

Hebrews 4:14

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[0 : 00] And please turn, if you will, to Hebrews 4.14 through to 5.10, page 1003, I think it is in your Bibles. Do you ever think, no one knows what I'm going through? No one knows what I'm going through. No one feels what I feel. No one has to face what I face.

But, when we do think like that, we are of course in one sense right. No one does know what we feel. Isn't it one of the most patronising things in the world when you're going through something and someone comes up and says, Oh, I know exactly how you feel. No you don't. No you don't. You might have had a similar experience but actually you do not know what it feels like.

And yet, there is one who does understand. There is one who can sympathise with us in all our weaknesses. As Wesley's great words put it there, this man is God indeed. This great high priest. On a human level, we're so aware that we don't understand how other people feel, do we? And, Maryle and I discovered just earlier this week, a friend of ours let us know, that her 40 year old sister committed suicide last Saturday.

Now this comes three months after her father committed suicide back in October. We cannot possibly understand what she's going through. She sent an email out this week saying this to many friends.

[1 : 31] How do we pray for a friend like that?

How do we support a family like that? I don't know how she feels. I can't begin to imagine the struggles she's going through. But there is hope. There is hope.

We find that hope put so clearly, don't we, here in Hebrews 4 and 5. There is hope. And he has a name. He is Jesus, our great high priest.

The God-man, the incarnate Son of God. The writer for the Hebrews is writing to these Christians who are on the verge of packing it in. They've suffered persecution.

Some have been imprisoned. They've had goods and possessions confiscated. The Christian life is hard for them. Judaism, which is what most of them have come out from, looks so much easier.

[2 : 44] It's a legitimate religion in the Roman Empire. They could practice their Judaism freely. They'd be welcomed back into the communities in which they'd grown up, in which they'd been a part. It looks so easy to head back.

And yet the writer has given them this warning, before the verses we read in chapter 4. He's reminded them of the Exodus generation. Who'd seen God's work. Who'd heard the good news that God had come to save.

Who had the great promise of God's rest in the promised land held out to them. And yet had failed to enter that. Because they had failed to persevere. That message had not been met by faith.

So the writer is exhorting them, urging them, to continue in faith. To meet this good news message and not to be found to fall short. But to hold on for that rest that is coming.

It might be a battle now, but there will be rest one day. As we fully enter into the Sabbath rest God has for his people. And what's the encouragement he gives them to persevere? To hold on?

[3 : 44] It's verse 14. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens. Jesus the Son of God. Let us hold fast to our confession. Now we're not going to look at all the details in this amazing passage tonight.

But we're going to look at two questions very briefly. So what makes Jesus a great high priest? So what? And then now what? So what makes Jesus a great high priest? And now what do we do? Now what impact should that have on us? So first of all, what makes Jesus a great high priest? There are really three things the writer mentions here. His appointment, his position and his experience.

His appointment, his position and his experience. Let's look down to chapter 5 verse 1 for a moment. We see what high priests had to be like. For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God.

To offer gifts and sacrifices for sin. So first qualification of being a high priest was he has to be appointed from among men. This person has to be a man.

[4 : 50] He has to be a man. He has to be a human being. To be the link. To represent God to humans. To be the high priest representing one to the other. And Jesus was indeed appointed.

So verse 6. The writer quotes Psalm 110. Yes, Jesus is our king. Psalm 2, which Chris preached on a couple of weeks ago. Which is quoted in verse 5. But he is also our priest. Psalm 110.

In another place. You are a priest forever. After the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is this very mysterious guy. Who appears briefly in Genesis.

Blessing Abraham. After a battle. And disappears again. We don't hear of him again until Psalm 110. And then all is quiet until Hebrews chapter 4. Or Hebrews chapter 5 rather.

And he pops up again. Appointed by God. That is the point. Jesus has been appointed. From among men. He is a man. But he is of this different order of priests.

[5 : 46] Not descended from Aaron. But of this priesthood. Chosen directly by God. Without lineage or ancestry. As the writer says later on. Not Chisedek.

He is a man. Appointed by God. So that is what made Jesus our great high priest. His appointment.

But secondly. His position. Verse 14. Going back to that for a moment. We are the great high priest.

Who has passed through the heavens. Jesus the son of God. There is a contrast here. The high priest on earth. Stood and ministered in an earthly tabernacle. Which was a model.

