

Our Great High Priest

- 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."
- ^{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.
- ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness."

Hebrews 4:14-5:2

Singing About The Priest

OUR CHURCH STILL USES A HYMNAL. Hymnals are structured books often ordered systematically according to the goals of the editors. The hymnal we use is called the *Trinity Hymnal Baptist Edition*. It follows the same outline as

its Presbyterian counterpart the *Trinity Hymnal*, keeping 99% of the songs, substituting a few hymns that would not otherwise fit our Baptist distinctives, changing some of the tunes, and adding a Psalter appendix so that all of the Psalms are represented in song.

This hymnal has 774 songs in it, and in the hymnal's index 170 songs are devoted to Christ. The topics include his deity, praise, love and grace, advent, birth, life, atoning work, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and offices. Out of all of these songs, how many do you suppose are devoted to Christ's office as a priest? This was a question once posed to me by a pastor who knew the answer and thought it not only surprising, but shocking. In the index of the hymnal the answer is: two. (Things are not actually as bad as the pastor thought. I did a search for the word "priest" and found that fourteen songs contained the word).

Calvin is often credited as the source who really brought to the attention of the church the **threefold offices** of Christ and their importance saying, **"In order that faith may find a firm basis for salvation in Christ, and thus rest in him, this principle must be laid down: The office enjoined upon Christ by the Father consists of three parts. For he was given**

to be prophet, king, and priest.”¹ Given such importance, one would think that two songs dedicated in an index to the topic of Christ as priest would seem underwhelming to say that least. Though we may in fact have two more songs about Christ as a priest to sing than many other Christians do, still I use this little fact as a backdrop against the importance that not only Calvin saw in Christ’s priesthood, but that Hebrews does as well.

Our Great High Priest

The priesthood of Jesus Christ now becomes the dominant focus of the book of Hebrews. After introducing us to Jesus by telling us that the Son is greater than all the angels because 1. He created them (**Heb 1:2**) and 2. He became a man who died on the cross and conquered Satan (**2:14**), he began telling us that this God-man became a faithful high priest in the service of God (**2:17**). His **primary pastoral motivation** here was to help us know that Jesus has suffered when tempted and therefore he is able to help us

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 494.

when we are tempted (2:18).

But at just the moment Hebrews introduces Christ as the high priest, it goes in a different pastoral direction, warning its hearers to pay very, very special attention to Jesus lest they fail to enter God's rest. Though they are Christians and confess Christ, confessing Christ must also be done out of faith in Christ. Lip service must arise from a tender heart for Jesus, not just because it seems like "the thing to do." Otherwise, there are grave dangers and consequences.

This warning continues in one form or another for almost two chapters, and concludes with a warning about God's word. As we saw last week, the "double-edged sword" of the word of God in 4:12 was a term used both of war swords and priestly knives which were used for circumcision and sacrifices. This may have been the signal in the preacher's mind to bring himself back to Christ as the high priest, which now happens at the end of Ch. 4. Thus the chapter finishes with these words, "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.” From here it will spend three chapters talking about how Christ’s priesthood is superior to the high priesthood of Aaron and four more chapters on how Christ’s priestly ministry is greater than the priestly ministry of Aaron. But for today, we only want to introduce ourselves to this rather unsung office of the Lord Jesus. Christ is a great high priest. What a marvelous note this is to sing.

Priests and A Great High Priest

Let’s begin with a basic question that arises from the title given to the “Son of God” in **Heb 4:14**. He is called “a great high priest” (*archiereus*). The question is, **what is a priest?** It seems an odd question, since most of us have an opinion already on the question. However, we need to realize that the reality is we no longer see priests in the same way that the entire ancient world had them prior to the coming of Jesus, and some of us don’t see many priests at all.

Priests were found everywhere, in every part of the

world, in every religion on earth. If you had a temple (and everyone did), you had a priest and a priesthood. Today, you still find them in most pagan religions. But you also hear the word used in certain segments of Christianity. Rome, Anglicanism, and Orthodoxy refer to certain offices in the church as “priests.” But this can add confusion to what a biblical priest actually was.

