

Sermon Christ's Priestly Heart by Ben S.
Reading Hebrews 4:14-16

Some people may ask, 'why do you have pastors but no priest?' Well, the answer to that question is: 'We have both!' We have a pastoral team made up of Ben, Moira and me. We feel our weakness. But we also have a priest: just the one but he is available 24-7. He is fully God and fully man but perfectly righteous and full of compassion. His name is Jesus. Just as Stephen the first Christian martyr looked up to heaven during his execution and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God the Father my hope is we will also have a small glimpse of our great, high priest in heaven today and be encouraged! Often we don't have an appreciation of how wonderful and how needed the priestly work of Jesus Christ really is. Turn in your Bible to Hebrews chapter 4 and read verses 14 to 16. *"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 empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are; yet he did not sin. 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."* Today I want us to consider Jesus Christ's priestly work and his priestly heart.

Christ's Priestly Work for Us: A priest is a representative who goes into the presence of God on behalf of someone else. When I was a kid if I kicked the ball over into next door garden and wanted it back I'd always say to my older brother "You go and speak to Mr. Farrow for me. I don't want to go. You go for me!" And he'd go and knock on the door as my representative to ask for the ball back! Throughout history and all around the world people have had a real sense of their unworthiness before the divine. "I can't just approach God. I need someone better than I am to go in on my behalf." Priests are appointed to this task: to approach God on behalf of the people as their representative!

In the Old Testament, the priest was appointed to do two key jobs. Firstly, they offered gifts and sacrifices for sin. Our sin vandalizes, infects and defiles God's good world, our lives and our relationships. Sin makes us unclean and cuts us off from God. Sin brings death and judgement. But, through the Priesthood, God provided a way for him to dwell in a harmonious relationship with a sinful community. Through the symbolic ritual of sacrifice the people were reminded of the tragic consequences of sin. An animal's life was symbolically offered to atone for the people's sin. On the Day of Atonement, the priest would go through the curtain in the temple into the very Holy of Holies to meet with God on behalf of the people. The priest's job was to approach God with the sacrifice God required on the people's behalf as their representative. When the priest was accepted on the Day of Atonement the whole community rejoiced knowing they had received God's mercy and his favour. He was present with them.

The second role of the priest in the Old Testament was to intercede on behalf of the people. The high priest came before God to pray for the community of Israel. He spoke to God on behalf of the people. God set up the Old Testament priesthood as a symbol to help us understand how his Son Jesus would truly save all God's people from their sin by an amazing sacrifice and be our perfect mediator in heaven itself. The book of Hebrews explains how Jesus fulfilled both the roles of the priest perfectly. As your appointed, great high priest he is interceding for you. He is in the very presence of God as your representative speaking to the father on your behalf. *"Therefore, he is able to save completely (to the uttermost) those who come to*

God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." (Heb. 7:25)

Christ's priestly heart for us: In the OT the prophet and the priest had different roles. The prophet stayed close to God and represented God by speaking his words to the people. But the priest's primary role was to approach God as their representative and to speak to God on their behalf. Hebrews 5:2 says, "*the priests were able to deal with sinful people gently because they knew what it was like to be weak.*" They had to make sacrifices for their own sins before entering into the presence of God on the people's behalf. They could never become superior and feel like they were above the mess of this fallen world. To have a priestly spirit was to have a sympathetic, compassionate and tender heart towards people in their brokenness. v.15 says "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are; yet he did not sin.*" When Jesus walked the earth he had so much sympathy and compassion for broken sinners. He was even concerned for his murderers asking his father not to hold their sin against them. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. His heart is still just as sympathetic and kind towards us in our weakness. The word sympathize here in Greek is the word 'co-suffer'. Just like a loving parent feels the pain of their suffering child and groans when they make sinful choices and get into all kinds of misery, so Jesus sympathizes with us in our weakness. He feels our sorrows deeply and his heart goes out to us even in our sin. He is fully God but he is also still fully man. He understands what you are facing and his heart goes out to you.

What makes his heart so sympathetic? v.15 tells us: "*Because in his human nature he too was tempted and tested in every way just as we are*". He knows what it feels like in his human nature to experience weakness. Sometimes we can think of Jesus as kind of glowing and life was all a bit of a breeze. Nothing could be further from the truth. Dane Ortlund writes in 'Gentle and Lowly, 'Jesus is not Zeus. He was a sinless man, not a sinless Superman. He woke up with bed-head. He had pimples. At 33 his friends deserted him. He never would have appeared on the cover of Men's health (he had no beauty that we should desire him Isaiah tells us). He came as a normal man to normal men. So don't hide your problems and your mess from him. Don't think you have to resist temptation in your own strength. Don't feel like you have to cope with suffering on your own. Remember your great high priest in heaven. Jesus faced the same battle against the flesh as we do and he knows how to beat pride, gossip, lust, greed, hatred, laziness, comfort-worship, fear of man, resentment. He knows how to deal with rejection, betrayal, violence, abuse, loneliness in a godly way. He experienced the same weakness as we do in his human nature but he figured it out. Jesus is brilliant at dealing with the mess of human life. He understands exactly what you are facing. He knows what it feels like and he cares. His heart resonates with sympathy. He knows how to deal with your mess, your trial, your pain. He has walked your path before you and come through sinless. He can help you if you turn to him. See his scarred hands stretched out bidding you come. See his sympathetic and compassionate smile. This priest has turned the throne of a pure and holy God into a throne of grace and help. There is infinite mercy for you in the throne room of God. There is help available for you in your time of need. Draw near through Jesus. You will never be rejected or cast out. Draw near and be healed.

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever." Amen 1 Tim 1:17