A prototype. Of the true heavenly place. And they couldn't go in. Or the high priest could go in once

a year. To the Holy of Holies. Having offered special sacrifices. So there is this limited access.

Whereas Jesus. Our great high priest. Hasn't just gone into some earthly sanctuary. But he has gone all through the heavens. That is the point the writer is making. He has free access. He has gone there.

[6 : 44] He has done it. He has triumphed. He has now. Chapter 12 verse 2. He puts it seated at the right hand. Of the majesty in heaven. He has complete access. He is the expert. He is there in the place we most need him.

There is a great contrast. To the earthly high priest. Or the contrast. To the kind of high priest.

People look to today. The financial advisors. The fitness coaches. The people who we hope.

Can give us life or security. For the future. Or the Hindu gurus. Or the Buddhist monks and

teachers. The lifestyle coaches. Who think they know the truth. And can give great advice.

Now Jesus is far better. He is not just a lifestyle coach. He is not just a guru. Who might think he knows something. He is a high priest. Who has gone through the heavens.

He has seen it all. He knows it all. And he is there. At the right hand of the majesty in heaven. So his appointment. He is appointed by God. His position. He is there in the heavens. And his experience.

[7 : 46] His experience. Look at verse 15. 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. That's the first part of the experience. He resisted temptations. But secondly. He learned obedience. Just as we must. Look at verse 8.

Verse 7. In the days of his flesh. Jesus. Notice he uses. The personal name. The human name. Jesus. The days of his flesh.

Emphasizing the physical weakness. Of human existence. In those days. Jesus offered up prayers. And supplications. With loud cries. And tears. To him.

Who was able to save him from death. He was heard because of his reference. Although he was a son. He learned obedience. Through what he suffered. This is why he's a great high priest.

[8 : 41] Because of his experience. Firstly. He resisted temptation. As we must. And secondly. He learned obedience. Or grew in faith. We could say. As we must. We'll look at those two things.

Separately. So first of all. He resisted the temptations we faced. He was tempted. Verse 14. In every respect. As we are. Yet without sin.

Now. We may have an objection at this point. If we've read James. No. James chapter 1 verse 13. Tells us. God cannot be tempted. So here we think.

That Jesus' temptations. Were just a kind of mirage. Just a theological construct. To make us feel better. Well. To understand this. We need to remember. That Jesus had two natures. Two natures in one. They were not confused or missed. As those of you who are in Sunday school class. This morning. Will have heard. That there are two natures in one. In his divine nature. Yes. [9 : 38] He was fully God. He could not be tempted. As God. Yet in his human nature. As a person. He could be tempted. Now. He had an advantage that we don't have.

He was born without sin. All of us have been descended from Adam. All of us are normal human beings. That means everyone else has ever lived. Are all Adam's descendants. We all have a sinful nature. We all have that inbuilt bias.

To rebel against God. Jesus didn't have that. But that doesn't mean he wasn't tempted. Adam didn't have that bias. He was created without sin.

Yet he fell very quickly. Didn't he? So Jesus was tempted in every way. As we are. And. As God incarnate.

He limited himself. To being a human being. If you like. Jesus. Jesus didn't suddenly use. Supernatural powers. To make life easier for himself. When tempted.

[10 : 34] He didn't kind of. Call his divine nature into play. And get rid of the temptation. Again. Think back to him being tempted. In the wilderness. As Satan comes. And says. Come on.

Turn these loaves of. Turn these stones. Into loaves of bread. Jesus resists the temptation. To use his. Use the fact. He was God incarnate. To make bread for himself.

He didn't have a sort of. Divine. Get out of jail free card. When temptation came calling. He resisted. In Philippians 2.

Paul talks about Jesus. Emptying himself. Taking the nature of a servant. He emptied himself. Of the right. To use his divine powers. For himself.

That's part of what that. Emptying was. And so. When he faced temptation. He used the resources. We have. He used the word of God. Remember that. In the temptations.

[11 : 27] In the wilderness. He quotes. God's word. Back to the devil. And of course. He was equipped. By the spirit of God. The spirit. Who led him. Into the wilderness. To face those temptations.

So he resisted. With the word. And the spirit. What do you and I have. To resist temptation with. The word. And the spirit. And remember. He resisted temptation. To a greater degree.

