

The High and Perfect Priesthood of Christ

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Date: 06 February 2023

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[0 : 00] In our last lesson, I mentioned to you that Dr. MacArthur has conveniently broken this chapter down into four major headings.

! And the last time we met, we were able to cover the first two topics, namely the availability and the elements of rest.

Tonight we're going to cover the other two topics, the nature and urgency of rest. And that should leave us enough time to move into our next lesson, at least in terms of an introduction.

So that's my plan. And if you missed that first lesson on chapter 4, I'm sure we can come up with copies, but can't do it tonight.

But let's mention this evening the nature of rest. We find this in Hebrews 4, verses 8-10.

[1 : 23] Verse 9, For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Now most people, including believers, have a problem associating the term rest with the visual image of rest. The rest spoken of here, you know, we shouldn't conjure up an image of some fellow reclining in his hammock in the backyard on a nice spring day.

And that is the only kind of rest that Joshua could have provided if he gave everyone a day off in the wilderness. And they didn't give days off as they journeyed toward the land of Canaan.

Scripture is talking about the rest provided by God, and that by the very source of its origin, that type of rest is far different from what most people imagine.

[2 : 44] God's rest is not administered through Moses or Joshua. It's not even administered through King David.

There is only one source for God's rest in the universe. And God's rest comes through the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's who we're going to focus on.

And in fact, for the most part, God's rest is not a physical rest at all. People might lodge a complaint and argue that God's rest is based upon a trust in his promises.

If we enter into that rest, we get rid of many physical problems, such as being tense or nervous most of the time. Such rest is seen as relieving us of other problems that manifest themselves within us physically.

And, you know, all that may be true in part. But these are mere byproducts of God's rest. Now, there are many denominations and a few cults that are based upon the promise that if you come to them and do what they say, you're going to have rest and happiness and health and wealth.

[4 : 04] And I always find it interesting that the pathway to wealth most often includes turning over a chunk of your money to those charlatans.

If you'll give them a chunk of your money, you're going to be prosperous. And the Bible doesn't teach that. Those are lies. It doesn't teach that.

The rest that God promises in his word is not even physical. God's rest is spiritual. We're talking about a spiritual rest. And, you know, make no mistake, God gives his people great earthly benefits as his followers.

But that does not mean we are immune to hard work or even affliction. Once that passage says, he who doesn't work doesn't eat.

Richard Wurmbrand, the founder of Voice of the Martyrs, he spent 14 years in a Romanian prison and most of that was in solitary confinement.

[5 : 11] That prison, by the way, in Romania has been converted to a Christian bookstore. You can go visit it the next time you're in Romania. He was beaten nearly every day. I knew Richard personally.

And he would tell us the only way he could survive this treatment was by resting in the Lord. A spiritual rest from the ardor of the physical abuse that he was receiving.

Fox's Book of Martyrs is a recounting of men and women who suffered and died for the Lord. It is primarily a book about people who rested in the Lord.

They were most afflicted yet found their rest in the Lord Jesus even to the point of death. And it's very interesting if you read that book how many of those that were burned at the stake, but they didn't cry out, it was like they didn't feel the flames until they inhaled the flames and died instantly because your lungs are destroyed.

But in our passage today we have a reference to the people of God. Just who is in view in this description. I think we can make the argument that it could refer, generally speaking, to anyone who knows God savingly.

[6 : 33] That would include any genuine believer living out their life in the 21st century as we are. But in the strict context of this passage, I believe the author is referring to the people of Israel.

We have Paul's words in the book of Romans, Romans 1.16, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation, to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Well then we have the urgency of rest. Hebrews 4.11-13 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

[7 : 57] So the passage here speaks of striving to enter the rest of God. And again, this is the rest provided through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you don't have faith in Christ, you don't have God's rest. And in all honesty, those believers living in the 21st century are in urgent need of God's rest.

We really are. And we need to strive for it. So how do we enter into God's rest? Well, we can only do that through faith.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot work to achieve it. We can't work to achieve that rest any more than we can work to achieve our salvation. It is a grace gift of God.