In the instance of the **Anglican/Episcopalian**, the term is basically a synonym for an **elder** (*presbyteros*; cf. 1Ti 5:17) or **bishop** (*episcopus*; 1Ti 3:1), which are overlapping terms that refer to **oversight** of a various groups of people.² Now, many people don’t realize that in the LXX OT, these terms include, but are not limited to, priests.³ The priests would have “oversight” of the tabernacle and religious instruction. So they could be called in some sense elders of bishops. But this only scratches the surface of what a priest in the OT or

² For the overlap compare something like **1 Tim 5:17**’s “elders” (*presbyteros*) who teach and preach with the office of the *episcopus* in **1 Tim 3:1-7** and **Titus 1:7-9**. But on *presbyteros* as something that goes beyond the formal office see its use in **1 Tim 5:1, 2** where “old men” and “old women” are *presbyteros*. Also, captains of armies are called episcopus (**Num 31:14**; **2Kg 11:15**).

³ For example, “Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest is overseer--the oil of the light, and the incense of composition, and the daily meat-offering and the anointing oil, are his charge; even the oversight (*episkope*) of the whole tabernacle, and all things that are in it in the holy place, in all the works.” (**Num 4:16** LXX). *Presbyteros* is rarely if ever used for priests. It refers more to heads of clans and the like.

anywhere else did in the ancient world. Yes, they had oversight. But there was more. Much more, and that is why using the term priest in something like Anglicanism is confusing and unhelpful.

In **Rome**, at least based on what they believe, the term fits better. The problem here is what they believe. Calling a certain ordained men “priests” in Rome is an idea that is also tied to these words (elder, bishop), but in Rome it is more because the priest is the only one who can perform the Mass. Why does this matter? Because the Mass is said to be the same “sacrifice” of the literal body and blood of Christ at the cross re-offered. Since it is thought to be a sacrifice, the word “priest” came to be used.⁴

It is this sacrificial component of priestly work that usually comes to our minds. It does this explicitly in **Hebrews 5:1**, “For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.” Back in Rome, add to this things such as priests being the ones the laity have to confess their sins to, and the priests being the ones who performs all

⁴ It is from this that the Protestants rejected what is called **sacerdotalism**. A *sacerdos* (Latin) is a priest, literally one who presents sacred offerings.

the sacraments and you start to see why the word came to be used.

There is actually some good that can be found here. There is always truth in error. There is **some continuity** between the Testaments in this regard, and the idea of a priesthood is certainly one of them. It isn't a bad thing to confess your sins to someone. The church needs trained teachers in the Scriptures, and this was a job of OT priests and of priests in all church traditions. Etc.

But the bad outweighs the good in my view, and as such I do not find it helpful to refer to a NT office as the office of a "priest." First of all, **the NT calls all believers "priests."**⁵ This is in line with Isaiah who predicted that Levitical priests would arise out of the Gentile nations. As priests, we offer our bodies as "**living sacrifices**" and other priestly and temple terms such as "offerings" or "incense" or "ministry" are used in the NT in this regard. But there is simply not a special office of "priest" (Gk: *hiereus*) for the church

⁵ Of course, the OT calls the entire nation of Israel "priests" as well (Ex 19:6). But curiously, this is the only time this idea occurs towards them. Immediately after this the people 1. Rebelled greatly against God and 2. God formally established his covenant with Levi among the people. In the establishment of the priesthood, whether some generic sense of a priestly nation continued or not, it is clear that the people had to go through priests in order to sacrifice and to meet with God in covenant. This is much more like what we see going on in Rome and much less like what we see going on in Hebrews as we will see below.

anywhere in the NT. The NT uses terms that do not include the idea of sacrifices for NT offices. Second, these priests are, at least in the case of the Mass as it came to be understood through more and more traditions, **usurping the role of the the High Priest.**⁶

The High Priest was a special man among all the other Levites of Israel. The official office in the nation of Israel began with the person of **Aaron** and only someone from his lineage could serve as the high priest of Israel. Much more will be said about this in Hebrews, so we'll defer talking about this until later sermons. Perhaps the most important job of the high priest was his offering up of the great bloody sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. Not even another ordained priest could do this. And the High Priest is who is in mind in **Hebrews 4:13**. Once a year, and only once a year, the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place and offer up a sin offering for himself and his people (**Lev 16:3, 6, 11, 24**). It had to be Aaron (or his descendant who became high priest). It could be no other.

