

Hebrews 4:14 - 5:10 // You Need a Priest (and So Do I)

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[0 : 00] Give me a minute. It's not open here. Sorry. Mark chapter 14, beginning at verse 32.

! And the reason we're looking at this passage in Mark is because later in Hebrews we're going to hear about how Jesus offered up prayers and cries to the one who could save him from death. And this is what the writer of Hebrews is talking about. Where Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane, he knows he's going to be betrayed and he's going to be put to death on a cross. And he knows that's going to happen, but he submits to his father and prays to him. So let's read it. Mark chapter 14, beginning at verse 32.

They went to a place called Gethsemane. And Jesus said to his disciples, Sit here while I pray.

[1 : 03] He took Peter, James and John along with him and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, he said to them.

Stay here and keep watch. Going a little further, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the hour might pass from him.

Abba, Father, he said, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. Simon, he said to Peter, are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour?

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Once more, he went away and prayed the same thing.

[2 : 10] When he came back, he again found them sleeping because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. Returning the third time, he said to them, Are you still sleeping and resting?

Enough. The hour has come. Look. The Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise. Let us go. Here comes my betrayer.

Thanks be to God for his word. Hebrews chapter 4, beginning at verse 14.

Hebrews chapter 4, beginning at verse 14. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin.

[3 : 33] Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God. To offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as for the sins of the people.

And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was. In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest, but God said to him, you are my son.

Today, I have become your father. And he says in another place, you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

[4 : 47] During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death.

And he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son, though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered. And once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Rob, for reading. And welcome to Tri-Church. Welcome to the wonderful world of Hebrews.

I can't promise that it will be any shorter than usual, but we'll see how we get on. Let's pray as we come to this part of God's word and ask for his help.

Let's pray. Father, as your word has encouraged us to do so, we approach your throne of grace, asking that you would meet with us by your spirit and speak into our lives.

[6 : 05] You know the folk who are here this evening. You know who we are. You know what we are going through. So we pray that you'd speak words of truth, words of mercy, words of grace, right from the throne room.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, okay, brilliant. With this section of Hebrews, we're getting right into the heart of the message.

And just to remind you, this is a letter written to first century Christians who'd started off well in following Jesus, but were finding that there was a cost.

They were beginning to realize that sticking with Jesus came at the expense of social acceptability. And for some, the pull was just strong to turn back, to go back to what they'd believed before, to go back to something familiar, more socially acceptable.

So the author writes to persuade them, don't go back. Hold fast, because Jesus is better, better than Moses, better than the angels, and better, we'll see tonight, than any priest.

[7 : 22] And from chapter 5, right through to chapter 10, Hebrews gets very excited that Jesus is the priest. Jesus is the priest, Jesus is the priest, Jesus is the priest, all about Jesus is the priest.

He's absolutely buzzing about this. And some of you, I guess, are less excited than the author of Hebrews, am I right? Some of you, I can see, are just beginning to glaze over a little bit.

So let's be honest. When we hear that Jesus is the priest, it might not automatically set our hearts racing.

And so it's worth us thinking about why you might be tempted to skip over this section of Hebrews, why you might be tempted to zone out this evening.

If we did a little thought experiment, if we did a little game of word association with priest, what pops into your head? What? I wasn't asking for the floor, Greg, but yeah, that's a good one.

[8 : 32] A big gap. Well, for some people, we might think of Father Ted, we might think of a confessional birth. That's one image topically in the popular mindset at the moment.

Here's another one. If we move on to the next slide. The priest was called Father Martin. He kept making us stand up, sit down, kneel, stand up.

It felt like a game of hokey-cokey, except more boring. I was like, make your mind up, mate. And I should probably vet what my daughter's reading a bit more carefully.

I'll need to speak to my wife about that. But maybe for some of us, the Reformation alarm bells are beginning to go off. Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. Wait, we don't have priests around here. Thank you very much.

We've got ministers. Martin isn't Father Martin. He's just Martin, our lead pastor. Didn't the Reformation get rid of priests?

[9 : 30] Actually, no. The Reformation didn't say we don't need a priest. It said we already have one. And more importantly, Hebrews says the same thing.

We already have a priest. His name is Jesus. Now before we dive into the text, let's just zoom out for a minute because this will help us get our bearings in Hebrews, especially if you're here for the first time this evening.

Now the writer structures this whole middle section, chapters 5 to 10, around one big central theme. Jesus, our great high priest.

And he brackets it off with a pair of matching passages, one at the start in chapter 4, verses 14 to 16, which we read, and one at the end in chapter 10, 19 to 23.

They're like bookends. Matching pairs, same ideas, same phrases. There's lots of matches. We're going to spot just a few of them. So get your highlighters out if you like doing that sort of thing.