Than we ever do. One of the things. When temptation comes. Isn't it. Is that. It's a relief. To give in to it. Why do I get angry? Why do I shout at my poor children?

It's because I'll feel better. When I do. Now then I'll feel bad. Because I'll feel guilty. But in that instance. I give in to the temptation. Because it feels relief. Doesn't it? To those who struggle with pornography.

That's the thing about it. Isn't it? In front of the computer screen. Relief. And then the guilt afterwards. And temptation gets bigger and bigger. Well.

[12 : 25] Until the relief comes. Doesn't it? Well think about Jesus. Tempted in every way. As we are. Yet without sin. So he kept on resisting. Kept on resisting. Kept on resisting.

To the nth degree. Further than we ever have. So yes. He has been tempted. He has resisted the temptations we face. That's what makes him a great high priest. He can pray for us.

Because he knows what we're like. He knows what temptation is like. And because he was a human being. He faced those temptations in every kind of way. As we do.

When are we often most susceptible to temptation? Isn't it when we're tired and hungry? Most arguments happen in married life before dinner. Top tip.

Eat a biscuit or something. It's true in the Cashman family. We look at each other and go. We need to eat. Eat. We need to eat. Did Jesus get tired and hungry?

[13 : 22] Of course he did. Hungry fasting in the wilderness. Tired. John chapter 4. Sends the disciples off in the village. While he sits down by the well. Tired and hungry from the journey.

Mark chapter 4. What's Jesus doing in the boat as the storm comes? He's tired. He's sleeping. He physically knew those things. We also get tempted towards self-pity and negative thoughts when we feel misunderstood or lonely or isolated.

How lonely did Jesus feel? He gets Peter and John to come with him in the garden and James to pray with him. And they fall asleep. He's arrested. The disciples all run off.

Did he experience loneliness? Oh yes he did. Sexual temptation. Jesus lived as a single man in a culture where everyone else was getting married.

He was a man just as we are. Material discomfort. Foxes have holes. Birds of the air have nests. The son of man has nowhere to lay his head. He had every sort of human experience going.

[14:30] Didn't he? He is not unable to sympathize with us in our weakness. Because he has felt those weaknesses from the inside. It's not just academic knowledge.

It's something he's experienced. And he resisted those temptations to the ultimate degree. He never gave in. And so the consequence. He has deep sympathy with us.

Deep sympathy for us. That word. He is not unable to sympathize with us in our weakness. The root of that is literally suffers with us. Suffers with us.

He draws alongside us. He does know what we're experiencing. I cannot for a moment fathom what our friend is going through. Who's lost her father and her younger sister in such a short space of time.

And yet in a sense Jesus does. That's her high priest. He intercedes for her. So that was the first thing.

[15:28] He's a great high priest for us because he resisted temptation to the ultimate degree. But also because he learned obedience through suffering. Or he grew in faith.

Look again at verses 7 and 8. Verse 8. An amazing statement isn't it? Although he was a son. He learned obedience through what he suffered. Now what does that mean? Well first of all what it doesn't mean.

What it doesn't mean is that the son of God never obeyed his father before he had to suffer. Well that is clearly not true. Because the very incarnation. The very fact of the son of God taking on human flesh and coming into the world.

Was an act of obedience in itself. The son has always obeyed the father. Always. Throughout his eternal existence. And it cannot mean he had to suffer discipline in order to learn to obey like you and I do.

I had to suffer a fair amount of discipline from my father growing up. I didn't always obey. And I suffered and learned that he was better to.

[16:29] That wasn't the way Jesus learned. What it does mean is as a human being he was able to learn and grow. So think of Luke chapter 2 verse 52. We read at the end of the account of Jesus' childhood.

Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man. And just as normal every human child grows and develops and learns. So Jesus because he grew as a human being. Learned and grew and developed just as we do. And so he learned obedience through suffering. Just as he learned how to make tables as a carpenter's son and everything else.

What does it mean that he learned obedience through what he suffered? Well it certainly means this. That he grew in his obedience. That every step of the way he learned as a human being more and more about obeying his father in heaven.

And for Jesus every step of the way. Every step from Bethlehem to Golgotha. Was a step of increased suffering. At any point he could have made another choice to make life easier.

