

Hebrews Chapter Four (vv.14-16)

An Introduction to Priesthood

The writer has ended his parenthesis and second warning (3.7-4.13). Now he resumes the theme of the **priesthood** of Christ which forms the main subject of the whole epistle. *Acts 6.7: And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the **priests** were obedient to the faith.*

The *prophet* was characterised by **speaking**. He would **reveal** God to man. The *king* was characterised by **sovereignty**. He would **reign** for God *over* man. The *priest* was characterised by **service**. He would **represent** man *before* God. There were king-prophets (David), priest-prophets (Samuel) and even a king-priest (Melchizedek) but Christ combines the offices of Prophet, Priest and King in One glorious Person. Note. The **Mediator reconciles** man (1 Timothy 2.5). The **Advocate restores** man (1 John 2.1). The **Priest sustains** man (Genesis 14.18).

Different dispensations emphasise different offices of the Lord Jesus. The first advent emphasises Christ as Prophet. *Deuteronomy 18.15: The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.* The second advent (and millennium) emphasises Christ as King. *Revelation 19.16: And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.* The present dispensation (day of grace) emphasises Christ as Priest. *Hebrews 2.18: For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.*

We are introduced to priesthood in Hebrews 2.16-18 where a Merciful and Faithful High Priest has met our need in relation to the **throne** (2.17) and the **wilderness** (2.18). Hebrews 4.14-16 emphasises the *heavenly character* of our Great High Priest. There is the superiority His **office** (v.14), **position** (v.14), **Person** (v.14, manhood and deity combined), **ministry** (v.15) and **qualifications** (v.15). Chapter 5 vv.1-11 will emphasise the nature of His **call** to this office.

Our Great High Priest (vv.14-16)

Hebrews 4.12-13 shows that any amongst the company who were merely professing faith in Christ could not escape the penetrating discernment of the **word** (Hebrews 4.12) and **eyes** (Hebrews 4.13) of God. True believers are also reminded of their weaknesses and need to be 'zealous' and 'diligent' in their labours for the Lord, the One to Whom we shall give account. We need the sustaining strength of our Great High Priest.

14 *Seeing then that we have a great high (chief) priest, that is passed ~~into~~ (through) the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us (continue to) hold fast our ~~profession~~ (confession).*

We have all we need in our Great (Person) High Priest (office). There were **83** high priests in Israel's history; none was ever called 'great' (*meegas*). The Lord Jesus is Great (Luke 1.32). He is the Great Light (Matthew 4.16), Great King (Matthew 5.35), Great Prophet (Luke 7.16), Great God and Saviour (Titus 2.13) and Great Shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 13.20). He can bring about a great calm (Matthew 8.26), great joy (Matthew 28.8) and great astonishment (Mark 5.42). Great and marvellous are His works (Revelation 15.3).

This Priest has 'passed through the heavens' (atmospheric and stellar) with the present result that He is now in 'heaven itself' or the 'third heaven' (2 Corinthians 12.2), in the presence of God. He has gone within the veil in the true tabernacle in heaven (Hebrews 1.3, 13, 2.9-10, 6.19-20, 8.2). On the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), the High Priest passed through the court, Holy Place and into the Holy of Holies. Christ has passed through the reality of which the Tabernacle was a type (cf. Hebrews 6.19-20, 10.19-21). Furthermore, the High Priest was one who led the people in their worship of God. As our High Priest has left earth and entered into heaven, the suggestion is that God has temporarily abandoned **earthly** priesthood and ceremony during this dispensation. Worship now takes place in heaven alone (John 4)! The Priest Who has accomplished all this is 'Jesus the Son of God'! Here is manhood and deity combined, giving Him unique qualification for such service. In the light of persecution, having such an One in the presence of God **sustaining** us is good reason to 'hold fast' or 'stick like glue' to our 'confession' that Jesus is indeed the divine Son.

