

Our Great High Priest

by A.B. Simpson

Jesus Christ is our Great High Priest, who has passed into the heavens and is able to sympathize with us in all our infirmities, providing us with perfect access to the throne of grace.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:14

Topics: "Boldness in Prayer", "Christ's Priesthood"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the significance of Jesus as our Great High Priest, who has passed into the heavens and is intimately aware of our struggles and temptations. He highlights that Jesus, unlike the earthly high priests, is both divine and human, making Him uniquely qualified to intercede for us. Simpson encourages believers to hold fast to their faith and to approach the throne of grace boldly, seeking mercy and help in times of need. He illustrates the profound connection we have with Christ, who understands our weaknesses and sorrows, and assures us of His constant presence and support. The sermon calls for a deeper appreciation of Christ's priesthood and the privileges it affords us in our spiritual journey.

Transcript

"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.

"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.

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4: 14-16).

After Moses, Aaron. After the great leader and messenger of God to Israel, the Great High Priest. After Jesus as the Apostle of our profession the writer of this beautiful epistle proceeds to represent Him as our Great High Priest. This is the second theme of the epistle to the Hebrews. Although there were two brief references to His priesthood in previous passages (2: 17, and 3: 1), yet the regular discussion of this subject commences with our text, Hebrews 4: 14, and continues until near the close of the tenth chapter. There was no figure more impressive in all the imposing ritual of ancient Judaism than the high priest when arrayed in his magnificent official robes. Every part of his garments had a special typical significance. His inner robe of white linen expressed the perfect purity of the Great High Priest of whom he was the type. His outer garments of blue, purple, and scarlet were all significant of His high character and

lofty functions. The blue signified His heavenly and divine character. The purple proclaimed His royalty; the scarlet His atoning blood. The priest's brow was crowned with a flashing miter on which were inscribed in jeweled letters, "Holiness unto the Lord." His shoulders bore two epaulettes, each composed of a massive jewel inscribed with the names of the tribes of Israel. On his bosom blazed twelve many-tinted gems, each bearing in the crystal stone deeply engraved the name of one of Israel's tribes. These jewels on his shoulders and his breast proclaimed at once the power and tenderness of the great High Priest bearing His people in the place of strength and in the place of love.

As he passed into the holy place on the Day of Atonement, having offered the sacrifices of that momentous occasion and bearing the precious blood and the holy incense into the innermost chamber where the Shekinah shone and God manifested His living Presence, awful suspense fell upon the people as they stood waiting outside, for they knew that the fate of the nation hung upon his acceptance. Solemnly and silently he passed within the veil, sprinkled the blood upon the mercy seat, made intercession for the sins of the people, and stood for a moment in the awful and immediate presence of Jehovah and then came forth with the signal of divine acceptance. With hands uplifted, he stood at the door of the tabernacle and pronounced upon the waiting congregation the great benediction of the ancient ritual, and then they knew they were accepted in their high priest, and that for another year the cloud of Jehovah's presence would rest upon them still, and the pillar of His guidance lead them forth in safety and victory.

It is not difficult for us to understand how hard it was for the Hebrew mind for one moment to think that any other could usurp a place so sacred and lofty, or claim higher honor and authority than their venerated high priest. And when the author of this epistle proceeds to show them that even Aaron was but the figure of a greater, and that the Lord Jesus Christ whom they had crucified, was the true Mediator and Antitype of Aaron, no wonder that they listened with the gravest questionings and needed the most powerful arguments to persuade them that He could be worthy of such honor. This is the subject of his argument in the epistle to the Hebrews, and it is needless to say that it is as powerful and convincing as the inspired Word of the Holy Ghost might be expected to be, and presents one of the sublimest and sweetest pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ in all the sacred volume. Let us as we follow it "consider the Apostle High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus."

I. HIS FUNCTIONS

These are explicitly defined in chapter five, verse one, "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 sin." And again, "That he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (2: 17). He was ordained for men in things pertaining to God. He was man's Representative to God just as the apostle was God's representative to men. He was especially the Mediator between God and men in dealing with sin. The ministry of the high priest was specifically on account of sin. His business was to open and maintain relations of friendship and fellowship between an offended God and a sinful people. This involved two ministries,

1. Sacrifice. This our Great High Priest has accomplished by offering Himself as the great Sacrifice. The entire ritual of Aaron and the entire teaching of the New Testament proceeds on the recognition of the necessity of satisfaction to the justice of God through vicarious suffering on account of sin. The primary work of the Lord Jesus Christ was to die in the place of guilty men. "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." He died, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." "He hath made him to be sin for

us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." There is no ambiguity about these statements. Let there be none about our faith or testimony. The only ground of a sinner's justification is through the precious blood of Christ. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, . . . that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3: 25, 26). Salvation is not merely the forgiveness of the sinner; it is the justification of the sinner. It is not mere pardon; it is righteousness. It is not overlooking our account; it is settling our account in full.

