

Lesson 15
Christ's Positional Superiority to Aaron
Hebrews 4:14-16

The bedrock of all the Jewish religion in the first century was the Levitical priesthood with its sacrifices and temple worship. The Levitical priesthood centered around the high priest, who originally was Aaron. In order for a Jew to be convinced of Christianity, he would have to know that Jesus Christ was superior to Aaron, for the high priest in Judaism represented the people before God.

The Jew would naturally reason that if he left Judaism he would have no high priest and no one to represent him before God. He would have no one to offer the yearly sacrifice on the Day of Atonement for his sins. For a Jew to leave his earthly high priest was tantamount to forsaking his salvation.

Beginning at Hebrews 4:14-10,18, the writer of the Book of Hebrews will show the superiority of Christ to Aaron and the whole Levitical priesthood as it is set forth in the Mosaic Law. Up to this point, the author has shown that Christ who is the Messiah of the Old Testament is superior to the prophets, the angels, Moses and Joshua and now he proceeds to prove that Christ is superior to Aaron. The author will prove that the Christian does have a high priest; in fact, the high priest is Christ Jesus, who ever lives to make intercession for His people.

The idea of Christ being a high priest was introduced by the author in the second and third chapters of Hebrews but he was sidetracked as he warned them of the danger of disobedience and apostasy, pleading with them to enter into God's rest of salvation.

"For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:16-18).

"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession" (Heb. 3:1).

The author warned them by thundering judgment in their ears, for these professing Hebrew Christians were considering leaving Christianity to go back into Judaism. The author told them that they were under the terrifying scrutiny of God and they would have to give an account for their actions to God in eternity. But now the author presents these Hebrew-Christians with a great comfort -- Jesus Christ our High Priest. While Christ is judge of all unbelievers, He is a merciful and faithful high priest to all true believers. He is a loving Christ to all who obey Him.

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens ...” -- Christ, after His resurrection and before His total glorification passed through the heavens. ***“And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight”*** (Acts 1:9). In this modern Space Age in which we live, this phrase should catch our eye. Christ went through the heavens to the place of God. He passed outside the limits of time and space. He is no longer contained within those boundaries that hold us within physical limits. Christ is outside, above, beyond and over all laws of time and space.

Today, we can take astronauts and hurl them into space by means of rockets, and they can circle the earth in space capsules and walk in space with space suits. We can throw them into the heavens but they are still within this space-time continuum.

Even if they reached the farthest star we know anything about, which seems utterly impossible now, men would still be in the heavens. But Christ went through the heavens into the very presence of God and had no space equipment, only a glorified body.

The words “passed through” are significant because they refer back to the work of Aaron as the high priest in Israel. The high priest passed through the court of the tabernacle, through the holy place and then passed through the veil to the Holy of Holies, which represented the place of God in Old Testament worship. But the priest also had to come out again, but Christ passed through the heavens to the place of God. The tabernacle, the holy place, the veil and the Holy of Holies were but types or shadows of the reality who is Jesus Christ. Christ, the Messiah, as high priest of the New Testament passed through the heavens into the very presence of God to sit on His throne.

Christ is superior to Aaron because Aaron’s priesthood was earthly and temporary but Christ’s priesthood is heavenly and eternal. Christ has a superior position to Aaron, and He is the “great high priest.” Christ’s priesthood is supreme and is a fulfillment of all other earthly priesthoods.

Did you realize that all the worship that is presently taking place is centered around heaven and not the earth? When Christ ascended through the heavens to God, all worship was removed to heaven and took on a spiritual significance. Christ is the fulfillment of all Old Testament types, and worship is now spiritual, as one worships a heavenly Christ. Real worship is no longer on earth but in heaven. This is new and revolutionary. Judaism with its tabernacle, temple, sacrifices, ritual, high priest and whatever are finished. Christ is in heaven and Christianity takes on a whole new dimension of worship. Worship is now in spirit and truth from the heart and is in no way related to earthly things.