⁶ A shocking illustration depicting the blasphemous confusion of this usurping of the role of the Great High Priest can be seen by comparing the image of Rome's chief priest—the Pope with that of Yahweh sitting enthroned above the cherubim on the ark of the covenant (see below).

This helps us understand what the most basic function of a priest was. Priests were **mediators**. They were intercessors. They were go-betweens. They were representatives. They maintained the place of intercession: the temple. This is where God would meet with the people. They offered sacrifices in order to intercede between God and man.

Now, Christ held three offices in his Person. He was a prophet, a priest, and a king. Prophets and kings are also representatives and go-betweens. **Kings rule for God**, in the stead of God, as vassals to the Great Suzerain. **Prophets speak for God**. They have God's words, they see God's Word. Therefore, the intercession of the prophet is downward—God to man.

Now, while priests did teach the people and as such were acting downward like prophets, telling the people what God wanted, in their capacity as mediators of sacrifices, **the priest is the reverse**. This intercession is upward—man to God. If man sins, the priest intercedes and via a sacrifice offers an appeasement or placation to avert God's wrath. If this is true of a daily sacrifice for sin, how much more the high priest's sacrifice on the Day of Atonement! Of course, there are

various other kinds of offerings such as thank offerings or freewill offerings, and the priest also oversees these on behalf of the people as one set apart as holy by the Lord. But the point is, the priest represents the people to God. So let us look [at the implications of this](#).

The first is this idea of “a great high priest.” *Jesus* is being given this title. It is the third time he has been called this, but now Hebrews is going to start focusing on it. We have learned a couple of things in Hebrew on this so far. First, Jesus has become [a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people \(2:17\)](#). In other words, it is his role in offering a sacrifice that has come to the forefront. In our verses we learn something more about this sacrifice. It says that he has [“passed through the heavens” \(4:14\)](#). What does this mean?

We understand it by comparing it to the priest on the Day of Atonement. The law concerning this very special Day begins by saying, [“Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat” \(Lev 16:2\)](#). There is a lot going on here. First, the [“veil”](#) was that which

you “passed through.” It was between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. So this is the connection to the “passing through” in Heb 4:14. Second, inside the Most Holy Place there was the glorious Ark of the Covenant. This golden box was covered with a golden lid which had two cherubim on top of it. This lid was called the “mercy seat,” and the idea is that it was the seat of a king. (Compare the throne of King Tut to the Ark of the Covenant):



Hebrews tells us that the tabernacle (as will be seen later in Hebrews) was a replica of heaven itself (Heb 8:5; 9:23). But it was not heaven itself. It was a copy. So the high priest did not enter into heaven, he entered into a copy of heaven. Nevertheless, it was very dangerous for him to enter into

the Throne Room of the Most Holy Place, because Yahweh had chosen to indwell this space in an act of condescending grace for his people. He would be their king in their midst. But because he was so holy and the people were so sinful, no priest (let alone other person) could go in and meet with him. They would be destroyed.

Except on that one day a year, that day God set aside whereby once sacrifice would make atonement for the sins of all the people, including the priest. On this day alone he could enter the Most Holy Place to make atonement (**Lev 16:15**). God's wrath would be placated. Propitiation would be offered. Sin would be dealt with on a temporary basis. And anyone who trusted in this God by faith would be forgiven.

But what Hebrews is saying that something new and better has happened, and it is the reason why **everywhere Christianity has spread, the priests of the pagan religions have gone away**. It is the reason why the world no longer looks as dark as it once did. Jesus has passed through the heavens. He can do this, it says, because he is "the Son of God." Only God could enter this place like this. Only God's Son could enter a place like this.

What is heaven? Heaven is pure. Heaven is undefiled. Heaven is where God dwells in unapproachable light. Heaven is God's throne. And Jesus the Son of God has passed between the veil of this earth into heaven itself and has made an offering for our sins.

It is curious that the verse ties in **the second thing** we have learned about this high priest back in chapter 3: **our confession**. Confessions of Faith can be long and drawn out or they can be quite simple. But whatever they are, it is vital to confess the Faith. Our confession of Jesus is that **he is the great high priest and the Son of God**. It said it in **3:1**, “**Jesus the apostle and high priest of our confession**.” It says it again now. “**Let us hold fast our confession**.” What is that confession? There is no other high priest who can offer a sacrifice for sin, not even the same sacrifice for sins! The Son of God alone has passed through the heavens and has made atonement for our sins. The Son of God alone offers the sacrifice of his Body and Blood. Christ alone!

