares. Jesus is the great High Priest that God planned to give to His people. He is the priest who lives forever, divinely appointed to offer the once-for-all sacrifice to atone for our sin. He is at God’s right hand and will remain there for eternity whispering prayers in the Father’s ear on our behalf.

But what does this mean for you and me? It means that we should hold fast to our confession of Jesus as our Savior and we should draw near to the throne of God with confidence.

II. 2 ways that we respond to Jesus our Great High Priest (V. 14 &16)

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...** (and)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.

First, we respond to the news of Jesus as our High Priest by holding fast to our confession. This means that we don’t abandon our faith in Christ as the Son of God who saves us from our sin. We

stay faithful. We keep trusting His gospel and we keep believing His promises. ***Why would we turn away from this Great High Priest?***

The author of Hebrews is writing this letter to Jewish Christians who are being tempted to abandon Christianity and run back to Judaism. They were being tempted to go back to the system of sacrifices and laws that they had known all their lives. They weren't sure if Jesus would truly save them and bring them to God.

But the whole point of this book is to show us that Jesus is better. Jesus is the One that God has been pointing us to ever since Genesis 3. He is the Savior that God promised and the Savior that has come. He truly brings us to God as the fulfillment of God's eternal plan of salvation and because of that he urges us to hold on to our confession of Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Don't be ashamed of Jesus. Don't abandon the hope He gives you. Don't seek some other way to deal with your sin or your temptation. Don't seek another priest, but ***Hold Fast*** to Jesus and with ***confidence draw near to the throne of grace***. We should hold fast and draw near because everything that was required for our salvation has been provided. We have no reason to fear and no reason to turn back.

Heb 10:12 When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...¹⁴ For by a single offering ***he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified***.

Let me try to put this into perspective for us by imagining what it was like to try and approach God before the coming of Jesus.

(Illus... May I Go In There?)

Imagine with me a Moabite of old gazing down upon Jerusalem and the Tabernacle of Israel from some lofty hillside. This Moabite is attracted to what he sees so he descends the hill and makes his way toward the Tabernacle.

He walks around this high wall of dazzling linen until he comes to a gate and at the gate, he sees a man. "May I go in there?" he asks, pointing to the gate where all the bustle of activity in the Tabernacle's outer court can be seen.

"Who are You?" demands the man suspiciously.

"I'm from Moab," the stranger replies.

"Well, I'm very sorry, but you can't go in there. You see, it's not for you. The Law of Moses has barred the Moabite from any part in the worship of Israel until his tenth generation."

The Moabite looks so sad and said, "Well, what would I have to do to go in there?"

"You would have to be born again," the gatekeeper replies. "You would have to be born an Israelite, of the tribe of Judah, or of the tribe of Benjamin or Dan."

² This is taken from an illustration in John Phillips' Exploring Hebrews commentary

"Oh, I wish I had been born an Israelite," the Moabite says and as he looks again, he sees one of the priests, having offered a sacrifice at the brazen altar and the priest cleansed himself at the bronze laver and then the Moabite sees the priest enter the Tabernacle's interior. "What's in there?" asks the Moabite. "Inside the main building, I mean."

"Oh," the gatekeeper says, "That's the Tabernacle itself. Inside it contains a lampstand, a table, and an altar of gold. The man you saw was a priest. He will trim the lamp, eat of the bread upon the table and burn incense to the living god upon the golden altar."

"Ah," sighs the Moabite, "I wish I were an Israelite so that I could do that. I would so love to worship God in there and help to trim the lamp and offer Him incense and eat bread at that table."

"Oh, no, the gatekeeper hastens to say, "even I could not do that. To worship in the holy place one must not only be born an Israelite, one must be born of the tribe of Levi and of the family of Aaron."

The man from Moab sighs again, "I wish that I had been born of Israel of the tribe of Levi of the family of Aaron," and then, as he gazes wistfully at the closed Tabernacle door, he says, "What else is in there?"

"Oh, there's a veil. It's a beautiful veil I'm told and it divides the Tabernacle in two. Beyond the veil is what we call 'the Most Holy Place'... 'the Holy of Holies.'"

"What's in the Holy of Holies?" the Moabite asks.

"Well, there's the sacred chest in there and it's called the Ark of the Covenant. It contains holy memorials of our past. Its top is gold and we call that the mercy seat because God sits there between the golden cherubim. Do you see that pillar of cloud hovering over the Tabernacle? That's the Shekinah glory cloud. It rests over the mercy seat," said the gatekeeper.

Again, a look of longing comes over the face of the Moabite man. "Oh," he said, "if only I were a priest! How I would love to go into the Holy of Holies and gaze upon the glory of God and worship Him there in the beauty of His holiness!"

"Oh no!" said the man at the gate. "You couldn't do that even if you were a priest! Only the high priest can enter the Most Holy Place. Only he can go in there. Nobody else!"

The heart of the man from Moab yearns once more. "Oh," he cried, "If only I had been born an Israelite, of the tribe of Levi, of the family of Aaron. If only I had been born a high priest! I would go in there every day! I would go in there three times a day! I would worship continually in the Holy of Holies!"

The gatekeeper looked at the man from Moab again and once more shook his head. "Oh no," he said, "you couldn't do that! Even the high priest of Israel can go in there only once a year, and then only after the most elaborate preparations and even then only for a little while."

Sadly, the Moabite turned away. He had no hope in all the world of ever entering there!

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by

the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith (**Hebrews 10:19-22**).

Here it is, a tremendous word of welcome, extended to Jew and Gentile alike, to come on in and worship, not in the holiest place of the human tabernacle, but into the Holy of Holies in heaven itself "by the blood of Jesus."

Conclusion...

We don't have to stand outside the temple any more. We can go right in to the very throne of God and we will find that it is a throne of grace. Because of Jesus, God's throne of judgment has become to us a throne of grace. As believers in Christ, when we approach God we will find there mercy and grace to help in our time of need.

So, draw near to Christ today and confess your sin and your need of Him. Hold fast to Christ today knowing that if you hope in Him your hope will not fail you.