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

The double negative expresses a strong positive, i.e. 'We **do** have a High Priest which **can...**'. The ministry of this Priest is one of **sympathy**. 'Touched' means 'to suffer *with* another person', 'to enter into another's experience and feel the heartache yourself'. In the context of the Hebrew epistle, 'infirmities' or a 'need of strength' was experienced in the light of severe persecution (cf. Hebrews 11.34). As such, the Lord Jesus enters into the weakness these believers are experiencing and feels it as His own (Matthew 25.40, Acts 9.4). The persecution they were experiencing was a point of

'temptation', i.e. 'trial', 'testing' or 'proving'. The Hebrews were experiencing a 'great fight of afflictions', they were made a spectacle, reviled and persecuted. They were suffering for righteousness' sake (Hebrews 10.32-34). The Lord Jesus had been tested 'in every respect' ('all points') like they were and He endured to the end. They had not yet resisted unto blood, but He had and was able to minister mercy and grace to meet their every need. *Hebrews 12.4: Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.* Clearly the Hebrews were not only being tested from **without** by Satanic persecution, but also by **indwelling** sin through the lure of the old way of life (Judaism). The Lord Jesus can only sympathise with any external testing which does not have its roots in our own selfish lusts (sin). There are two types of temptations; one is **internal** when our own thoughts and hearts give rise to sin (2 Samuel 11.2, James 1.14), the other is **external**, when Satan seeks to attack from without (Luke 4.2). The Lord Jesus could never be **tempted** from *within* (no principle of sin in Him), only **tested** from *without* (Matthew 4.1, John 14.30).

Clearly the verse has a **wider application** in relation to believers today. **Firstly**, He still feels our weaknesses as His own. This is suggested in Isaiah 53 (quoted in Matthew 8.17). *Isaiah 53.4: Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.* Christ is the One who has 'borne' the nation's 'griefs' (sicknesses) and 'carried' their 'sorrows' (pain). This indicates that the Lord Jesus 'lifted up' and 'carried away' the 'sicknesses' of the people as His very own burden. He also shouldered as a 'heavy load' the 'grief' and 'pain' of the people. He compassionately entered fully and personally into the sorrows of the people and felt them as His own. **Secondly**, He was 'in all points... tempted like as we are', i.e. in 'every class of temptation He was tested' (EW Rogers). *Albert Leckie: These temptations are not unholy, but holy temptations (e.g. reproach, poverty, hunger, thirst, rejection, bereavement). He has passed all that way before us. He cannot sympathise with our sins, only our infirmities. Praise God! He is better able to sympathise than anyone else as He has experienced temptation to its bitter end.*

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

What is the practical outcome of such delightful encouragement? **PRAY!** It is as we come boldly to the throne of grace we 'lay hold on' or 'receive' all that our Great High Priest has already procured for us. We are to 'approach' or 'draw near' (cf. Hebrews 7.25, 10.1, 10.22, 11.6, 12.18, 12.22) with boldness. The word 'boldness' is literally 'with all freedom in speech' and is used of speaking **clearly, openly and confidently**. We can come with confidence because the Lord Jesus has met every demand of God's throne (Hebrews 2.17). What a blessing that we now come before a 'throne of grace'. In OT days, God's throne was a 'throne of mercy' (Exodus 25.22, 1 Samuel 4.4, 2 Samuel 6.2). In these days worshippers could approach the courts of the Tabernacle, priests could approach the Holy Place, but only the High Priest could approach the Holy of Holies, the place of God's throne, once a year, not without blood. What a contrast to the throne under grace! We have immediate access to God and freedom to draw near to Him continually.

Christ has made propitiation at Calvary. He now acts (as Great high Priest) on the basis of propitiation already made. There is thus available to us 'mercy' and 'grace'. 'Mercy' is not the mercy of salvation (Psalm 85.7), that is already ours, but the mercy of 'active compassion' and 'kindness' which our feebleness requires. See Matthew 9.36, 14.14, 20.34, Mark 1.41, 5.19, 6.34, Luke 7.13. There is also 'grace', divine favour and support for our pilgrim journey communicated through the bread which strengthens and the wine which cheers (Genesis 14.18).

This grace and mercy is received 'in time of need'. **G Campbell Morgan:** *I am never tired of pointing out that the Greek phrase translated 'in time of need' is a colloquialism of which 'in the nick of time' is the exact equivalent. That we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the nick of time, grace just when and where I need it. You are attacked by temptation. At the moment of assault, you look to Him, and the grace is there to help in the nick of time. There is no postponement of your petition until the evening hour of prayer. But there in the city street with the flaming temptation in front of you, turn to Christ with a cry for help, and the grace will be there in the nick of time.*