In this way, something extraordinary has happened. It is something I don't know that anyone in the OT could have fathomed, not this way. An atonement has been made that is so far superior to the OT Day of Atonement, that it has

knocked that OT ceremony right off the map. No longer is there a need for animal sacrifices, because the Lamb has been slain. No longer is there a need for priests to offer them up. For thousands of years, this was all the world knew. Since Abel offered up the firstborn of his flock at the door of Eden, this is what the world did. All pagan perversions of the truth did it. The OT did it. Everywhere you went, this is what was done. This is what had to be done. But not any more. It is almost impossible for us to fathom how radically different the world is because of this one event of history. Look around and you will see a mighty absence of these things. Because Jesus is a high priest who has gone into heaven itself. If there is anything worth confessing in this world, this is it. For if such an event by such a person could so radically transform all of religious history in this way, surely it is worth confessing. Jesus Christ the Son of God has passed through the heavens as our great high priest.

Able to Sympathize

Besides entering into heaven once-for-all, a second implication of the priest representing the people is

something that our preacher thinks is vital to tell you about. He is able to sympathize with us in our own weaknesses (Heb 4:15). Now, have you ever stopped and asked yourself why he would even say such a thing? “Of course he is able to sympathize with us. What a completely self-obvious thing to say.” But in the first century, was it? Could they have been thinking something about this “great high priest” that would have made him unable to sympathize with us? Allow me to speculate.

I can't figure out a reason for bringing this up unless he was continuing to think about what he has already said about the Son of God. Remember how he began the book in the first two chapters? Jesus is greater than angels. But do you remember the climactic given for why he is greater than them? It is because he took on human flesh and became one of us.

Perhaps something was going on with these people, and it might just be something that goes on with us as well, though maybe not for quite the same reasons. Is Jesus really human? “Nah, couldn't be. We've heard that the Word of God was an angel (i.e. Philo). The Angel of the LORD. That must be it. Our great high priest is an angel. But of course,

as an angel he wouldn't be able to sympathize with anything about us.” In fact, as a teaser for a future sermon, we know with certainty that some before Hebrews was written (the Jews at Qumran for instance) thought that the high priest of a town called Salem in days long gone—a man named **Melchizedek**—was an angel.⁷ In fact, they equated him with Yahweh himself (i.e. the Angel of the LORD), so this could very well be the exact context that our verse is written to address. Can angels sympathize with us? I don't really know. The Greeks were divided. Some thought they didn't even have emotions! Others thought, of course they do! Maybe they can, maybe they can't.

But I said that we might fall prone to the same kinds of error. How? We may not think that Jesus is an angel (at least not since the incarnation). But we are prone to things that also make it so that he is unable to sympathize with us. Theologians can do it. There is a great temptation in us to

⁷ Two quotes here: “The ‘Songs [of the Sabbath Sacrifice in the DSS]’ depict a hierarchy of angelic priests who serve in the heavenly temple. They are surrounded by other divine beings known as *elim* or *elohim* (gods, divine beings) or holy ones, spirits, princes, and ministers. And Melchizedek seems to be a leader of this assembly of servants.” Paul Sumner, “Melchizedek: Angel, Man or Messiah: 11 QMelchizedek (11Q13),” *Hebrew Streams*, <http://www.hebrew-streams.org/works/qumran/melchizedek-dss.html>, last accessed 1-8-2016. Therefore, “It would seem most plausible that Melchizedek is to be identified with the seventh and highest of the chief princes, as Michael is customarily identified with the highest of the archangels.” Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 37.

split the two natures of Christ in two. Every Christological heresy has done this. People think: The God side of him couldn't possibly undergo such and such, and so they say, "Well, his divine nature didn't do such and such." Or they think: The human nature couldn't possibly withstand this and that, and so say, "Well, his human nature didn't withstand this and that." Do you hear the refusal to think about Jesus as a single person, but feel the theological necessity to split him into parts in order to protect one side or the other? But when you do this, suddenly it makes it much more difficult to think about a single Person who could sympathize with us? Maybe the human side could, but certainly not the divine side, or something like that.