[10 : 37] First one is, since we have a great high priest. There it is on both sides. Next one, Rosie, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

It's later echoed as, let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. And then last one that we're going to do, let us approach God's throne of grace with confidence in chapter 4.

And then again, since we have confidence, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, let us draw near to God. So you see that? It's the same refrain playing at both the beginning and the end.

Matching pairs. And bang, in the middle of this section, chapter 8, verse 1, if you want to flick on just a page, Hebrews chapter 8, verse 1, even says, this is the main point of the whole book.

In Jesus, we have such a high priest. So if you're wondering what Hebrews is all about, then that's your answer.

[11 : 44] The main point, the beating heart, is this. We have, in Jesus, a great high priest. And that's what we're going to unpack this evening, why the writer gets so excited about Jesus, the high priest, and why once you understand who he is and what he's done, you'll find that this is very good news indeed for you too.

So if the main point of Hebrews is that we have a great high priest, what difference does that actually make? What's the point of having a priest day to day in real life?

What's the point? Well, the writer doesn't leave us guessing. Right here in chapter 4, before explaining how it all works in chapter 5, he shows us why it matters with two down-to-earth applications.

Two down-to-earth applications. And that's where we'll begin in the end of chapter 4. Now, it might sound a bit niche, like something for theologians, not for the real world.

But it's really not as obscure or disconnected to real life as we might think at first. It's incredibly practical. And you can see it in verses 14 to 16.

[13 : 03] So, end of verse 14, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

And then, verse 16, let us approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

So, did you notice both these applications start with the same little phrase that's easy to skip over? Let us. And that really matters.

Let us. Let us. Very important. I know it's corny, but it will help you remember. Let us is very important. Don't forget the let us. And these calls, then, aren't just for individuals.

They're for us all as the whole church family. Hebrews says, let's do this together. Let's do this as God's people. So, two very practical calls for us as a church family.

[14 : 09] Hold firm and draw near. The first is hold firmly to the faith we profess. This is how we persevere in the Christian life.

So, think about it. If we're going to keep going with Jesus, then you've got to hold on to something. That's what the writers say. Now, maybe this hold firm sounds a little bit vague.

So, what does it actually mean and how do you do it in real life? To hold firm is just, obviously, to grab tightly and not let go. It's the language of endurance, of stamina, to keep holding on when something's pulling you away.

So, you might picture yourself on the deck of a ship in a stormy sea holding on for dear life while the waves crash around you like that.

Well, that's the image here and that's real too because all around us are pressures for us to loosen our grip. Pressures for us to ease off, to drift, to let go.

[15 : 15] Situations in work or uni or school, maybe even in family conversations over a gun fence, you feel the pull to blend in, to keep quiet, to hold on to your faith a little bit less firmly when people are listening.

But Hebrews says, hold firmly to the faith you profess. And notice that it isn't just the faith that we believe but the faith we profess.

Faith that is public not private. Faith that confesses Jesus openly, doesn't keep it hidden in a box, not quietly tucked away. Well, that's what Jesus meant when he said, whoever confesses me before others, I will confess my Father before my Father in heaven.

And that's both a promise and a challenge. Because it isn't always easy, is it? It isn't always comfortable to be professing our faith in the Lord Jesus publicly, to speak out for Jesus when it might cost you your reputation, your credibility, maybe even your job prospects.

Not always easy. I get that. and you know that Monday morning moment when somebody asks you what you've been doing over the weekend? It's tempting, isn't it, to mention everything you've done

on the weekend apart from what you did on this Sunday, especially in an open plan office when everybody's listening.

[16:55] But that's what it means to hold firm, to take the chance when it comes to profess Christ with grace and courage. And we don't do it alone.

That's why Hebrews says let us. We need one another for this. We need one another's encouragement, one another's prayers, we need one another to remind us that this is what we're called to do, that Jesus is worth holding firmly to.

So practically hold firm, keep confessing Christ and keep your grip on him and on the truth about him.

Hold firm. Here's the second practical call and it's breathtaking because it's not just a call to be holding on down here but it's a call to be drawing near to God himself.

Verse 16 Let us approach God's throne of grace with confidence. Just take a minute to let that sink in.

[18:06] You get to approach the throne room of the living God. You get to approach the creator, the majesty on high, the judge, the sustainer of the universe.

You get to do that with confidence. God's throne is a place of power and of judgment.

Yet for those who belong to Jesus, it's a throne of grace. No longer a throne of wrath but of welcome because Jesus has opened the way.

And so we can come not with fear and trembling but with confidence. Confidence not in ourselves but confidence in Jesus our great high priest.

We come for two things in verse 16. Firstly to receive mercy, forgiveness for all our failures.

