



Jesus is Greater

What you believe to be true about Jesus is the most important thing about you. It matters more than your name, your career, your achievements, or anything else. Why is that? Because what you believe to be true about Jesus dictates your eternity. But what you believe to be true of Jesus must also dictate every other aspect of your life.

WEEK TWO

Jesus is our Great High Priest

Message Passage: Hebrews 4:14, 5:1-9, & 7:1-28

Small Group Passage: Hebrews 4:14-16 & 10:19-23

TEACHING AND VIDEO NOTES

Many Christians have unintentionally developed a very broken way of understanding the Bible. They will think of the Old Testament as very long, very tedious, and if they are honest with themselves, the part of the Bible that is a STRUGGLE to read. Sure, it has some great stories and some awesome high points, but if they were cornered and asked how everything fits together, they might get nervous. If this is you, two things I want to share with you.

1. **This is a problem:** If we fail to see how the grand narrative of scripture fits together and culminates in Jesus Christ, we have failed to understand scripture itself. If we do not see the big picture, we do not see the picture at all. The only way to see the big picture is to see how the Old Testament points to Jesus (Matt 5:17-20).
2. **It does not have to be this way:** Jesus' significance and his place in the grand narrative of scripture are not hidden from us. In fact, studying the book of Hebrews is one of the best ways to bridge the gap between the Old and New Testaments.

The book of Hebrews helps us see that Jesus himself fulfills so much of the Old Testament law and is therefore greater. Rather than allowing this to justify throwing

away the Old Testament, this may give us the proper “why” for better understanding it, so that we can see how great our Savior is.

Hebrews 4:14 *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.*

We hear those words and begin to ask questions: Who was the great high priest, and what did he do? The original audience would have had none of those questions because they were likely Jewish converts. But they had questions about how Jesus was greater than the high priest they had grown up knowing of. The author answers that question next... we will fill in the blanks as we go.

Hebrews 5:1 *Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.*

Levitical priesthood: There were many priests in the land of Israel. They all had to come from the tribe of Levi (i.e., the Levitical priesthood). The Levitical priesthood began with Aaron, the older brother of Moses (Exodus 28:1–3). Aaron’s descendants served as the priests in Israel, ministering in the tabernacle and, later, the temple, primarily as mediators between man and God. The Levitical priests were responsible for offering the sacrifices required by the Mosaic Law.

Great High Priest: Out of the Levitical priesthood, there was only one great high priest. “It was the high priest’s responsibility to see that the covenant was enforced, and to direct people to complete the duties of the temple and the law of Moses. As the representative for the nation of Israel, the high priest had a tremendous responsibility to direct the hearts of the people toward God and the fulfillment of the covenant. Some of the primary responsibilities of the high priest were the regular handling of sacrifices and offerings, the blessing of people, and the annual entrance into the most holy place within the tabernacle/temple during the Day of Atonement.”¹

We learn so much about Jesus by seeing how similar he was to the Great High Priest, and yet he was so much better.

Hebrews 5:2-3 *He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. 3 This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.*

¹ Mary B. MacFarlane, “High Priest,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Jesus, like the high priest, deals gently with us in our weakness and ignorance because he knows what it feels like to be human (Heb 4:14-16).

But unlike the high priest, Jesus never made a sacrifice for his own sin. Why not? Because he was the one who never sinned (1 Pet 2:22).

Hebrews 5:4-5 *And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father."*

You did not campaign to become a high priest. You did not seek out the high priesthood for the prestige. Like so many roles of spiritual authority, it is a burden. Likewise, Jesus did not glorify Himself but was appointed by God

Hebrews 5:7-9 *During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him*

The Great High Priest would always bring a sacrifice, both for himself and for the nation. Jesus did no such thing. He was the sacrifice. He was the sacrifice that would truly wipe away our sin and shame forever. Something that the blood of a lamb applied by a fallible man could never do.

If you have read through Hebrews on your own, you have certainly read numerous times about how Jesus is a high priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:6, 7:17, 7:21 - quoting Psalms 110:4). Who is that? And how is Jesus a priest in his order?

Hebrews 7:1-2a *This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, 2 Abraham gave him a tenth of everything...*

Background on the story: "When Abraham was returning home after winning a great battle against many kings. Four kings in Abraham's region had united and had conquered Sodom and other neighboring cities (Genesis 14:1-11). Abraham's nephew Lot and his family lived in Sodom. When Abraham heard that Lot and his family had been captured, Abraham mobilized 318 men for battle. With a surprise attack,

Abraham and his tiny band of men liberated Lot and the others who had been captured (Genesis 14:12–16).²

Hebrews 7:2b-3 ... and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” **3** Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

Melchizedek was unique in that he was both priest and king, according to Gen 14:18. In the Old Testament, those were two different offices. You could be one or the other, but you could not be both. Likewise, Jesus is both priest and king: He is king of kings, and he is our great high priest. He fulfills the role of prophet, priest, and king. Forever.

