

**International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
January 18, 2015**

**Lesson Text: Hebrews 4:14-15:10
Lesson Title: Jesus Intercedes for Us**

Introduction

Chapter four of Hebrews continues the theme that began in chapter three with the failure of the Hebrew people under Moses' leadership to enter in God's rest (Hebrews 4:1). "*Rest*" as the word is used in Hebrews, is a synonym for salvation. Believers today can fail to enter into God's "*rest*" in the same manner as Israel failed in the wilderness. What the wilderness was to Israel, the world is to us. God had something better for Israel than the wilderness life and He has something better for us today than life in this present world.

One of Jesus' most powerful descriptions of what He came to offer us is found in Matthew 11:28-30, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" Jesus came to offer salvation's rest to all who would come to Him by faith. So how do we enter into God's "*rest?*" How do we "hold fast the profession of our faith?" We do so by coming to Christ for salvation and then continually utilizing the wonderful gifts that God makes available to us through his saving grace. One of those gifts is the ministry of Jesus, the High Priest, and His intercessory work on our behalf.

Jesus' high priestly ministry is one of the topics discussed at great length in the Epistle to the Hebrews. As High Priest, Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. But His high priestly work did not end there. He continues to be our High Priest or Mediator in heaven, representing us to God. That means that when a child of God wants to talk to God, he doesn't need another human being to talk to God for him. Instead, the child of God has personal access to the God the Father through Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5).

After Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, He ascended back to His original home in heaven. Today, Jesus is seated at the right hand of His Father interceding on our behalf (Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2). As a result of Jesus' intercessory work, we who are saved by grace can hold to our profession of faith in Him.

A Recognition of Our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Verse 14

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.”

“Seeing then” means “now that we know.” Now that we know “we have a great high priest” is one of the greatest truths in the Christian faith. The Hebrew author believes that knowing “we have a great high priest” is a great anchor of hope for all believers.

The ministry of the “high priest” in the Old Testament was significant to the Hebrew. He ministered in the presence of God on behalf of the people. When the “high priest” went into the holy of holies he “passed” from the sight of the people and only stayed long enough to make atonement for sin. He then came out to re-appear to the people. For the believer today, our “great high priest,” Jesus Christ, has “passed into the heavens.” Jesus is now in God’s presence and remains there praying for us. What great encouragement!

The Hebrew writer makes it very clear that “Jesus the Son of God” is the “great high priest” to whom he is referring. The exact phrase, “Jesus the Son of God,” occurs only here in the New Testament. It combines our Lord’s earthly name with His divine title and thus underscores the fact that both *His human nature* and *His divine nature* were necessary if He was to be our High Priest.

As a result of having “a great high priest” such as Jesus, we are commanded to “hold fast our profession.” “Hold fast” means “to use strength and seize or maintain. The “profession” is recorded in Hebrews 3:1, *“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.”*

Verse 15

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched...” is a major difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. While the Old Testament priest may have performed his duties in strict obedience to God there was no possible way he could have understood or been in touch with the reality of the people’s needs. But now, because of the Cross, “we have” a “high priest” who is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”

“Touched” means “to feel sympathy with.” Jesus sympathizes with His children and He knows how to suffer with us. Jesus just doesn’t pretend to know nor does he try to imagine what we are facing. “Infirmities” refer to our feebleness, our weaknesses, sickness, and disease. Whatever you are going through our

facing as God's child, Jesus knows. He knows the reality of what you are facing and what you are feeling.

Verse 16

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

While "Let us" in verse 14 is a command, "Let us" in this verse is an invitation. The Hebrew author is giving believers an invitation to "come boldly" or draw near to the presence of God. Old Testament saints never enjoyed that privilege. The *permission* is "let." The *people* are "us." The *prescribed way* is "boldly." The word "boldly" means "free to speak, no hesitancy on the part of the one coming." The word "boldly" is the same word as "*softly*" used in Ruth 3:1-7 where Ruth went in and laid at Boaz's feet. She had a right to be there and that caused her to have the right approach to being there. Believers don't "charge the throne of grace" or go into God's presence demanding our rights. Believers approach confidently, yet humbly into God's presence through Jesus Christ our great high priest.

The "throne" is where God's administrative work takes place. But this "throne" is a "throne of grace," not judgment. At God's "throne of grace" there is "mercy" to be "obtained." The word "obtained" means "to be gotten hold of." "Mercy" of course is God's tender compassion. "Mercy" is something we do not deserve but God freely gives it to us. "Grace" is God's unmerited favor. "Grace" is given to "help."