[19:23] And secondly to find grace in your times of need. Mercy wipes the slate clean and grace gives us the power to keep going.

Both come from the same throne, the throne of grace. So let me ask you, are you making use of that access? Are you making use of that privilege?

Are you living lives as if you really can draw near to the living God? Anytime, anywhere, for anything? Well here's where it gets really practical.

Because are you ever in need? Let me ask you this way, a better question perhaps. Is there ever a day you're not in need in some way or another?

We all have moments, don't we? Moments when we're just painfully aware of our weakness.

There's times when we're barely holding on, when temptation feels too strong, or suffering feels too heavy, or faith just feels too small.

[20:32] In those moments, in those moments, hear the invitation of the Lord Jesus. Come, draw near, receive mercy, find the grace you need.

You don't have to face it alone. find the grace you need. You have access, real access to the living God. So don't hide. Don't beat yourself up.

Don't wallow in guilt or shame. Come to the throne of grace. Receive mercy. Find help. What are you waiting for? Come to Jesus.

Now what does that look like day to day? Sure, it includes reading your Bible and praying. I think it's bigger than that.

It's a whole life lived in God's presence, orientated towards him. Peter Adam puts it beautifully in a book that some of us are reading on prayerfulness.

[21:39] He writes, it's about drawing near to God with our whole lives and drawing near in a constant relationship. A Godward life leads to Godward prayers.

Godward prayers flow naturally out of a Godward life. That's the invitation here in Hebrews, to live a Godward life, a life confident before the throne of grace, a life of constant mercy received and constant grace supplied a life energized by God's power and serving him in all we are and all we do, serving him in all we do in his power.

And that's practical and that's only possible because Jesus is our high priest. That's what Hebrews shows us next. So brilliantly we're told what a priest is.

Hebrews 5, 1-4 gives us the job description of the high priest. It's like a job advert. Fill in this job application for high priest. Now we're currently hiring at St.

Silas, not for a priest let me assure you, but for an operations manager. There's the ad, you probably can't read it from the back. But we've got a person specification, a list of qualifications and essential skills.

[23 : 02] Please do be praying for the right person. Feel free to apply if you think you are that person. It's probably not a grad position. But Hebrews gives us the same thing.

Not for an ops manager, but for a high priest. So who can get the job and how? Well first one tells us, every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God.

He must be human. The high priest must be a human being. Why does he have to be human? Because only a human can stand in for other humans.

That's what a priest is, a representative, somebody who mediates, who stands between sinful people and a holy God. And verse two adds, he is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and going astray since he himself is subject to weakness.

He can understand human weakness because he's weak too. He can be gentle because he understands, he gets you because he's one of you.

[24 : 26] He knows the tug of temptation, he knows the struggle of weakness, he knows the despair of spiritual wandering. But there is a problem in verse three.

He also has to offer sacrifices for his own sins. So his empathy is real but he's compromised. He can sympathize for sure but he himself is unable to save. Still, the first qualification is clear. He must be human.

The humanity is essential. The priest must be human. Now then verse four adds a second bit. No one takes this honor on himself but he receives it when called by God.

He's representing man so he must be man but he's representing man to God. So he must be acceptable to God and therefore chosen by God.

[25 : 29] You can't just apply for this one. The role of high priest isn't open to public competition. And if you think about it there are serious implications for our culture.

In a multicultural city like Glasgow if it's kind of spiritual pick and mix where all paths supposedly lead to the same place at the top of a mountain.

Hebrews cuts through that noise and says no that's not how this works. You don't get to appoint your own priest. You don't get to choose. Only God can choose the one who stands between him and us.

So you can throw up whatever philosophical ladders that you want, whatever religious bridges that you want but the only one who actually got what it takes to fill that gap is the one chosen by God and that person is Jesus.

We need a priest and Jesus got the job. So how did Jesus get the job? Well Hebrews shows both the similarities and the differences between Jesus and Aaron and sons and we see that in the next bit.

[26 : 43] So Jesus was chosen by God that's what it says in verse 5. In the same way Christ didn't take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest but God directly appoints him with these two next statements.

You are my son and you are a priest forever. So just like Aaron Jesus didn't self-appoint himself to the priesthood but unlike Aaron God didn't just pick him for a short time he's appointed him forever. Now that phrase in the order of Melchizedek funny how these things pop up in a tri-church service but that phrase just means that Jesus priesthood is independent of the line of priests descended from Aaron.

So if you're here for a tri-church and wondering who on earth is Melchizedek is you're in good company there'll be plenty of Christians among us for whom Melchizedek is an unknown. And Hebrews gets very excited about Melchizedek in chapter 7. Here we simply need to note that Melchizedek is this kind of mysterious priest king figure that pops up in Genesis 14 and then in Psalm 110 and he's relevant here to the writer of Hebrews because he foreshadows Jesus as a forever priest.

