

Calum Cameron: Hebrews 2 - Our Great High Priest

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] So this evening, just for a few minutes, I want us to look at some of these verses we have here in the letter to the Hebrews chapter four, which describe Jesus as our great high priest.

Now in the Reformed tradition, we believe that Jesus fulfills three key roles as a reward beemer. He is both our prophet, he is our priest and he is our king.

The Westminster Confession, short cataclysm reminds us both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation. But tonight I want to focus on the second one, Jesus Christ as our priest.

And we're going to think about some of the ways that Jesus acts as our priest on our behalf by looking at these words in Hebrews. Now I have all the books of the Bible for me.

I think Hebrews has most transformed into how I view the Old Testament, how I read books like Leviticus and a lot of the kind of ceremonial stuff that's kind of hard to get your heads around.

[1 : 0 6] The Book of Hebrews is really showing us how a lot of the stuff in the Old Testament ultimately points to and is fulfilled by Jesus Christ. So it teaches us not just how these things point to Christ, but the ways in which Christ is better than the Old Testament, Levitical system and so on.

So in chapter one of Hebrews and chapter two, it goes on to show how Jesus is greater than the angels. Chapter three focuses on how Jesus is greater than Moses. Chapter four, how Jesus is greater than Joshua.

But where we're at in chapter four, verse 14 and onwards, it's beginning to look at how Jesus is greater than Aaron and the priesthood we have in Leviticus.

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. So Jesus Christ is our great high priest, but we don't really have high priests in 21st century Scotland.

It's kind of a bizarre concept to us. So I thought first of all, we just asked the question, well, what is a high priest? Just very briefly. The high priest in the Old Testament was the chief religious leader of the people of Israel.

[2 : 1 9] And it wasn't a role that anyone could sign up for. It was for people who were descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses. And the high priest, he would have oversight over the activities of the priesthood.

He would perform a number of ordinary priestly duties like sacrifices and so on. But really his key role was he functioned as a bridge between the people and God, particularly once a year on the day of atonement.

He basically acted on behalf of the people in relation to God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. So the high priest was a mediator. He was someone who acted on the people's behalf in relation to God.

And as I said, the most important duty the high priest had was on the day of atonement. See, in those days to get into God's presence, access was restricted. To get anywhere near God in the first place, you had to be a Jewish male.

To get further into God's presence in the holy place, you had to be a priest. But to get into the holy of holies, the most holy place, you had to be the high priest. Only the high priest was allowed to go beyond the veil and enter into the presence of God.

[3 : 31] But he would sacrifice for himself and for people. So ultimately the high priest was a mediator between the people and God.

And one of the key points of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus is the culmination. Jesus is the climax of what all of that stuff is pointing to.

And that's why it's important that we read books like the Viticus to help us understand a lot of what Jesus came to do. He is our great high priest. Not only does he do what the high priest of the Old Testament did, but he does it better.

Now from verse 14 of chapter four in Hebrews, right through the main section of the book, the author begins to show why Jesus is better. He illustrates the ways in which Jesus is a better high priest and why that should give us confidence as Christians and what that means for us in our own lives.

And there's just two things I wanna think about briefly this evening. The first reason we can be confident in Jesus as our high priest is because of his unique position. And secondly is because of his unique experience.

[4 : 40] So firstly, briefly, Jesus Christ's unique position. Since then we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens. Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

So first of all, our high priest has passed through the heavens. Now as we said, the high priest in the Old Testament would pass through the veil into the presence of God once a year, but Jesus did something that no earthly priest ever did.

He passed through the heavens to the right hand of the Father, right into God's presence. So Jesus is fulfilling his role as our high priest in a position that the Old Testament high priest couldn't even have dreamt of.

He ascended into heaven to be seated next to the Father to intercede for you and for me. The New City Catechism, Question 51 asks this, of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension?

It says Christ physically ascended on our behalf just as He came to earth physically on our account and He is now advocating for us in the presence of His Father, preparing a place for us and also sends us His support.

[5 : 51] In other words, Jesus is working for us, for you and for me, in a position that was unprecedented, a unique position at the right hand of the Father.