The word "help" means "aid." It is a picture of someone running to the aid of another who is crying out for assistance. Luke uses "*helps*" in his description of the storm tossed ship in Acts 27:17. This procedure of passing ropes under the ship to hold it together is known as frapping, (*frap is a nautical term that means to draw tight, to lash down or together*). So in the midst of the storm the sailors wrapped cables around the ship's hull and winched them tight. Thus supported, the ship would be better able to withstand the severe pounding of wind and sea. That's the same kind of "help" that is available to Christians when we come to the "throne of grace."

The "time of need" mentioned here could be anything or anytime in life. When you have a personal "time of need" in your life it really doesn't matter what "time" it is for anyone else.

Application: Jesus Christ is our great high priest. He saves us and sympathizes with us. Maybe this is the "time" for you to "come boldly" and "find grace to help." If so, come today. If so, come now.

A Reflection on Our High Priest (Hebrews 5:1-10)

From Hebrews 4:14-16, the author reminded us to hold fast our profession of faith and draw near to the throne of grace. The reason we can do that is because Jesus Christ our great high priest. In Hebrews 5, the author continues that theme by giving us more information concerning our great high priest. He is going to give reason after reason why we ought to have confidence and boldness when we come before God through Jesus Christ.

Verse 1-3

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.”

What we have in the first three verses of Hebrews 5 is a reflection on the purpose of the high priest applied to Christ.

First, the words “for every high priest taken from among men” means the high priest did not choose himself. He was chosen by God. The author wants us to know that it is God who has chosen Christ to be our high priest.

Second, “taken from among men” emphasizes the fact that the high priest must be fully human. In order to function as a high priest and represent man before God, the priest must be human. The fact that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin and came into this world to live in human flesh was no accident. That was essential for Christ to be our Mediator.

Third, “ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” describes the functions of the high priest. The high priest, on a yearly basis, especially the Day of Atonement, went into the holy of holies and offered sacrifices on behalf of the people’s sins. By stating this the author wants the people to think of what the priest did in the Old Testament and connect that with what Christ did on the cross.

Fourth, the words “who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity” are a beautiful description of how Christ is able to sympathize with us because he understands our humanity and our weakness. As a fellow human being “compassed with infirmity,” the high priest could identify with the people he was called to serve.

Fifth, the words “And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins” describes the high priest offering sacrifices. The

sacrifices he offered were intended to cover his own sins as well as the people. The Hebrew author wants us to recognize that the Old Testament high priest, the descendant of Aaron, knew what it meant to sin and to need forgiveness.

Now we know that as high priest, Jesus relationship to God sets Him apart from all the high priests that ever lived. Jesus never had to sacrifice for His own sins because despite all He went through, He had no sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Verse 4

“And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.”

The thought of verse 1, that God chooses the high priest, is expanded here in verse 4. “No man taketh this honour unto himself” means that a man just didn’t decide and then become a high priest. Only “he that is called of God, as was Aaron,” could be high priest. In order to be a high priest in the Old Testament, a man had to be from the tribe of Levi and a member of “Aaron’s” family. The Lord Jesus was not of the tribe of Levi nor was he a member of “Aaron’s” family. He was born into the tribe of Juda. So, how can Jesus Christ be a rightful high priest? He may sympathize with us as humans and have compassion for us in our sins and troubles, but is He a true high priest? The answer is yes. And verse 5 gives us the answer.

Verse 5-6

“So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

In spite of the fact that Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi, nor was he a descendant of Aaron, He was nevertheless chosen by God to be high priest. Christ did not “glorify himself to be made an high priest.” That means Christ did not take it upon himself to appoint himself to that position. Christ was appointed the task of being high priest by God the Father.

“He that said unto him” is God the Father speaking to God the Son, Jesus Christ. “Thou art my son, to day have I begotten thee” is God the Father saying, “Jesus Christ is my Son, and I can have no high priest but my Son.” “To day have I begotten thee” is a quote from Psalm 2:7. It refers to the day or time when Christ began his redemptive work here upon the earth.

“As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” is taken from Psalm 110:4. “The writer now shows his hand and reminds his Jewish readers of something they had long forgotten: that there was a priesthood that far exceeded that of Aaron and that was in existence long

centuries before Aaron ever was born, the priesthood of Melchizedek. God chose Melchizedek to be a priest long before He chose Aaron. In fact, the first mention of the priest in the Bible relates to the priesthood of Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-21). This sudden mention of Melchizedek throws a shaft of light into the whole argument of the letter. It would become immediately apparent to the intelligent Hebrew where the argument was leading. At this point, however, the writer does little more than inject the name, but he comes back to it later and builds mightily upon it in Hebrews 7. So then, Christ was exalted to be a priest as Melchizedek was exalted to be a priest.” (John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring Hebrews: An Expository Commentary.)