A major problem that has plagued Christianity from its very inception is that Christians constantly mistake shadows for substance or pictures for reality. Many professing Christians are living in types and shadows and not in the spiritual reality of Christ. Many churches today are a compromise with Judaism and they do not know it. Judaism had its earthly priests and some

Christian groups have their earthly priesthoods. Some even worship a visible Vicar of Christ on earth, the Pope, who takes the title Pontifex Maximus which means “the greatest high priest.”

Judaism had special clothing for their priests and certain groups of Christians have special clothing for their clerics. Judaism had a wealthy and beautiful sanctuary and Christians have special, expensive sanctuaries. Judaism had candles, incense and an altar and some Christians have these things in their churches. Judaism had endless ritual and some Christian bodies have prayer books and endless ritual.

Smugly we might be thinking to ourselves that these things mentioned have reference to Roman Catholics or High Episcopalian or Lutherans, but not to us who are evangelical Christians. Surely we believe the Bible and are not guilty of living in the shadows. But we build a building and call it a church, yet the Bible says the church is a body of people and has nothing to do with brick and mortar. We call our high arched churches sanctuaries when Christians are the sanctuaries in the New Testament. We refer to a church building as “the house of God.” Subtly many of us live under types and shadows and do not understand the reality of spiritual worship in Christ.

What happens when you take these earthly, carnal things away from people? Most of the time they fold spiritually because their faith is in earthly things and not in spiritual realities.

“Jesus, the Son of God ...” -- This one who passed through the heavens and who is our great high priest is no mere man. He is God. He is the God-Man. “Jesus” means “Savior” and emphasizes His humanity. “Son of God” is a title for Christ’s deity. Jesus Christ has to be God to enter into the presence of God and He has to be man to meet the needs of men.

Our God, our Savior, our King, our High Priest is in heaven and we must worship Him in a heavenly manner!

“Let us hold fast our confession.” -- The author now exhorts these Hebrew-Christians as well as himself to hold fast their confession of Christ as God, Savior and King. These Hebrew-Christians were under great persecution from unbelieving Jews and they were sorely tempted to renounce Christianity and go back into Judaism. If they would renounce Christianity, they would be renouncing faith in Messiah as the High Priest, and they would return to animal sacrifices which were part of apostate Judaism. Furthermore, they would be leaving the One True God, for Christ is God come in the flesh. Therefore, these Hebrew-Christians are to be diligent to retain the faith that they profess to have in their hearts, for if they leave Christ, they leave the possibility of salvation for salvation is only in Christ.

CHRIST SYMPATHIZES WITH HIS PEOPLE - Hebrews 4:15

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses ...” -- Even though Christ is God, He is sympathetic and approachable. He is full of tender compassion for His afflicted people. The double negative is used to stress a positive truth -- we have a high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses as human beings. Christ, as a man, is nearer to us than any earthly priest could ever be. The word “sympathize” means “to have a fellow feeling with.” Christians do not have a high priest who is remote from them, who is isolated from them, and who does not understand what they are going through. Christ can sympathize with us in our infirmities and temptations. Christ understands us when we go through the deepest trials,

testings and temptations of life. He can enter into our innermost spiritual being and sympathize when no other human being can really understand.

“But one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” -- Any testing or temptation that ever came to Christ never resulted in sin. All the external tests from Satan and the world system were not yielded to by the Lord Jesus.

Christ, our high priest, has felt every pressure, has known every pull, has been drawn by every allurement we face, has been frightened by every fear and beset with every anxiety and yet through them all He never sinned.

While it is true that Christ had no sin nature and in one sense could not sin, He was absolute holiness and when testing and temptations came to Him the intensity of evil solicitation meeting perfect holiness is beyond our human comprehension. Christ suffered to the maximum with every temptation and did it without sinning. This is why Christ can sympathize with us in our weakness of the flesh when testings and temptations come our way. As a man, He has been there before us and understands.