Hebrews 7:4-6 Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! **5** Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. **6** This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.

“In antiquity, it was common for people to give a tithe to a god or his representative. Abraham, the father of the Hebrew faith, gave a tithe to Melchizedek. That proves that Melchizedek was superior to Abraham. The lesser person tithes to the greater (v. 7).”³ We must understand what this Tithe was for. It was not a tithe that Abraham gave to Melchizedek to get a blessing. No, it was a tithe given in response to a blessing. **Likewise, we give worship and walk in obedience in response to Jesus' sacrifice and love, not as a means of receiving them.**

The biggest difference between the Great High Priest and Jesus, our Great High Priest, is in what they accomplished.

Hebrews 7:15-19 And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, **16** one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. **17** For it is declared:

“You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

² Bruce Barton et al., Life Application New Testament Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 1028.

³ John MacArthur Jr., ed., The MacArthur Study Bible, electr, High Priest, High Priest Theonic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1907.

18 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless **19** (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

The work of a high priest and the sacrifices he made never made someone forgiven and redeemed before God. Not so with Jesus...

Hebrews 7:23-25 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; **24** but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. **25** Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Aaron's lineage had to retire from the priesthood after their term was served. Not so with Melkizedek; his priesthood was a lifetime. Likewise, Jesus' priesthood endures for eternity. Jesus is our high priest forever. He never stops ministering to us. Only someone who is eternal can save us eternally. Only someone who is sinless can take away our sin. Therefore....

Hebrews 7:26-28 Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. **27** Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. **28** For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

Key Idea: Remember, our doctrine is not simply academic knowledge. What we believe to be true and sound doctrine, especially what we believe to be true of Jesus, must be the driving force behind how we live our lives as followers of Jesus.

Transition to small group: So here is the question. Do we treat Jesus as the perfect and great High Priest? Do we treat this sacrifice as sufficient and eternal? It is one thing for us to claim these things; it is an entirely different matter to view Jesus and his role as our high priest as so perfect that we live and approach him differently.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. According to Hebrews 4:14, “we are to hold firmly the faith we profess.” In our culture today, many Christians are pressured to keep their faith to themselves as a private matter. What is wrong with that mindset?

Leader Note: A couple of thoughts.

- While we do have a personal relationship with Jesus, that does not mean that we have a private relationship with Jesus. Confusing the two is a grave mistake.
- If we value the treasure that is the Gospel, we will profess (proclaim) Jesus as Lord to all who will listen, with both words and actions (Col 1:26-27).
- It does not say we are to hold firm to the faith and profess. We are to hold firm to the faith we profess. It is not an either-or. As we hold firm to the faith we profess Christ and vice versa. A private faith is easily abandoned in trial. A professed faith is not.

READ: Hebrews 2:5-18

2. Vs 15, why does it matter so much that Jesus Christ, as our great High Priest, is able to not only sympathize with our weakness but also empathize with us?

Leader Note: Sympathy is valuable. But sympathy often implies that the person offering it has not walked a mile in your shoes. Empathy implies that the empathetic person not only cares for you but also understands your difficulties or turmoil. Jesus has suffered as we have, been tempted as we have, and has even mourned as we have. Therefore, he is our sympathetic High Priest.

3. Vs 16, What does it look like for us to approach God’s throne of grace with confidence?

Leader Note: If we believe that Jesus’ sacrifice was perfect and sufficient, yet He also understands our suffering and temptation, our prayers of confession and repentance will reflect it.

- We can pray to our savior who understands our fears, struggles, and pain.
- We can confess our sins to a savior who has truly forgiven us once and for all.
- We can seek deliverance from sin patterns knowing that Jesus himself was tempted in every way we have been and yet was victorious.

READ: Hebrews 10:19–23

4. If we believe that Jesus is the perfect great high priest and that we are forgiven because of what he did, we will draw near to God, because nothing separates us from Him any longer. What does it practically look like to draw near to God?
5. Vs 23, We are to “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.” At first, this seems daunting and even impossible. But the good news is that our holding on is not based on our faithfulness but his, “for he who promised is faithful.” How does relying on God’s faithfulness rather than our own make it possible to hold unswervingly to the hope we have in Jesus?

Leader Note: The author of Hebrews helps answer this very question in Hebrews 6:19-20, “*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, **20** where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*” Only Jesus could enter into the Holy of Holies on his own merit. Only Jesus could be a high priest forever. Who Jesus is as our Great and perfect High Priest serves as an anchor for our souls when the storms of life come. We are not exempt from the wind and waves, but the supremacy of Christ acts as an anchor keeping us from drifting out to sea.

6. How can we, as a small group, practically encourage one another on to love and good deeds?

PRAYER TIME

DISMISS