Many of the Hebrews in the wilderness forfeited their right to enter into God's rest by lacking faith in the promises of God's Word.

[9 : 06] Remember how many times Moses spoke or God spoke through Moses or God spoke directly? And they rejected that and they murmured against God. That was a lack of faith. The same is true of the people who will question the Lord Jesus as to why they are not entering into glory with Him.

And they'll cry out, Lord, Lord, have we not done these great works for you? And as I pointed out last time, that is a works theology based upon human effort.

And works theology through human effort always falls short of the biblical standard. Always.

When people seek to enter into God's final rest, they will meet a stiff judgment. No one will be able to trick God and God cannot be trifled with.

We're not going to trick Him into giving us eternal life any more than we can trick Him into giving us eternal rest. So this begs the question, why would anyone harden their heart and forfeit eternity with God?

[10 : 21] And yet the biblical record and even observation in our day is millions will do that. Even in our day. So let's continue our study with a question.

We're told not to harden our hearts toward God in this passage in Hebrews. Who is in reference here?

Well, in context, the one spoken of here is the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ. But the reference is also to the Lord in one of His specific offices.

We know that He is a prophet. We know Jesus is King. But He is also priest. Prophet, priest, and king.

And we're now going to at least initiate our look at the Lord Jesus tonight as our great High Priest. And we're going to be there for a little while.

[11 : 23] Because the book of Hebrews is there for a little while. And I'm going to do that to start with by examining the final three verses of Hebrews chapter 4.

Which actually contains one of my very favorite verses in all the Bible. Since then, we have a great High Priest.

And by the way, no human was ever a great High Priest. That's Jesus. 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. And now we come to that favorite verse of mine.

[12 : 24] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

That's worthy of memorization there. This is in the form of an appeal to those Jews in this Hebrew congregation.

And what can we say about them? Well, obviously they were dissatisfied with Judaism. They'd left it. That is why they left that particular religion.

But in turning from Judaism, many had not yet turned to Christ. Others in the congregation had, but others had not.

And they had not embraced Him as Lord and Savior. They were sitting under sound teaching. As attendees to this church, they were hearing the word preached.

[13 : 28] Just like we can hear on Sunday morning. They were hearing the word preached. They knew the claims of Christ.

That was being preached. They knew that Jesus was superior to prophets, to angels. He was even superior to Moses, who was the most revered Jew that ever lived by many estimations.

But they need Jesus and were in dire danger of not trusting in Him, just as the Hebrews had done in the wilderness, and fell and their bones are still over there getting bleached by the sun, according to Scripture.

And they were in dire danger of not trusting Him. They were not trusting in His finished work on the cross. They were being urged to enter into His rest and cautioned against hardening their hearts. That's a very dangerous thing, to harden your heart. By genuinely receiving Christ, they would find perfect rest in Christ, provided by Christ.

[14 : 48] Sometimes the gospel message can be hard. Sometimes even negative, if the Holy Spirit knows that this is what it's going to be, going to take to bring the elect to salvation.

The message to this point has essentially been negative, and it's used words like doomed, forever lost, forever apart from God, outside His rest.

Even God's Holy Word was described as a two-edged sword. Think about that. But there is also a very positive message.

Many people describe salvation as keeping us out of hell. That's how they view their salvation. Well, I'm not going to go to hell when I die. Well, that may be true.

If you're one with Christ, it is true. But while that is true, there's a lot more to it. Much more.

Salvation provided by Christ saves us from spiritual death.

[16 : 00] Spiritual death is separation from the Godhead. But it also saves us into spiritual life.

Instead of focusing on the negatives that happened if we are not saved by Him, we need to consider the great good that accrues to us if we are saved by Him.

Salvation is entering into the greatest relationship possible in the universe. No greater relationship than one we can have with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's the greatest experience we can ever hope for. We're talking about walking in fellowship, walking in fellowship with the very Son of God, the one who is our Redeemer.

He is our Creator. And He's the one who will sustain us through eternity. You know, when we get to heaven, a lot of people say, if I can just get there and shut the door.