[28 : 13] Jesus is God's chosen forever priest. Now secondly we need a priest who's not only appointed by God but who fully identifies with us.

And verse 7 paints the picture vividly. During the days of Jesus' life on earth he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death.

That's the language of Gethsemane Rob read for us earlier on. And we heard the intensity of Jesus' cries and how his soul was overwhelmed with sorrow.

Blood, sweat, tears, anguish. Jesus plumbed the depths of human emotions. Your high priest understands you. Now we're beginning to connect with the first part of the sermon. Jesus, your priest, gets who you are. He feels your pain. He knows your struggle. He's not aloof. He's not distant. He's not mechanical. He gets what it's like to be human.

[29 : 26] He gets what it's like to be you. Exhausted, despairing, heartbroken, disappointed, whatever it is you're going through.

There's nothing that you will experience in this life that Jesus cannot relate to. Nothing in this life at all. Jesus took to himself a human nature, becoming like us in every respect except one. And so here's the crucial difference. Jesus never sinned. He felt the full force of temptation far greater than any of us could experience by far the full force of temptation and he never gave in not once.

So Jesus' empathy is deeper but his purity is intact. His holiness is intact. He's the only priest who can truly understand you and truly save you.

And so then verse 8 sounds a bit strange doesn't it? When it says Jesus learned obedience and verse 9 was made perfect. What does that mean?

[30 : 50] Jesus was made perfect. In what sense was Jesus made perfect? Wasn't he already perfect? Well yes Jesus is perfect in his being in his sinlessness.

The thing that Jesus wasn't already perfect at was being priest until he came down and stepped into our shoes.

He was made perfect in his qualifications to be our priest. He didn't just sympathize with our weakness from a distance. He entered into it. He learned obedience through suffering step by step until that obedience led him to the cross.

And there in his death and resurrection he was made perfect for the job of high priest. Not by ritual washing and sacrifice like Aaron but by perfect obedience to his father as a human and perfect sacrifice as a son.

So verse 9 says once made perfect he became the source. He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

[32 : 10] Eternal salvation because he is the eternal priest. So if you're here looking in on the Christian faith it really is all about Jesus.

Jesus is the source. Jesus says elsewhere if anyone is thirsty let them come to me and drink. Are you spiritually thirsty?

Come to Jesus. He's all you need. He's the source. He's the well. He's the source of life. Come to him and find satisfaction in him.

God will be so back to where we began in verses 14 to 16. When we hold firmly we're holding firmly to him.

We're holding firmly to our person. We're holding firmly to this Jesus. Appointed by God sympathetic to our weaknesses perfectly qualified to save.

[33 : 14] And when we approach the throne of grace we're approaching his throne. The same Jesus who wept and prayed in Gethsemane now reigns at his father's right hand.

So go ahead and picture it. Picture it in your mind's eye however you want to imagine it. Shut your eyes if you find it helpful. You enter God's throne room.

His majestic throne room. not crawling in shame. Not standing on your own merit.

But boldly approaching Jesus your high priest. Still human. Still scarred. Still bearing the scars from the nails on the cross.

And as you approach him he turns to the father and says these ones are mine. They belong to me. I've paid for them.

[34 : 28] And then he turns to you and he says child what do you need? Need mercy? Receive mercy.

You struggling? you weak? Receive the grace and strength you need. Come to me.

What are you waiting for? That's the access that you have. That's the privilege you have. That's the difference it makes every day.

And especially in your times of need. when you're tempted he gets it. When you're ashamed he offers mercy. When you're weak he gives you grace. When you can't even pray you're struggling so much.

He's still got you. He loves you. And so here's the life changing truth.

[35 : 33] Hebrews doesn't just invite us to a life of occasional prayer on a Sunday. Hebrews invites us to a whole life Godward posture.

As Peter Adam puts it let your life be Godward so that Godward prayers flow naturally from a Godward life. As Jesus our high priest has opened the way we can offer ourselves every thought every action every prayer to him.

So friends let us together hold firmly boldly approach and orient our whole lives to him.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank you so much for the Lord Jesus our great high priest.

We thank you that through his death and resurrection we now have this astonishing access to your divine mercy and grace. This extraordinary privilege.

[36 : 48] Would you forgive us for all the times we've depended on our own strength rather than depending on you for the grace and strength we need. Would you help us by your spirit to help each other to hold firmly to our faith in the Lord Jesus and proclaim our hope in him boldly to those around us.

Would you be at work in our hearts so that our whole lives are oriented towards him. In his name we pray.

Amen. So we're going to respond now to God's words. God's