But even with ordinary Christians who never bother worrying about the relationship of the two natures of Christ like Arians, Nestorians, Apollinarians, Eutychianism, and other heretics have done, maybe we just forget about Christ altogether. We become practical Muslims. "Lord, you wouldn't understand. My life is so hard. You are much too high and lofty to care about me. You are God. I can't bother you. My problems are much too small compared to your immensity and transcendence." (Of course, we also need to

beware of turning Jesus the Great High Priest into the My Buddy doll: “Where I go, he goes. My Buddy and Me!” Or perhaps the “Jesus is my Girlfriend” music, as I heard one pastor call it, of so much contemporary worship music. There is no transcendence at all here).

This is the point. They were obviously prone to such things be it through bad theology of the Son of God incarnate or ignorance of the gospel or stubbornness of heart. We are prone to it as well. Hebrews here is concerned with anything that causes us to think that God couldn't possibly understand what I'm going through because, well, he's God. If God were [the Muhammad version of Allah](#), he wouldn't care, he couldn't sympathize, it would be impossible.

But in redemptive history, God comes to us through his Son and his Son became one of us. And he became a great high priest. If the priest represents the people to God, then the priest has to be a human being. How can you represent someone that you are unable to relate to, unable to sympathize with, indeed unlike? [Gregory of Nazanzus](#) wrote long ago, “[That which Christ has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also](#)

saved.” The Son of God has passed through the heavens as our high priest and thus unites anyone with faith in him to God and so saves them.

But this high priest came to us as one of us, fully man in all ways, save one as we will see. But because he came as one of us, unlike an angel or even a completely transcendent God, he can sympathize with us. No other god does this, nor can he. But at just this moment it really hits us hard. It gives the reason and it is the scandal of the incarnation. “He has been tempted in every respect as we are” (vs. 15). Jesus Christ is man. Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ was tempted. How is this not utterly scandalous?

How many squid have spilt their ink so that we could fill up pages of books to figure out what this means about God? I won't go there today, because Hebrews doesn't. Instead, let's just remind ourselves of the background here. This refers to [Jesus in the wilderness](#) in Gospel stories. Jesus goes out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. This is a recapitulation of the exodus temptation and also of the temptation of our first parents. The amazing thing is that these temptations correspond to [the three great kinds of sins of the world](#): the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and

the pride of life.

We'll just think about the first of those temptations here. He is out in the desert with nothing but sand and rocks. He hasn't eaten for forty days! So Satan takes him to one of those rocks and tempts his flesh. Turn these into stone. That temptation is remarkable because for you and I we couldn't do it. But Jesus could! Jesus was not only tempted to eat, thus feeding his flesh. He was tempted to do something out of his divinity, thus tempting God himself! The thing is, if Jesus was tempted in his flesh, then he understands our own temptations.

Jesus' temptations	Adam & Eve's temptations	1 John 2:16
turn stones into bread	tree was good for food	lust of the flesh
see all kingdoms	pleasing to the eye	lust of the eyes
save life spectacularly	desirable for gaining wisdom	pride of life ⁸

But it is just this kind of a thought that causes us to be tempted in our own flesh. Maybe we start theologizing and saying things like, "But Jesus was God and he couldn't really be tempted." Someone notices the part I've left off until

⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd Edition. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 260.

now and says, “**See, he was without sin.**” (See how the question takes us back to splitting apart the natures)? Does the Bible do this even a single time? Yes, it gives us glimpsed into his deity and also into his humanity. But it refuses to speculate on such things, and perhaps this is leading us into wisdom. Asking questions about this might be helpful. God knows I’ve asked this very question many times. But they also might not be. If we let those answers carry us away or come to some solution in our mind where we miss the teaching of Hebrews here, and it makes it more difficult to relate to our Lord Jesus as a sympathizing priest, then we are in big trouble. What do I mean by this?

Drawing Near to God

Why is this talk about Jesus sympathizing with us said? It is said **to greatly encourage you**. Your God is not remote and distant. He is not so utterly far away from you that he has no thought of you, much less the things that you go through. This is because of Jesus. God has come near to us in Christ. He has come so near that he has become one of us. Consider the problem of evil, be it the evil around you that

causes so much hurt in the world (this is the problem as most people want to think of it), or the evil that is in your own heart and why you can't get rid of it altogether even as a Christian. Beloved, this question is answered, not first in coming up with good arguments about why God is good or why he allows such things, nor in creating new laws to keep people from sinning. The answer is found at the incarnation and the cross, in the Father sending us his Son in God-man Jesus Christ to die for us. God did not withhold from himself the very turmoil that we ourselves undergo. I say this in Christ.