[17 : 16] No, no, there's no security in a place. Billions of angels fell from heaven. The chief angel fell from heaven. The chief angel fell from heaven. Security is not in a place.

It's in a person. Christ Jesus. He's the one that sustains us through eternity. Now, He is our Judge. We should fear His wrath. Fear for the believer is reverential trust. But more than that, we see not His wrath so much as we see His grace.

It's grace. It's grace. Brothers, if you haven't seen His grace, you need to get on your knees and search for it. Ask for it. He is our Judge. But more than that, He is our merciful and faithful High Priest.

Capital H, capital P. Well, what makes Jesus our great High Priest? And this is just our introduction into the High Priesthood of Christ.

[18:19] Well, there are three things that I'll mention tonight. First, His perfect priesthood. Second, His perfect person.

And third, His perfect provision. And the first thing I want to mention is His perfect priesthood. Hebrews 4.16. I'll read it again.

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.

Now, the book of Hebrews could have easily and accurately been named the High and Perfect Priesthood of Christ.

There's a good title, Lee. The High and Perfect Priesthood of Christ. There are references to the Lord as High Priest throughout much of the book of Hebrews.

[19:23] We've already learned that Jesus has made purification for our sins. It's what the High Priest did. We can read that all the way back in Leviticus. I studied Leviticus this week, getting ready for next week's lesson.

If I start reading in Leviticus, we may not get out of there for a while. That's what we learn about the High Priest. We know Jesus is a merciful and faithful High Priest.

We also know that the Lord is the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. These are all roles and functions of the High Priest.

And that again takes us all the way back to the Old Testament book of Leviticus. I am mesmerized when I sit down in the quiet of the night at my house and read the 16th chapter of Leviticus.

Just an amazing, amazing chapter. What is a priest? A priest was a person that was appointed by God to be a mediator between God and His people.

[20:52] And we've studied that in here. And we've made many references to the fact that Christ is the mediator. And that term will come up more often in the future.

That's what a priest is. He mediates between the Father and the people of God. And that's what a priest is.

Under the Old Covenant, only the High Priest, little h, little p, human guy, only the High Priest could offer the highest sacrifice made only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

The Jews call that Yom Kippur. You've heard that term, I'm sure. Only on Yom Kippur and on that day, all the sins of the people were brought symbolically to the Holy of Holies.

That was the most sacred place on earth. And it was in the tabernacle originally and later in the temple, on the Temple Mount.

[22:16] Once there, the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the mercy seat. In that manner, the sins of the people were atoned for.

And it doesn't take a mental giant to figure out who that was symbolizing. That was a symbol of what Jesus would do on Calvary.

And would do when He entered into the very Holy of Holies in the heavenly temple and there to present His blood on the mercy seat to atone for our sins.

I added that and now I'm lost. So once the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies, the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the mercy seat.

And the sins of the people were atoned for. Now, the Day of Atonement was an elaborate ceremony.

[23:29] It took about 24 hours. And you can read guys like Alfred Edersheim, a Messianic Jew. You can read Josephus, a Jewish historian.

This was an elaborate 24-hour ceremony. And it had to be done perfectly. I'd have been a nervous wreck. Oh, man.

It involved numerous washings. It involved numerous changes of clothes. And it was bloody.

The Jewish historians talked about the blood above the ankles or up the calf of the priest as he entered in because of all the sacrifices that were going on.

Before entering the Holy of Holies, the priest that year had to make atonement for himself. That in itself was an elaborate ceremony.

[24 : 36] And he wasn't going to go in there until he was satisfied. He wasn't carrying any sin in there. Because he knew he'd be struck dead. So he had to make atonement for himself.

Then the high priest, the human high priest, would make atonement for his family. He wanted his family's sins to be covered.

And only then could he atone for the sins of the nation. And the scriptures tell us in the Old Testament, he was actually entering into the presence of God.

And everything had to be done perfectly. Now what did he say? I don't know. What did he see? I don't know.

Probably the Shekinah, the glory cloud. But that was not a time for mistakes. Or frivolity. Now you remember frivolity? Remember Nadab and Abihu?