2. Intercession. Having accomplished His sacrifice He passed within the veil and there for eighteen centuries He has been engaged in our behalf as our Advocate and Representative. His work as our High Priest in heaven is just as unselfish as His work on earth. He is not there for His pleasure, but for our interests. He belongs to us and His one occupation is to represent us, befriend us, and help us in time of need. His intercession involves in the first place His presenting to the Father His accomplished sacrifice and claiming on the ground of His finished

work for His people all the blessings of the covenant of grace.

Next it involves His constant representing of their interests before the throne as expressed a little later in this epistle, Christ is entered "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Not only has He secured for us the forgiveness of past sins, but He is constantly securing for us forgiveness and grace for every fault and every need. Therefore we read, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," and "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." His advocacy includes the receiving and presenting of our prayers before the throne, and the mingling with our imperfect petitions of the sweet incense of His merits and righteousness through which we find continual acceptance. He is the strong Angel before the throne who presents much incense with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which is before the throne (Rev. 8: 3). Thus we are kept in constant fellowship and can say with holy boldness, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

II. HIS QUALIFICATIONS

1. He is divine. We have "a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God." In seeking an attorney to conduct some important case in court it is usual that men should endeavor to secure some person of high standing and superior influence, a great name in the legal profession, one who has access at headquarters and influence in places of authority. Our Advocate is the Judge Himself, the most potential name in heaven and all the universe. His pleas are all demands. His petitions are always claims. Him "the Father heareth always." He has never lost a case, and He is your Advocate. You do not need to retain Him by some enormous fee. You do not need to fear that He will ever be retained by your adversary. His one business is to attend to your interests and represent your case. There is emphatic force in the phrase, "We have a great high priest." You have Him. He is yours.

2. He is as human as He is divine. He is committed to the interests of our race. He is one of us. He wears our nature and stands before the throne a man. "He took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."

3. He has passed through the heavens. He represents not merely the natural life, but the resurrection life. He has entered into the world of the unseen. He has traversed the realms of death. He represents the future life as well as the present. He is able to carry us not only through, but beyond the present sphere and stage of our existence. He has passed not only into the heavens, but through the heavens; as it is expressed in another passage, "He has passed above all heavens." There is no part of the universe that is not beneath His feet and under His control. He is supreme in authority, infinite in influence and all-powerful in His advocacy and resources. What confidence we may have in confiding all our interests to His almighty hands!

4. He is able to sympathize with us to the fullest possible extent, "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 in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted."

(a) He is able to sympathize with us in our temptations. He has felt the keen pressure, and while He has not yielded to it He knows all the pain, the strain, and the horrible contact with the powers of darkness. There is no form of temptation which He has not experienced, and in the hour of painful pressure He is near at hand and "able to succor them that are tempted."

(b) He is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses. He knows what it is to be peculiarly susceptible to temptation. He remembers the long fast days, when, exhausted and hungry, the enemy tried to take advantage of His infirmity and make Him eat forbidden bread. And so when you are pressed above measure, in sore extremities, nervous, tired, and susceptible to evil influence, He understands. He makes allowance and He will give supernatural help and deliverance if you will but look to Him and never be discouraged.

(c) He is able to sympathize with us even in our failures. He can have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way. He does not judge harshly even the sinner so long as he is willing to forsake his sin and receive the help of the Savior. His one business is to deal with sin and save the erring, and we can come boldly to Him not only when we are right but when we are wrong, for mercy to pardon as well as grace to help.

(d) He is able to sympathize with us in our sorrows. There is no form of affliction which He has not shared. Have you mourned in bitter bereavement? He, too, wept at Bethany. Have you felt the keen pang of a false and faithless friend? He, too, was denied by the disciple for whom He had done the most. Have you been betrayed by those whom you had harbored and who had accepted your friendship only that they might have a better opportunity for perfidy? He, too, felt the kiss of Judas and "knew what was in man." Have you been poor and homeless? He had not where to lay His head. Have you ever felt the anguish of spiritual desertion and vainly sought your Father's face? He, too, once cried in darkest agony, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" There is no step on the dark path of human sorrow, not even the last deep plunge of death itself, through which the Forerunner has not passed and in which He does not come back to your side and whisper, "Fear not, for I am with thee."

