Hebrews 4:14-5:10 Jesus Our High Priest

Introduction: One of my very favorite movies is "Parenthood." The basic point of the movie is that life is a roller coaster. It is terrifying, and thrilling at the same time. Some people (like me) don't like the roller coaster. They would rather just ride the merry-go-round. But that just goes round and round. Do you like the roller coaster or do you prefer the merry-go-round? Priests are to be emotionally engaged – certainly Jesus was, and so must we be.

I. The High Priest

Hebrews is practically the only NT book that deals with Jesus as High Priest. In Hebrews there are two offices (or roles) of Christ that are emphasized: Christ as revealer (prophet) and as Priest.

• The Purpose Of A High Priest: He represents his people before God – he is a go-between. Why do we need a priest? Because we have been cut off from God by our sin. (illustration: the tree of life now guarded by an angel with a flaming sword.) The movement of the priest is from mankind toward God (the opposite of the prophets who moves from God toward mankind.) He never comes with empty hands but offers up sacrifices and prayers to God for the people. And in the case of the OT priests they needed to offer a sacrifice for their own sins first.

• The Qualifications for a High Priest: He must be able to identify with those he represents, he must share their nature and also experience their sufferings. And he must be appointed to the role – it is not something he can take upon himself (vs. 1). This is ironic because in Jesus’ day the high priesthood had been bought by one family and had been corrupted into something like the medieval papacy.

• Interestingly, none of the Jews ever talked about the weakness of the High Priest. (vs. 2) So where does Hebrews get this idea? From considering our true High Priest Jesus! (See Heb 4:15-16) From reflection upon what Jesus was like (“for I am gentle and humble in heart” Matt 11:29) the author of Hebrews is able to discover God’s intention for the priesthood – the priests’ continual offering of sacrifices should have made them humble and gentle. But in Jesus’ day this was not at all true! The High Priest was one who loved power and often abused it. This should be a warning for all those called to serve in leadership roles in God’s church, and for all of us since all are called to be priests (1Pet 2:5, 9) and called to pray and walk humbly before God!

II. Jesus Is Our High Priest!

• Christ is like the other priests in some ways (vs. 1-3, 5-7) He was a real man, and appointed by God (Hebrews quotes OT passages to prove that even Jesus was appointed to this role by God - vs. 4-6.) And he offered up prayers on our behalf to God.

• But Christ, unlike all other priests, became “the source of eternal salvation to all who believe” (vs. 10) by what He did through His suffering. As the Greek can be translated, He is the cause of our salvation. Our obedience serves to authenticate our faith, but it is not the cause of our salvation – Jesus is! Imagine a Jew being told that he could now enter the holy of holies with boldness and that he wouldn't die! Remember this was something that only the high priest could do, and only once a year, and even then he entered with great fear knowing that he might die. But Jesus earns for us the right to come boldly before God, and God confirms this (vs. 10). It is His death that is the cause of our salvation, not our decision. Therefore we can come into God's presence with confidence. The scriptures consistently say that Christ's death on the cross actually saved His people, it didn't just make them savable.

• This is one of the major emphases of Hebrews – Jesus is our High Priest! In fact, Ps 110:4 (quoted here in vs. 6) is the most quoted OT text in the Book of Hebrews. And we need this image to get a full picture of who Jesus is! If all we know about Jesus are the descriptions from the gospels and Paul’s letters, we are missing some of the splendor of who Jesus is and our worship of Him can’t help but be deficient and our experience of Him lacking somewhat.

III. Gaze Upon Our High Priest Jesus!

• Consider the magnitude of His task (vs. 7) Why do we see Jesus in the Garden being so overwhelmed (the scriptures say he was sorrowful to the point of death) as he wrestles with God about the cross? It was not just the physical suffering but was that He was going to experience the full weight of the covenant curses for His people. Look at Leviticus 26:14-39. But if we are in Christ, we need not fear these curses. Not because God has changed His mind and no longer has such a strong negative reaction to disobedience. We who are in Christ no longer have to fear because Jesus has taken all of these curses on Himself at the cross. If we want to know more of the full depth of what Jesus suffered on the cross we only need to look at the curses of the covenant God promises for those who are disobedient. Similarly, the blessings of the covenant, spoken of in Lev 26:1-13, are earned for us by Christ, the one who obeyed the covenant.
• Christ prayed not to be delivered from dying but for God to sustain Him in the temptations that the sufferings would bring and Luke 22:43 says that God sent an angel to strengthen Him in the Garden. Jesus did not resort to His divine nature to endure the cross but lived as the perfect submissive and dependant man in the experience of the cross. God answered his prayer like He answered Paul’s regarding the thorn, not by taking it away but by providing strength and comfort in the midst of the trial. This can teach us how to pray for ourselves, and for others, for our friends, our children etc. if Christ prayed because He feared shrinking back in the moment of trial then how much more should we pray! Do we pray to endure trials faithfully?