[25 : 39] Sons of Aaron? And they got drunk. There's your answer about whether alcohol is good for you or bad for you. They got drunk and offered strange fire.

Walked into the Holy of Holies and offered strange fire. And it says God consumed them. Fire came out. And consumed. They were dust. They were cremated.

Their father Aaron was the high priest. And I love this passage of scripture because it's so instructive. And it says, and Aaron was silent.

What do you say? Do you lodge a complaint against God? My sons got drunk and went in there and did that? And Aaron was silent.

But the earthly high priest once a year was actually entering into the presence of God. And he was striving for perfection in everything he did.

[26 : 40] And he would not linger because he's in the Shekinah. The glory. Sometimes people say the Shekinah cloud.

That's like saying cloud cloud. The Shekinah. Or the Shekinah glory. That's glory glory. This is the very glory of God that filled the room. Isaiah saw that in the sixth chapter of Isaiah.

He saw the Lord high and lifted up. And the robe of His temple filled the temple. And there was smoke. There was earthquake. And the doorposts were shaking.

And I said, woe is me. He pronounced a curse unto myself. I'm undone. For I've seen the Lord. And the Gospel of John tells us that was Jesus Christ whom he saw. In the temple that day.

But he couldn't make a mistake. If he made a mistake, he could be struck dead by the Lord.

[27 : 45] And you know, this went on for 1600 years. I imagine there were some high priests that made mistakes. Or maybe went in having drunk some alcohol.

And there they are. Well, you got a problem, don't you? No one can go in after him. Only the high priest could go in.

And now they're yelling in there. Are you okay? And there's no answer. So Josephus said they would tie a rope on him.

And if they didn't hear from him for a while, they would reel him out like a fish. Because they couldn't go in after him. They'd drag him out.

It's also instructive that there were no chairs in the Holy of Holies. There were no chairs.

[28 : 43] The priests never sat down. Why not? There was always more work to do. There was always more sin to atone for.

And once he left that room, he didn't return for a year. Now when Jesus entered the heavenly Holy of Holies, what's the first thing he did? He sat down. The right hand of the Father.

Didn't happen on the earthly tabernacle or later the temple. Now, to get inside the Holy of Holies, the priest had to pass through three areas of the tabernacle, later the temple.

Those areas were the outer court, the holy place, and then into the Holy of Holies. Jesus, to become our High Priest, had to offer a sacrifice for the sins of His people.

We know that as the atonement. Who are His people? Everybody whose name is recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life, from before the foundation of the world, down to our day and beyond.

[30 : 03] That's the atonement. Meaning appeasement or satisfaction. Who was appeased? Who was satisfied? The Father. His wrath was satisfied. Once the Lord made that one-time sacrifice on the cross, He passed through three areas.

The Lord Jesus Himself. He passed through the heavens. The Lord went through the first heaven, which is the atmosphere of earth.

Next, He traveled through the second heaven, which we call outer space. And then Jesus entered into the third heaven, which is where God the Father dwells.

So He went through three places. Here is how the apostle Paul described his experience with this. 2 Corinthians 12, verses 2-4.

I know a man in Christ, who 14 years ago was caught up to the third heaven. That's where the Father dwells.

[31 : 14] I've never been up there. And I get offended. Pastor, I hope I'm not off base on this. But I get offended these guys that say they go up there and then they write books about their experience.

I was watching Bethel Church out in California. It was on video. And this tinsel started coming down from the ventilation system.

And Bill Johnson, the pastor out there said, this is the Shekinah of God. He's coming down to visit us. And you talk about hooping and hollering.

And when the video ended, MacArthur said if that had been the Shekinah of God, everyone in that building would be dead. Every one of them.

When the Shekinah appeared before Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, to spare their life, God knocked them out.

[32 : 14] He knocked them out. So they didn't die. The only way men have been able to dwell in the presence of God was in Christ and His glory was veiled in human flesh.

Now there were times it shone through with catastrophic results. Remember the soldiers that came arresting him? And he said, whom seek ye? He said, Jesus of Nazareth? And what he really said was, I am the sacred name for God.