Paul put it like this in Romans chapter 8, verse 34, Christ Jesus who died, more than that, who was raised to life is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

And not only that, but the book of Hebrews tells us that our high priest is also the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Our high priest is divine.

Our high priest is sinless and perfect. And that's in contrast with the sort of the limitations, the flawed Old Testament priest who is sinful and at times corrupt human priests.

And we have this contrast made for us in Hebrews chapter 7, it says in verse 23, the former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but He holds His priesthood permanently because He continues forever.

[6 : 55] Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

He has no need like those high priests to offer sacrifices daily, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, since He did this once for all when He offered up Himself.

It says, for the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. And if we jump forward in Hebrews to chapter 9, this is gonna picked up again in verse 11, but when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect end, not made with hands, that is not this creation, He entered once for all into the holy places, not by the means of blood of ghosts and calves, but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

So time and again, Hebrews is reminding us, it's telling us that in every way, Jesus not only fulfills the priesthood of the Old Testament, but He is infinitely better.

He's in a far greater position to intercede for us before God. One of my favorite hymns sums up well, before the throne of God above, it's that I have strong, a perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me.

[8 : 31] My name is graven on his hands, my name is written on his heart. I know that while in heaven he stands interceding for us, no tongue can bid me thanks, depart.

So our plea before God's throne, our basis for coming before God in prayer and in requests and in supplication is purely based on our great high priest, the name of Jesus Christ.

So we have total confidence in Christ as our high priest, first of all because of his unique position at the right hand of the Father. He's passed through the heavens. He is the divine Son of God, seated at the right hand of the Father.

Secondly, we can be confident in our great high priest because it is unique. Experience, verse 15 picks up on this in chapter four, it says, 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.

I think a lot of people today think that when we pray to God, when Christians pray, we're praying to a God who is distant, who is far off, who is somehow cold and unable to really understand human experience.

[9 : 46] A God who doesn't really know what it's like for us to go through our everyday struggles of life. But the Bible is telling us here that we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with us, who basically understands what we go through.

Jesus, the great high priest, the Son of God, who ascended into heaven to the right hand of the Father, is one who understands you. He knows what you're going through. But how can the Son of God, who is so holy and so sinless and so exalted, possibly sympathize with sinful, broken people like ourselves?

Well, the second half of verse 15 answers us. It says that in every respect, he has been tempted as we are. I think sometimes we overlook the fact that Jesus, in his time on earth, fell to temptation.

He went through human trials. He experienced human emotions. I think sometimes we think that for Jesus, it wasn't really temptation in the same way it is for us because he was sinless.

But Jesus felt it. Matthew chapter four, verse one, says, Jesus was led by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry.

[11 : 06] That's probably one of the biggest understatements in the Bible. And the tempter came and said to him, if you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. Then the devil took him to a holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down for it is written.

He will command his angels concerning you. And on their hands, they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone. And then again, a third time, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

And he said to him, all these I will give you if you fall down and worship me. Now the fact that Jesus is divine, that he's God, that he's sinless and perfect, doesn't reduce the power of these temptations.

Or any of the other experiences Jesus had in this time on earth, Jesus felt real temptation. See, Jesus had the power to do these things. He had the power in a harpy to turn those stones to bread, to get rid of his hunger, to solve any of his problems around his ministry.

He had divine power, but he chose not to. He was without sin. But the Bible tells us here in Hebrews chapter four that Jesus has been through human experience.

[12 : 25] He has been placed in positions where he has been tempted, where he has suffered, where he has struggled. Hebrews chapter two verse 17 puts it like this. He says, therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service of God to make propitiation for the sins of his people.

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. So there's a clear connection between Jesus suffering when he was tempted and his ability to sympathize with you and with me.

Jesus has been through what we're going through. So when we pray to God, when we come to Him, we tell Him and we ask Him for help. We don't come to one who is cold.

We don't come to one who doesn't really get us. We come to one who is sympathetic, who understands human weakness. See, when Jesus was on earth, he felt what it was like to be hungry.

He felt what it was like to have thirst. He felt exhausted at times. He felt tiredness. He experienced sorrow. He wept at the loss of his friend.

