

Holding Fast to our Great High Priest

The Son's priesthood, as a "topic", cannot be separated from His perfect, effectual, once-for-all sacrifice nor the New Covenant in His blood, nor the law, nor worship. None-the-less, this study will focus on the Priesthood of Jesus Christ, and why holding on to Him is vital.

We will begin with two wrapping (inclusio) statements (4:14-16 & 1:19-23) followed briefly by some important central passages regarding the priesthood of Jesus Christ (7:20-8:6), then closing with some brief observations around mediatorship and intercession in priesthood.

Holdfast our confession and confidently draw near 4:14-16.

Context: this passage immediately follows on from the warnings and exhortations regarding unbelief (study 2) e.g. 4:11 ... *strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience*, and that 4:13 ...*all are exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account*.

They (we) are not left with a threat of judgement; all that they need to endure and enter God's rest is found in our great high priest. They aren't to focus inwards "trying harder" to work up faith, they are to focus on Jesus Christ. This set of two short exhortations does exactly that; they draw their attention to Jesus Christ, their great high priest.

4:14-16 parallels 10:29-23; "The inclusio serves as an indicator of the extent of the Letter's central statement" Pfitzner pg 86.

4:14-16 *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.*

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. 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.

10:19-23 ... 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, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 4:14-16 contains two sets of truths about the Priesthood of Jesus Christ to confess, each with an exhortation to an obedient action (faith) response.

Truth to believe 1. Since then

4:14a *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God*

- **Great high priest:** Not any priest, but the greatest of all priests – surpassing Aaronic priests because he is *Jesus, the Son of God*, who is demonstrably superior to the former priests.
- *Who has passed through the heavens.* The old priests, after making sacrifice for their own sins and the sins of the people, returned to their sinful people. After making sacrifice for sins, our sinless great high priest, ascended to the place of reign and rule *After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high* (1:3b).
- The heavenly curtain (10:20) separating the people and the Most Holy dwelling place has been opened by the blood of Jesus – we have access to the heavenly sanctuary. *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater*

and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places. (9:11-23b)

- The Son has ascended to this heavenly sanctuary as king, judge and priest – when accusations are brought to Jesus Christ as the righteous judge, He “*will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more*” (8:12).

Qu. How can God forgive and remember no more? e.g. Deut.5:8

Obedient action 1. Let us ...

4:14b let us hold fast our confession.

- Confession of the early Church – that the Son of God, Jesus Christ is Lord.
 - “... *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*”. Rom10:9
 - *And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”* Acts 16:31
- We have a high priest, mentioned in 2:17 and 3:1 but now this truth is expanded and highlighted in their “confession”.
- Confessions are about what we believe, creeds are about in whom we believe (TGC)
- Confession: We have a great high priest in heaven, The Son of God who rules over all things.
- Apostles’ Creed: I believe in God the Father ... and in Jesus Christ who ... “He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty” ... and the Holy Ghost ...

Qu What do we inwardly and openly confess about Jesus Christ?

Truth to believe 2. For we do not have ... but one who ...

4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Sympathise (ESV), empathize (NIV), have compassion (Wycliffe), touched with the feeling of our infirmities (ASV).

- *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise:* He understands the pressures that the readers were experiencing, pressure to live apart from faith, pressure to yield to temptation, not trusting and obeying.
- *... but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are:*
 - Led by the Spirit in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13) refused to:
 - depart from the Father’s instruction and provision.
 - engage in false worship & establish independent dominion.
 - put God to the test.
 - He remained obedient to the Cross: *Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.* Luke 22:42.
- *yet without sin:* Unlike Aaronic priests who were all sinful needing to sacrifice for their own sins, His priestly service was for the people alone. Victory over Sin was won because He did not give in to temptation, because He held faith in His Father’s plan for salvation, labouring until the work was finished.
- Our great high priest remains a man who can still sympathise with our weaknesses: He doesn’t just remember what it was like to be tempted, His priestly ministry operates in this understanding of us.
- As should His Household - *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.* 1 Peter 2:9

Obedient action 2. Let us then ...

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.

- That Jesus Christ is able to sympathise with our weakness gives us confidence to approach Him with our requests and with our worship.
- We approach for both forgiveness (mercy) and help (grace).
- The Mercy seat in the earthly Holy of Holies was the throne of God's presence. This has been replaced with the superior *heavenly sanctuary*, and God hasn't changed: Our great high priest has brought a once-for-all atoning sacrifice both to propitiate wrath (a merciful action averting punishment for sin) and allowing Man to dwell in His presence, at one with Him, worshipping Him (undeserved grace). Draw near.

Superior priesthood 7:20-8:6

Writing to believers who had no earthly hope – prison, loss of property, possessions, income, family, life. They needed to set their confident hope in their high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, not on the things of this world.

Former priests	Jesus Christ's priestly ministry	Consequence/s
Temporary (7:23)	Perpetual (7:24)	Saves to the uttermost –and Always lives to make intercession for them (7:26).
Sinful (7:27) and weak (7:28)	Perfect: <i>Holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted to the heavens</i> (7:26)	A holy loving priest that we can trust. Strong An unstained & acceptable sacrifice.
Repetitious , daily sacrifices (7:27)	Once for all (7:27)	No need for any other priest to make any other sacrifice for our sin.
Without an oath (7:20)	Sworn oath (<i>You are a priest forever</i> 7:21)	Jesus the guarantee of a better covenant (7:22) – God cannot lie.
Copy (8:3-5), earthly	Ministers in the true tent, the Heavenly Sanctuary (8:1-2)	Makes all things pure in the heavenly household of God – including us, pure unity and worship Unshakable c.f. 12:26-29
Old - Mosaic (8:6)	New Covenant	the covenant he mediates has better promises (study 5)

There is one mediator

8:6 *But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the **covenant he mediates is better**, since it is enacted on better promises.*

Mediator: Webster dictionary definition, “someone authorised to perform sacred rites of a religion, especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God”.

Qu. Is there another person who we need to, or should go through to approach the throne of Grace to receive grace and mercy in our time of need?

1 Tim 2:5-6 *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

“There is no-one else in this position, who can claim true mediatorship. Christ is the one and only possible mediator – he is unique. In him alone priesthood and mediator-ship coalesce.”
Martin Bleby – The True Nature of the Priesthood.

Two intercessory prayers

7:25 *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since **he always lives to make intercession for them.***

Luke 22:31-32 *“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”*

John 17:10-23 *My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

O soul are you weary and troubled
No light in the darkness you see
There's light for a look at the Saviour
And life more abundant and free

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace*

His word shall not fail you he promised
Believe him and all will be well
Then go to a world that is dying
His perfect salvation to tell

Helen Howarth Lemmel (1863-1961)