Why is there such great evil in this world? While I might have explanations, at the end of the day, maybe I really just don't know. But I do know this. Jesus experienced it personally. Why do I sin time and time again? Why do I often feel so helpless against my own depravity if I'm a Christian and have been given the Holy Spirit and a new nature in Christ? I might have some theological answer for you, but again at the existential level at the end of the day do I really know? I do know that my God is able to personally sympathize with me because Jesus was tempted in every way that I am. And I also know that he is more

powerful than my sin and is able to save me because he didn't give into the temptations. He never sinned! This is very pastoral in nature. But there is one more thing.

Vs. 16 moves you to do something very specific. And it is something that perhaps you are sometimes timid or even worried about doing. “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.” What an extremely cheerful verse this is. Does it not lighten your burdens almost immediately? Let's think about the parts of it.

First, because Jesus is a man, like us in every way, tempted to sin but without sin, and because Jesus is also the Son of God having gone into heaven to make atonement for our sins as a great high priest, he has opened the way into the Most Holy Place. This is itself a staggering thought. Remember how Most Holy Place is the throne room of God? And remember how only the high priest could enter it, and that only once a year? Now, Hebrews is saying that we may enter it. But it doesn't use some possibly fearful term like “the most holy place.” No! He calls it the throne of grace.

This is where we come to “receive mercy.” Why do we

need mercy? Because we sin. At that first moment of repentance when God justifies us once-for-all, **we need mercy**. Though justified and our sins will never be counted against us, we will sin and grieve the Holy Spirit. Our sin wreaks havoc on our lives, on our minds, on our bodies, and on our souls. They make us depressed. They make us worry. They make us anxious. They make us angry. They make us doubt. They make us fearful. They make us not want to go before a holy God even though we have been justified.

But despite these sins and the subjective feelings they bring to us that keep us from having close communion with God, we are gently told that we may come and receive mercy. Any time. For any reason. In fact, **5:2** says that because he is a high priest like this, God can deal gently with us ignorant and wayward people! What God is there that is like this? Why do we do so little to tell others about God in these ways? God will heal those who come to him in Christ. God will sanctify us anew each and every day that we turn to him and away from our sins. He will never stop forgiving those who ask his forgiveness. Because in Christ God is merciful to us.

But more than this, **we also find grace**. Mercy is not

getting something you deserve, but grace is getting something you do not deserve. In this case, it is help! There is a promise here that when you turn to the throne of grace, the great high priest will bring you to God **to help you**. The context is particularly that of **sin**. This is why the “**time of need**” is here. Our greatest time of need is when we are caught up in sin. When you are tempted to sin, turn to God in Christ. Go to the throne of grace. Receive the power of God anew so that you can resist the devil as James says. It is when we are not in the throne room of God that we sin, is it not? And what do I mean?

What Hebrews is talking about here is **prayer**. Prayer is how you ascend to heaven and commune with God. Prayer is where you talk to God. Prayer is where you bring your requests before the throne. Prayer is where you pour out your soul. Prayer is where you cry out your tears. Prayer is where you grapple in war with the devil and the power of sin. Prayer is where you rise into the temple of heaven and meet with God. Prayer lifts you into the very throne room of the heavenly places, the place Isaiah saw, the place that Daniel saw, the place that Stephen saw. Through prayer, you can now go to the place that was reserved only for a

select few individuals. And God will hear you as he hears no others ... because of Jesus.

We must say it in our pluralistic culture where everyone offers up prayers to “God.” It is not on your own that you go. It is not in the name of another god nor to another god that you go. But it is through the intercessory work of the Lord Jesus Christ—the only God-man who ever was or is or will be. He is the way to the Father. By Christ alone we are saved. He is our great high priest and no other. There is no other name under heaven by which men may enter the throne room of heaven, for there is none other who was worthy in himself or who has offered a satisfactory offering or how has gone into that place before you but Jesus.

This is the doctrine of Christ as our high priest. This is the doctrine neglected in our sons. This is the doctrine that has brought us salvation.