[13 : 40] He knew anguish. He experienced all of these things. Isaiah describes Jesus as a man of sorrows, a man acquainted, a man familiar with grief. And we get a powerful window into that when we read about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Matthew 26, verse 36, says, Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled.

And he said to them, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. Going a little further, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, my Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will.

And then the parallel account in the Gospel of Luke adds this, it says, being in agony, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground.

Jesus' obedience, his life on earth was not easy. He faced human suffering, he faced human temptation at a very real level.

He is able to sympathize with anything that we go through. So our great high priest is both divine and human, he's fully God and fully man.

[15 : 03] His divinity means he is in a wonderful position to intercede for us, to give us access to God, to give us confidence as we come before God. But his humanity means that he has been in our position, he understands what it's like, he is absolutely sympathetic to our weaknesses.

So we have complete confidence in our high priest, first of all, because of his position, and secondly, because of his experience, he is the perfect person to intercede for us.

So what does this mean for us? Well, verse 16 goes on, it says, let us then with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace in time of need.

So Jesus as our high priest is our confident basis for prayer. It radically transforms the way that we view prayer.

The Greek word that the ESV translates as confidence here, it's also possible to translate it with a sense of freedom, with frankness.

[16 : 10] It's a word that has a kind of meaning of plain speaking. An example of this is if you're before royalty, you're generally gonna be quite guarded in what you say, you have terms of respect and reverence.

But if that person, if that king or that queen says to you to speak freely, to speak your mind, that is an incredible privilege, it's extraordinary. I think it's incredible to think that we have that kind of invitation to come before God, to speak with confidence, to speak frankly, with the creator of our world, with the king of our universe.

Of course we come in reverence and in respect, but we come with a boldness in the name of Christ. But I think when we do come before God in prayer, so often we make it into a kind of transaction.

We think that we have to bring something to God and then God will answer our prayers. So with that way of thinking, we often find ourselves saying, well, I've not really read my Bible enough this week, so God's not gonna hear my prayers.

Or I've not been going to church as much as I should have. Or I've been in a bad place spiritually recently. So somehow that's gonna affect my standing before God. But the good news is that we approach God's throne on the basis of our great high priest.

[17 : 34] We come in the name of Jesus. Do you ever think about why we end our prayers in Jesus' name? It's really important. It's not a magic formula that we add on just so God will answer us.

But it's saying that we pray in Jesus' name. We're saying this is the basis on which we come to you, Father. In the name of Jesus, in the name of our high priest, it's the only ground in which we can come to God and have confidence that he will hear us.

So he gives us incredible access to God. He gives us confidence in prayer. Just think again about in the Old Testament, the people of God, for them access was so much more restricted.

The message then was keep back. Distance yourselves. Only the high priest could go right into the presence of God only once a year, but we have this incredible, phenomenal access to God.

This is the message of Hebrews, therefore brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh.

[18 : 49] And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. So God's word is reminding us that we have this incredible access available to us.

We have this astonishing privilege to be able to come into God's presence with confidence, with boldness in prayer. We have a great high priest who is in a perfect position to mediate for us, to intercede on our behalf.

And we have a great high priest who has that wonderful experience of knowing what we're going through, of being able to sympathize with all of our weakness, with all of our brokenness. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace in time of need.

Amen. Let's just pray briefly. Our Father in heaven, we come before you this evening with confidence.

We come before you with boldness. Father, we come before you so thankful for our wonderful basis for prayer. Lord, we thank you so much for these words in Hebrews that remind us that Jesus Christ is our great high priest, that even just now he is interceding for us.

[20 : 11] Lord, we thank you so much that we don't come to you on the basis of our own merits, on the basis of our own good lives, but Lord, we come to you confidently in the name of Jesus.

Lord, help us to be more prayerful. Lord, help us to remember how wonderful this privilege is. Lord, we thank you that we can come into your presence and we can be confident that you hear us.

Lord, as we think of all that you suffered and all that you experienced, all of the trials and temptations that you faced, Lord, we thank you that you went through that for us.

Lord, we pray that you would be with us in the week to come, that you would help us to be dependent on you each and every day on your grace. Bless us now as we continue to worship you in Jesus' name.

Amen.