• He suffered and cried out His whole life, and all of it was suffering as our Priest! Verse 7 speaks to more than just the garden of Gethsemane! In fact, Bill Lane says that Hebrews uses a technical word here for “offered” in vs. 7 that is used of offering sacrifices because Hebrews sees all of Jesus’ prayers and cries as part of His High Priestly service. And this was all part of His reverent submission that earned salvation for us and qualified Him to be our Savior. Thus when we study the life of Jesus we are not just to look for “What Would Jesus Do?” but see what He did do, because it was all part of Him earning our salvation!

• He suffered from the moment of birth and it got worse and worse as He got closer to the cross! That’s why it says He “learned obedience” from what He suffered. (What an extraordinary phrase!) BB Warfield (the great Professor from Princeton Seminary in the early 1900s) wrote an incredible piece about this called “On The Emotional Life Of Our Lord” in which he contends that Christ was suffering for us His whole life. Why else would He need to be circumcised? His innocent flesh had no need to be cut except that He was willingly identifying with His people! Why did He live in poverty when He deserved the richest splendor? What other religion has a God who has become One of us – who has not stayed aloof and distant from the pain? But why is it that so few (Christians and non-Christians) don’t realize this about Christianity? Is it because we ourselves are not comfortable with suffering and thus give the impression that the God we serve runs from it as well? We shouldn’t run from suffering, not just because Jesus wants to meet us there, but because it says something about the sufficiency and character of our precious God!

• Christ offered Himself – in the cross He suffered but also acted – He was not merely passive!! “Christ on the cross was far more than a willing victim passively enduring the stroke of divine judgment. He was there performing a work, nor did He cease until He cried in triumph, “It is finished!” He loved the church and gave Himself for it (Eph 5:23), He laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:11, 18)... He poured out His soul unto death (Isaiah 53:12), He gave up His spirit (John 19:30). Hell’s utmost force and fury gathered against Him: Heaven’s sword devouring Him, and heaven’s God forsaking Him: earth and hell, and heaven, thus in conspiring action against Him, unto the uttermost of heaven’s extremest justice, and earth’s and hell’s extremest injustice: what is the glory of the cross if it be not this: that with such action conspiring to subdue His action, His action outlasted and outlived them all, and He did not die subdued and overborne in the dying. He did not die “til He gave Himself in death”. (AW Pink quoting Hugh Martin)

• Christ offers something to God, He does not come with empty hands. This is our security! Because He honored God, God answered Him. We are saved by works, but not by our works (vs. 10)

• Jesus grew through suffering and so should the Hebrews - and so should we, rather than avoiding it at all costs. Instead, the Hebrews are immature and this is a real tragedy! As suffering grew Christ it should grow us up too! It is not to be avoided at all costs, it is to be embraced and used. (cf. Hebrews 12)

• Have you made use of Jesus as your High Priest?

Have you made use of Him for salvation? If Christ feared bearing the wrath of God and cried out for help in bearing the cross then why are so many unmoved by the thought of God’s judgment? If you have not run to Christ to be brought home to God then run now!

Have you made use of Him for returning to God? Have you been a prodigal running from God? “He Himself once felt the load of unforgiven sin. He Himself once felt the frown of an angry God.” (Robert Murray McCheyne) Jesus knows the load of the burden of sin and guilt on your conscience and can wash you clean this very moment!

Have you made use of Him in your sorrow? There is no sorrow or pain that you will feel that Jesus does not feel more grievously. He has experienced betrayal, abuse, poverty, hunger, homelessness, and loneliness – not to mention torture like we can only imagine. Don’t hold back, but run to Him now!

Have you made use of Him in your burden for our broken world? Ask Him to give you His heart for the world and the brokenness that sin has brought and ask Him to give you courage to pray knowing that He cares! Jesus is emotionally engaged in His world, but is His church?