Are you poor in material things of this world? So was Christ even though all things were made by Him and for Him. Are you lonely, misunderstood and forsaken? So was Christ who was at times thought to be out of His mind and was forsaken by His friends in His greatest hour of trial. Do you suffer for your testimony for God? So did Christ in that He was spit upon, imprisoned, scourged and crucified. Christ understands every and all testings that we go through and He longs to sympathize with us. He knows, He understands and He cares!

CHRIST GRANTS GRACE AND MERCY TO HIS PEOPLE - Hebrews 4:16

“Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace...” -- The author now exhorts his readers to draw near to God in worship. In the New Testament each believer is a priest and he can draw near to God. In the Old Testament believers could only be on the outer court of the tabernacle and only the high priest was permitted to draw near to God within the veil. But all Christians, the youngest, the weakest, the most ignorant, have been made nigh and have constant freedom of access to God as believer-priests through their High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Drawing near to the throne of grace was a basic fundamental of the Protestant Reformation. It is fashionable in some circles these days to view the Protestant Reformation as a great mistake, something that we should feel ashamed of and work to heal by the Ecumenical Movement of our day. The Reformation was a revival of Biblical truth that was lost in the endless ritual of Roman Catholicism. The Reformers, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and others nailed to the masthead of their movement three great principles taken from Scripture: 1) No sacrifice but Calvary; 2) No priest but Christ, and 3) No confession but the throne of grace. With these three principles, the Reformation turned Europe upside down during the Middle Ages.

We are to draw near to the throne of grace “with confidence.” The KJV says “boldly” which might connote brazenness and disrespect. No child of God may ever approach the throne of

grace irreverently, flippantly, carelessly or presumptuously, but he may approach it with confidence. The word “confidence” means “with liberty” or “with frankness.” We are to say all to God with honesty and openness of speech. We are not to fear but to approach God who is gracious. We are to pour out our hearts before Him. We are to come as we are, say what we feel and ask what we need.

Certainly one aspect of drawing near to God is through our prayer life, but we must approach honestly and with confidence. We must claim the promises.

“Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you” (Mark 11:24).

“And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (John 5:14-15).

We must not only claim the promises but we must speak freely to God. We must hold no secrets from God because He knows them “anyway” and we must open up in prayer so as to be honest before God.

*Lord, teach us how to pray aright,
With reverence and with fear;
Though dust and ashes in Thy sight,
We may, we must draw near. Give deep humility; the sense
of godly sorrow give;
A strong desiring confidence,
To hear Thy voice and live.*

We are told to come to the “throne of grace.” The throne of the great High Priest is not a throne of judgment but a throne of grace. We do not receive there what we deserve but what we do not deserve. A throne is a place of power and something can be done when one is on a throne. This is a “throne of grace” which expresses love, kindness and favor of the One who wields the power. There is powerful grace that comes to all who go to the great High Priest, even Jesus Christ.

Where is the throne of grace? It is past the heavens. Yet, the throne of grace is very near to anyone who goes to it through faith and prayer.

“That we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” -- “Mercy” is love that helps the wretched and “grace” is love that pardons the guilty. Mercy is ours for sins committed and grace is ours when we have a spiritual need. At the throne of grace, there is mercy for errors and sins and there is grace to help and strengthen us when we are in difficult straits. .

This mercy and grace comes at the exact time we need it but it is not ours unless we go to the throne of grace in faith and claim it. All the help we need whether it be forgiveness, cleansing,

wisdom, patience, love, strength, food, clothing or whatever is ours if we go to the throne of grace.

CONCLUSION

Christ is a heavenly High Priest but He is not everyone's high priest. He is only the heavenly High Priest of the heavenly people. The heavenly people are God's people and God's people are all who have been touched by God's grace and have believed on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Are you among God's people? Have you been touched by God's grace? Have you received Jesus, the Son of God as your Savior? If you have not, you are not among the heavenly people, for all true believers in Christ are heaven bound.

Are you heaven bound? If you were to die today, where would you go? To heaven or to hell? To judgment or to the throne of grace? To Christ or to outer darkness? You can know you are heaven bound if you trust Jesus as your Savior for sin and acknowledge Him to be the Lord of your life.