[17:37] So let's just take a few examples. Mark chapter 1. He's just healed a few people. The crowds are beginning to gather. Jesus takes himself off early in the morning while it's still dark to pray. Peter comes to look for him with the other disciples.

They go, come on. The crowds are looking for you Jesus. Come this way. Come and heal a few more people. There's a great roadshow going on here. That's what the crowds want. Now the easy thing at that point would have been to please the crowds.

What does Jesus say? No. I'm going to other villages as well to preach. That is what I've found. See Jesus chose to disappoint people. So he could please his father.

And that was a little act embracing suffering. It's always hard to disappoint people isn't it? Especially if you're like me and a people pleaser innately. But Jesus chose the step of suffering. As obedience to his father.

And of course you turn over to Mark chapter 2. Jesus hangs out with the tax collectors and sinners. And the Pharisees and the religious leaders are aghast at this. And say, what are you doing eating with these people?

[18 : 38] But Jesus once again embraces the difficult path of suffering. To do the father's will. To eat with the sinners and tax collectors who needed him. Say, I've come to call the righteous.

I've come to call the unrighteous, not the righteous. It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. And of course that leads to the conflict, doesn't it? With the religious leaders and with the Herodians as well.

Where does that conflict ultimately take Jesus? To the cross. See, step by step there's a sense in which he learned obedience through suffering. That each step of obedience made life harder. And obedience makes life hard for us sometimes, doesn't it? It makes life hard for us. And yet here we have a great high priest. Who prays for us. Knowing that obedience can be hard. And yet he did obey. And of course that culminated with what is mentioned here in verse 7 of chapter 10. In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears.

[19 : 41] To him he was able to save him from death. And was heard because of his reverence. See, it was hard. Jesus cried out. We read of him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Sweating blood. Crying out to his heavenly Father. Take this cup from me. But not my wills, but yours. How many times did he say that? Did he go back to praying?

Three times. That's how hard that obedience was for our Saviour. He did not have some kind of divine anaesthetic to make that a very easy cup to drink.

It was hard. And his friends were no use, were they? They just fell asleep. Matthew 26, verse 38. He says to Peter, James and John.

My soul is very sorrowful. Even to death. Remain here and watch with me. Sorrowful to death. No, to the greatest possible extreme. This is the greatest distress a human being could face.

[20 : 41] As the Son of God looked to the cup he was about to drink. The cup of God's wrath. This was hard. Yet Jesus learnt obedience through suffering.

He found out in his own body. In his own personal human experience. How hard it is to follow the heavenly Father in a fallen world. Yet his Father heard him, didn't he?

He was heard, it says in verse 7. Because of his reverence. Now what sense was Jesus heard? Because he wasn't saved from death, was he? He went to the cross.

He died. He drank that cup. Well his reverence was not my will but yours. As he bows before his Father. And he was heard. In that he was raised from the dead.

He will never die again. He will never die again. He has defeated death. He has come out the other side. Vindicated. Rescued from death. Death could not hold him.

[21 : 41] That was how the Father answered those prayers. Not by taking the cup from him. But by giving him victory. So as we pray. As we face situations in life.

Where we think, Lord what is going on? Why haven't you heard this prayer? We have a high priest standing there. Praying for us. Who knows what it is like when our prayers in a sense do not seem to be answered.

Because the crown awaits after the cross. He prays for us. Even as we wonder what is happening. The fact he cried out in prayer shows us.

That it was a struggle for Jesus to obey. It was a struggle to trust. But as he learned obedience. He grew in faith. The Son of God even grew in faith.

It was a reality for him. So do you see now how he's a great high priest who can help us? Yes. He's appointed by God among men.

[22 : 47] Yes. He's got the position of being in the heavens. But also he's got the experience that counts. He's resisted temptation. As we must. And he's grown in faith and obedience.

As he learned it through suffering. As indeed we must. And having been made perfect. Look at him now. Verse 9. And being made perfect. As in being made perfect as a high priest.

Being made perfect as a rescue. Always morally perfect. But having been made perfect as a high priest. What has happened? He became the source of eternal salvation. To all who obey him.

Being designated by God a high priest forever. After the order of Melchizedek. Perfect and perfectly equipped. To give us the salvation we need. The eternal salvation.

To get us safely home forever. So that answers the first question. So what makes Jesus the great high priest? Well he's perfect. He's perfect.