And they all passed out. It's a heady thing to come into the presence of God. I remember the great black preacher E.V. Hill, and he had a moment in his church, and she was praying, she says, Oh God, just come down and touch us.

He said, if he did, you'd pass out. You'd have a heart attack. Don't pray that prayer. I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago was caught up to the third heaven.

Whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know. God knows. That's scripture. God knows.

And I know that this man was caught up into paradise, whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know.

[33 : 25] God knows. Paul's talking about himself. And he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

I'm still offended by one of those charismatic guys. I won't call his name Jesse Duplantis. And he said, I went to heaven this week. I've told you this before. And I got there and Jesus was over in the corner crying.

I went over and said, what's the matter, Lord? And he said, I failed. All these people are dying and going to hell. He said, I put my arm around. I said, don't worry, we've got everything under control down there. That's blasphemy. That's why I'm not God.

He'd been Nadab in a bayou. God was merciful. So Jesus ended up in the true Holy of Holies where the Father dwells and where he dwelt for millennia before this time.

Unlike the earthly high priest, Jesus did not have to leave. His one sacrifice was good for all time.

Also, Jesus, upon arrival in the true Holy of Holies, sat down.

[34 : 40] The earthly high priest never sat down when making sacrifice. The work was never completed. There was always another sacrifice to make. In fact, there were no chairs in the earthly tabernacle or temple.

And then we have his perfect person. 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.

Jesus was perfect as God. Jesus was also perfect as man. The most unique individual in the universe. The God-man.

And he was able to identify with the human race and make atonement for the sins of his people. As a man, Jesus felt pain. He felt the heat of the day and the cold of the night.

He became hungry and thirsty. He experienced feelings of love and concern and disappointment and grief and frustration and all that just because of Peter.

[35 : 48] You know? Gotta love Peter. He was tempted just as we are, yet he committed no sin. But he understood sin and he wanted nothing to do with it.

And now, again, one of my favorite passages, his perfect provision. Let us then with confidence, same Greek word for boldness, draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4.16. The perfect Christ provides for us perfectly. He understands us perfectly. Listen to this promise, 1 Corinthians 10.13.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

He knows our temptations and he will lead us out of them. In this amazing verse in Hebrews, we can draw near with confidence or boldness to the throne of grace.

[37 : 13] Most of the ancient rulers were unapproachable by merely common people. I remember when the emperor of Japan made a recording saying we're surrendering to the allied forces.

That was the first time the Japanese people ever heard his voice. And when MacArthur met with him, he said, I'm only going to make a few demands on you. He liked him.

MacArthur, well, the Japanese emperor went to him and said, I alone am responsible for the sins of my people. And that impressed MacArthur. And he said, I'm only going to make a few demands on you.

But one of them is you got to tell the people you're not God. Because that was like they believed he was God. He said, I'll gladly do that because I know I'm not. And he said, I'll gladly do that. So we have this amazing verse in Hebrews.

We could draw near with confidence or boldness to the throne of grace. And most ancient rulers, you couldn't approach them. And the great Bible story, you guys remember this, don't you?

[38 : 18] Was Queen Esther. She was Jewish. And who was it? Haman that wanted to kill all the Jews. And so she went to her husband.

He was seated on the throne. And he was talking to his cabinet. And she went in without invitation. That was punishable by death.

She risked her life for God's people, the Hebrews. And the king was so pleased and so impressed about what she had done. He said, come sit next to me.

He loved her. He said, any believer may approach the Lord's throne of grace. God shed his blood to make it a throne of grace.

Prior to that, it was a throne of judgment. Why is it a throne of grace? Because grace is dispensed there.

[39 : 22] Now I do think when we approach that throne, and we should do it daily, all day, camp out there. But not in frivolity, in sin.

It's a reverent place. So the question that I leave you with tonight is this, have you gone to his throne today, there to receive mercy and grace in time of need?

That's what we need to do every day. That's what we need to do every day. That's what we need to do every day.