

## *The High Priest of Compassion*

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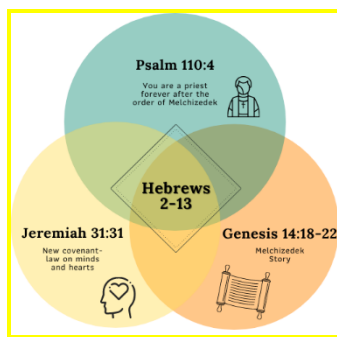
*Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested. (Heb 2:18)*

### Context

Our text this morning is Hebrews 5:1-10. The point of the narrative is to enable us to **hold fast to our confession** (4:14).

You will have noticed a fair bit about the priesthood of Melchizedek in our passage. And right up through 7 and beyond it is a weighty part of the argument of Hebrews. I've actually spoke on this text on March 21, 2021 (**A High Priest Forever**). The YouTube and manuscript are available on our website if you have the interest to review. It is with good reason that the author warns us that **About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become dull in understanding** (Heb 5:11).<sup>1</sup>

Notice that it is Psalm 110:4 that is quoted in our passage today at vs 6. **...as he says in another place, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."**



### In the Text

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<sup>1</sup> Just to briefly review, our author of Hebrews asserts that we ought to think about Jesus' life as a temple sacrifice, a perfect one, hence it was once-for-all (Heb 7:27).

Nowhere else in the NT is Jesus referred to or presented as a priestly figure. Jesus' self-understanding was that of prophet, Son of Man, Son of God. A teller of parables, compassionate healer, wandering Rabbi and trouble-maker disrupting the commerce of temple economy which he considered debased by corruption. But never as a *priest*.

So this argument in Hebrews is unique in NT theology. The topic spans Hebrews chapters 2-13. Plus a lot of really wonderful moral exhortation scattered along the way of course. But basically that is what the author does in this unique theology.

As a sidebar, we could also note that it is the finest Greek in the NT. Complex and beautiful, and showing evidence of the Hellenistic influence of the kind of learning being pursued Alexandria, and thence arose Adolf von Harnack's view that it might have been written a woman, the possibly Alexandrian Pricilla or perhaps by both she and her husband Aquilla (Acts 18:2).

The book is an extended commentary on three Old Testament passages actually. The promise of a New Covenant in Jer 31:31. It is based on the Melchizedek story in Psalm 110:4, the only priesthood in the Bible, and a very obscure one at that, that is not based on the Aaronic family.

The really striking thing about our passage today is the way it expands on the message which we talked about last week, that is... Jesus has been tested in everyway as we have and He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Today let's turn to a number of aspects of *Jesus'* experience that our author presents for our reflection.

First:

***He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness;*** (Heb 5:2a)... so also is our heavenly high priest, Jesus.

***Because*** of his participation in our nature he is able to do this. Sympathise with our weaknesses. Deal gently with our ignorance and waywardness. Because he was ***subject to weakness***.

The analogy (and I think analogy is the right word) is that just as an earthly high priest was weak and could deal gently (vss 1-4), so also Jesus can do the same the same because he prayed and made supplication with loud cries and tears, because he too had to learn reverent submission, and he too had to learn obedience (vss 7-10). If you take nothing else away from today I hope that it is that God is not a terrible frowning judge waiting to catch you out, but the prince of a gentle knowing throne of grace.

I love that, ***deal gently*** (*metriopatheō*), found only here in scripture. From the word "measure" or "to moderate." Through Jesus God measures the response to those who are ignorant and wayward. He sees us ***through*** Christ. Notice that it is with the ***ignorant and wayward***. It isn't talking about the sinner here. The word translated "ignorant" (*agnoēma*) means "sin committed in ignorance" (BAG, *A Greek and English Lexicon*, p. 11). And wayward means "wanderer, roamer" (Ibid, p. 672). I think the allusion here is to the subject matter of the Exodus where those lost souls wandered in the desert for 40 years.

For today, what this means, and there is some very deep gospel here, so get ready... is that God covers us with grace even in our ignorance, even in our waywardness. Calling us, calling us back to example of Jesus. I can't really get my head all the way around that because it is so deeply gracious. It is truly a Throne of Grace.