[23 : 45] So second question. Now what? Now what does that mean for us in our lives? Well let's look at verse 16. There are two things it means for us. In verse 16 we see the first of them.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace. That we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need. So what? First thing. Draw near.

Draw near. This is this relational language. Draw near to the throne. Draw near. Come close. Don't be scared. Don't hold back. Come close. Call out to him in prayer.

And what are we drawing near to? The throne of grace. The throne. The position where God sits. Ruling the universe.

Where the Father sits in glory and majesty. But what is this throne like? It's a throne of grace. That's the character of this throne. It's not a throne of judgment and intimidation.

[24 : 41] Not now. It's a throne of grace. Where we come to receive what we need. Where our high priest is seated at the right hand. As we read in chapter 12 verse 2. The place of authority.

The place of grace. Grace that gives us what we don't deserve. Instead of the judgment we do deserve. And what do we get when we... What do we receive when we get there?

Verse 16. That we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need. Mercy.

Forgiveness for when we've blown in.

Forgiveness for when we've given in. Forgiveness for whatever we've done. Because we've been paid for by the blood of the Lord Jesus. And grace in our time of need. Strength to resist that temptation.

Strength to say no. The grace of God which teaches us to say no to ungodliness. As Paul puts it to Titus. That's what we get. We sometimes feel don't we.

[25 : 39] We can't pray. It's been blown again. I've got angry again. I've done that sin again. I've given in to the lust again. I've gossiped again. I've indulged in self-pity again. How can I go back to God now?

Yet that's the time we need to go. And there are no bonds. Instead there is a high priest who understands our weaknesses. Who sympathises with us. Sympathises with us in them.

And who prays with us. So don't hold back. Draw near. Draw near. Comes without throne of grace.

You don't get it ticking off. Instead the high priest is like he has his arm around our shoulders.

He says, I understand. I've resisted. I learned obedience. I'll pray for you. I've been learning too.

I've cried out with tears and helplessness. I know what temptation feels like. I've paid for that sin.

What would stop us drawing near from a throne of grace with a high priest like this?

[26 : 40] What would stop us? Well that's the first thing to draw near. The second thing is actually back in verse 14. Hold fast. Draw near.

Hold fast. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens. Jesus the son of God. Let us hold fast our confession. Our confession. As the writer of the Hebrews puts it. It's our confession that Jesus is the Christ. Christ is God's forever king. Is the high priest. Is the only one through whom eternal salvation is available. That's the confession.

He's saying that since we have this great high priest. Let's hold fast to that confession. In the light of the judgment that is coming. In the light of the rest that is ours. If we hold on to him. If he holds on to us.

Then hold fast. Hold fast. Why might they be tempted not to hold fast? Because it was difficult following Jesus.

[27 : 35] Because of the persecution. They visited friends in prison. They lost some of their goods. We read in chapter 12. It was hard. It was so much easier to go back with our old friends. To Judaism.

To the traditions they were familiar with. To the richness of the cultural heritage. To the legal position of the religion in the Roman Empire. It was easier. But hold fast. Because you have a great high priest.

Let's face it. Life would often be easier for us. If we weren't following Jesus. Wouldn't it? Why might we not hold on to our confession? Well.

Because the teaching. That Jesus is the only saviour. Is hated in 21st century Britain. Because the cost of following Christ. Can be hard at times. For some it will mean singleness.

That's hard. For some it means exclusion from. By colleagues. It means difficulties in work. So why should we hold on? Hold on because we have a great high priest.

[28 : 35] Who has gone through the heavens. Who is there at the right hand of God. Who is praying for you. Giving us grace and mercy in a time of need. So let's pray he'll help us hold on.

Whatever those temptations are. Whatever situation we're going through. Even if that is a situation. Where a dearly loved sister and a father. Have recently killed themselves. That email I mentioned earlier. Goes on like this. The kids are confused and sad as well. And also feeling tired. Grief is tiring. We are standing on a rock. There is a hurricane and gale all around. But we stand secure on the rock. Which is Jesus. I hold on to Jesus. He is the centre of everything. The great high priest is praying. And he is holding on to his people. The high priest who sympathises with our weaknesses. And gives us grace and mercy in our time of need. So let's hold on to him.

[29 : 33] Let's draw near to him. And let's hold on to our confession. Let's pray.