These words prove beyond any doubt that there can be a high priest who is not from Aaron’s lineage. That high priest is Jesus.

Verse 7-8

“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

While Jesus lived upon earth “in the days of his flesh,” he actually did priestly work. Notice the things that are said about Him. First, “he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death.” Jesus prayed to God the Father on our behalf long before he died and rose again. In John 17, Jesus prayed for all believers, then and now. But Jesus’ “prayers, supplications, strong crying and tears” give us a deeper glimpse into our Lord’s devotional life and also remind us of the intense suffering of the cross.

The Bible tells us that Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, over the city of Jerusalem, and in the Garden of Gethsemane. But the reference here to the “strong crying and tears” seems to refer to that night of prayer and preparation for the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was there that our Lord agonized until his sweat became as great drops of blood (Luke 22:44).

Jesus prayed to the One who was “able to save him from death.” “Note that Christ did not pray to be saved "from death" but "out of death." He did not pray for the Father to rescue Him from the cross, but to raise Him from the tomb. And this prayer was answered. Certainly Christ was willing and ready to face the cross and to drink of the cup God had poured for Him (John 12:23-34).” (Wiersbe Expository Outlines - Wiersbe's Expository Outlines – Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament.)

“Was heard in that he feared” is one of the most sacred arrangement of words in the Bible. The word “feared” means “caution, reverence.” When God hears our prayers, he hears because of Christ and His grace unto us. But when God hears His Son, He hears because His Son deserves to be heard! That is what makes the intercessory work of Christ so powerful. When Christ comes to the Father it is different from when we come to the Father. Jesus, through His person and His passion on the cross is worthy to be heard. He has earned the right to be heard by the Father through His obedience and righteousness. You and I could never be heard unless we go to the Father through the One who deserves to be heard, Jesus!

We are also told that Jesus “learned obedience by the things which he suffered.” That stresses to us that Jesus is able to sympathize with us, even though He is sinless. Even though He cannot be tempted from within because there is no part of His being that can be touched by Satan; nevertheless He is able to sympathize with our weakness because of His suffering.

Verse 9-10

“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.

“And being made perfect” is not suggesting that there was a time when Jesus was not perfect. Jesus was always morally perfect. The words mean His perfections were made visible while he lived here upon the earth. To all who acknowledge that truth “he became the author of eternal salvation.” That means Jesus brought salvation into being. He is the cause of salvation.

This “salvation” that is in Christ is “eternal.” That means forever. It was possible that some of the Hebrews to whom this epistle was written were of the opinion that one could lose salvation. The book of Hebrews does not teach that a truly save person can lose his salvation. In fact, no book in the Bible teaches that. Salvation, once accepted, is “eternal.”

“Called” in verse 10 is a different word than “called” of verse 4. “Called” in verse 4 means “ordained or appointed.” “Called” in verse 10 means “to address by name or greet.” Jesus was “called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.” That means after Jesus completed the work of eternal salvation, died, was buried, and rose again, God the Father greeted, and saluted the Son, welcoming him back to the right hand of the Father.

The Hebrew author stresses again that Christ is “an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.” “At this second mention of the name Melchizedek, all within a few sentences, the intelligent Hebrew reader would begin to pace the floor with a thousand tumultuous thoughts racing through his mind. Aaron!

Melchizedek! A ritual priest! A royal priest! A priest installed by the law of Moses! A priest installed before Moses was born! So then, Christ is not only a real priest, He is a rightful priest. He has been chosen as priest.” (John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring Hebrews: An Expository Commentary.)

Conclusion

When we compare Jesus with other religious figures in the world who claim to have access to God, we find them all lacking and insufficient. Those who trust anyone but Jesus are trying to earn their way to God and that always results in eternal separation from God. Sinful man can never find a way to God on his own and he certainly can't grant access to God through his own righteousness. Human figures like Buddha, Muhammad, or the Pope, may make some kind of impression on people's lives, but ultimately their message never gets higher than human effort.

Christianity is not a religion. It is a relationship. It is not about man. It is about the God-Man. It is about the only perfect man who ever lived. Jesus Christ is our access to God the Father. He is also our high priest who can sympathize with us at the human level without joining us at the sin level. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6).

As you pray today, pause and consider what it means that Jesus is your high priest. He doesn't have to guess about your feelings and needs. He knows by His perfect knowledge and He knows by His own experience. When you recognize these truths, you are appreciating Him as your High Priest!

Amen.