It is because he himself had to resist pride and find reverent submission to God, to cry with tears of supplication, to learn obedience through his suffering, that he can be our mediator. Because of this he can usher us to a Throne of Grace.

Second:

***In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission*** (Heb 5:7).

This is a far more emotional and struggling Jesus than we typically think of from the gospels and Paul. We don't really often think of Jesus in the throes of wailing and weeping.

Third:

***Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered;*** (Heb 5:8)

How can Jesus learn obedience?<sup>2</sup>

### From the Text

I think one hardly knows how to think about the notion that Jesus himself was “subject to weakness” or that he had to exercise “reverent submission” or that he “learned obedience.”

These are all aspects of the human experience. And the heart of our Christology, our view of who Jesus was and why he came, is that he shared our human experience. So that if there is weakness in the human experience, he wasn’t spared it. If there is testing he endures it, without sin, if there is a temptation to pride he responds with the discipline of reverent submission.

And, if you think about it, this had to be real for Jesus. If His **testing** didn’t hold out the possibility of failure it wasn’t testing, it had no meaning. If his **reverent submission** didn’t involve the discipline of ego and self-interest, it had no meaning. If His obedience was rote, perfect, a script he read, then his obedience had no meaning. It all has meaning because His human experience was real. That is the key to understanding the redemption He brings.

In our day no one wants to be thought **ignorant and wayward** (v 2) or considered **reverently submissive** (v 7) or to be **obedient** (v 8). You won’t find a Masters Ignorance and Waywardness, or in Submissive or Obedience. We don’t teach it!

Because those aren’t what we value in our culture. No... its in Leadership! Confidence! Knowledge! That is what we celebrate.

But if I understand even just a little bit about who *God is* and *who this Jesus is* I will realize in a moment that in relation to God I *am* ignorant and wayward, I *am* in need of reverent submission and that obedience to God is a *good* thing, not a weakness.

Another word for this is humility. Which is something that seems to be missing from our public discourse and our cultural milieu.

My other point is this, and I’m getting close to finished here [musicians come and prepare to lead in worship of God]. Let’s review... So far in these four messages in Hebrews we have learned:

- Week One: In many and various ways God has spoken to us in these days by a Son
- Week Two: That when God looks in a mirror he sees the Son, when we look at the Son we see God
- Week Three: That because he himself has been tested and lived the human experience, the throne of the Son, which will endure forever and forever, has become a Throne of Grace. That is, in the cosmos Grace is now enthroned.
- And today, that the High Priest of Compassion deals gently with us because he has experienced weakness, and submitted to the discipline of reverent submission to God, and learned obedience. And that, because of this his throne is transformed from a seat of terrible

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<sup>2</sup> ...*and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for those who obey him* (Heb 5:9). Perhaps this is what “made perfect” means – that he learned obedience.

condemnation of our sin and inadequacy our willfulness and egoism, to a powerful tool of transformation to a life of grace. That's our gospel today.

Finally, the argument to the book proceeds like this. It begins with this powerful theology of who he is. We have been exploring about the 'who is Jesus' question and how the cosmos works in terms of grace (this occupies the first 10 chapters, we have only scratched the surface of its ocean of meaning).

It then moves to ***praxis***.

In grammar we call this a consecutive clause. So ***SINCE*** we have such a high priest (4:14). Or, ***THEREFORE...SINCE***. I count at least 21 consecutive clauses in the book. That means that because one thing is true, an action or result occurs.

Theology to Praxis. Because theology is true – action follows. That is always how it goes. And the praxis, that is, how it affects the way we live each day is expressed already in our passage from last week when it said, ***since*** we have such a high priest, ***let us hold fast to our confession*** (Heb 4:14).

And then in 10:19-25, but esp. v 23: Since we have this high priest... ***Let us hold fast the confession of our hope... and consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together....*** Etc etc. In chapter 11 we have the magnificent exhortation to have faith, and on and on it goes to the end of the book, endure trials, pursue peace with everyone, let mutual love continue (12:1, 7, 12, 14; 13:1). Very powerful paradigm. Theology first – then praxis.