Once, it is said, a timid prisoner was sentenced for some breach of discipline to spend the night in a dark and lonely cell so terrible in its isolation and its gloom that it was the one horror of the prison, and was dreaded almost worse than death itself. He was borne away in chains to his dark and dreary dungeon, and at last flung in upon the damp floor while he felt the loathsome air creep over his vitals and almost choke

out his life. As he heard door after door close behind him, and knew that he was there for one hopeless night, far removed from every human voice or ear, buried underground in a living tomb, he sank upon the floor with a gasp of despair and his very reason for a moment seemed to fail him. Then suddenly he thought he heard above him the sound of footsteps, and as he listened he knew that someone was pacing the floor above with measured steps. It was an infinite relief, although he knew not who might be there. And as he listened the steps ceased and a low voice was heard speaking through the floor to him, and saying, "Fear not, I am here; I am the chaplain of the prison. I heard of your terrible fate. I learned that you were here. I knew you could not stand it alone, and want you to remember that I will be here as long as you remain." Instantly that dark vault was transformed into a place of rest. He was no longer afraid. He was no longer alone. Another heart was throbbing by his side. A friend was near with love and sympathy. Beloved, listen in the darkest hour and the loneliest night and you, too, will hear Him softly saying, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the age"; and you will answer back, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."

(e) He is able to sympathize with us in our physical sufferings and conflicts. The word 'infirmities' is often applied to physical disease, and our Savior was tested in His body as well as in His spirit, and learned in more than one conflict to take divine strength for His physical frame. In the wilderness, when weak and faltering the enemy pressed Him to accept forbidden bread, He left us the lasting message that for man, as well as the Son of man, physical strength may be received not from bread alone but from the mouth of God.

But this epistle tells us of another conflict, "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" (Heb. 5: 7). This seems undoubtedly to refer to that conflict in the garden when the devil tried to take His life before the time, and He cried to the Father that the cup might pass from Him. We have been accustomed to be taught that His prayer was not heard. But we are told in this passage that "He was heard in that he feared." His life was preserved. There appeared an angel unto Him strengthening Him, and He was able to go through the awful strain of the judgment hall and the cruel cross, fulfilling every Scripture, finishing every task, and then voluntarily yielding up His own life, and saying, "It is finished," as He bowed His head and gave up the ghost. So He still understands your disease and pain, your fight for life, your faith that overcomes disease and lives till your work is all complete through His almighty life and strength. Let us, therefore, come boldly to His throne for physical help in every time of need.

(f) He is able to sympathize with us in all the steppings and painful discipline of our Christian life. He was made "perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2: 10). He "learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5: 8). And having been made perfect He now comes to perfect us and lead us to glory by the same path through which He, the Captain of our salvation, went before. Christ's perfection had no suggestion in it of moral imperfection. It simply means completeness and full growth. He did not come upon the scene like Adam, full grown, to bring to us a cast-iron example of holy character, but He was born a little babe and His whole life unfolded in perfect naturalness and simplicity like ours. And so His trials, temptations, and various situations all came to Him in the course of a perfectly human life, and He met each of them in detail, just as we meet ours, developing day by day all those traits of patience, unselfishness, and obedience which at last left the record complete and yet perfectly human. He had learned obedience by a long and painful discipline, and His life was symmetrical and perfect. So now, He comes to walk with us in all the details and teach us step by step and day by day to finish our course and complete our life-pattern even as His.

III. THE PRACTICAL LESSONS or CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

1. Let us hold fast our profession (Heb. 4: 14). Let us be true to Him who is so true to us.
2. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4: 16). Literally, "Let us draw near." We have perfect access; let us accept it. Let us enter into our holy privileges and heavenly rights in Him. Let us do it with boldness: let us have perfect assurance of His love and our acceptance, and without fear or faltering let us come boldly to the throne of grace. Let us come in time of need, for He is ready to give us instant help. It is grace for timely need. We need not wait. The telephone is always on. The door is always open. As someone has said, "He is such a handy God." There need not be one lost link or one instant of failure. Let us make more of the privilege of prayer, and come boldly to the throne of grace.
3. Let us go on unto perfection (Heb. 6: 1). Let us follow Him in obedience until the Captain of our salvation shall have made us also perfect through sufferings, and brought us unto glory even as Himself.

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