

Dan Tyler on Praying through the Son – 20th June 10

Teaching Notes

Hebrews Chapter 4

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Chapter 5

IMPERFECT: ¹Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. ³This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

IMMORTAL: ⁴No one takes this honour upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." ⁶And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

IMMATERIAL: ⁷During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ¹⁰and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

How many times have you listened to a politician get asked a question and they completely ignore it and say something else?

I find it really frustrating when people change the subject without dealing with the issues. It's like there's an elephant charging round in the church and they just talk about the colour of the chairs. It's like they're embarrassed, ignorant or just confused.

What is the elephant in this passage? I have read it loads of times and I've even heard a few sermons preached on it, but I've never heard anyone talk about Melchizedek. Not ever.

Maybe they're embarrassed by the fact they don't know who on earth he is?
Maybe they just gloss over him because they don't think he's important?
Maybe they are just so confused that they take the long way around to avoid him?

I think we'll find that Melchizedek is, not only the elephant in the room, but he is also the pillar holding the roof up.

The phrase 'in the order of Melchizedek' turns up 5 times in 3 short chapters... it's no accident. When we read this passage we're supposed to ask – Melchizedek WHO?

The plan this morning is to show you not how Melchizedek is important in history – although that would be interesting. It is not to show you how Melchizedek is important in religion – although that might be relevant. It's not even to show you how Melchizedek is like Jesus – although that is both interesting and massively relevant. The plan is to show you that because Jesus is 'in the order of Melchizedek' the whole world is turned upside down.

It means that we, as sinful, mortal, finite creatures can have access to a holy, immortal and infinite God. Not only that we can have access, but that God desires to commune with us more than anything else. Not only that, but because Jesus is in the order of Melchizedek, there is hope for the world – a hope that will never fade.

There's a big argument that has been raging for centuries over who wrote the book of Hebrews... in fact so much so that John Reynolds (doing a degree at London School of Theology) had to write an essay explaining who that author was – John, I can't work it out, who wrote this book?!

I'm not sure we'll ever know – but I'm pretty sure who ever wrote this was a Baptist.

You see, in Chapter 5 verse 1-10 there are three neat little points lined up to be preached on. They were very helpful in those days!

The three points are three ways in which the Old Testament priesthood failed to bring us to God, and how Jesus, being like Melchizedek, gives us an access-pass to the throne room of God.

One of my best friends from university has a nan who works at Buckingham palace. Last I heard she was doing something to do with the catering. I think it was setting tables. I think that sounds like a pretty odd job. Maybe the reason we have a budget deficit is that we pay people to do jobs like lay the table in Buckingham palace. Hasn't the Queen heard of a eating off a tray while watching the football?!

Anyway – every year the Queen assembles all the palace staff and arranges a drinks reception meet them. It's a lovely idea and it's got to be good for staff moral.

The thing is that my friend's nan only gets to meet the Queen once a year. She can't walk into the banqueting hall and stop for a chat. It doesn't work like that!

What if she wanted to get to see the Queen every day? She would have to tag along with someone who has that access... maybe she could marry into the family, although I'm not sure how many royals are left to be married off.

In some ways we're in a similar position with God. Unless we tag along with someone who has access – namely Jesus – we can't just wander into the throne room. We can't even pray in confidence without Jesus.

Point 1: They were imperfect.

What I was saying is that the first 10 verses of chapter 5 are split into 3 sections. They are three different ways in which Jesus gets us access to God because he is like Melchizedek not like the old priests.

The first problem is obvious in verses 1-3: the priests are not perfect so they don't have access to God themselves.

I'm imperfect as well... it might surprise you! When I was at school I was really good at the subjects I liked... PE, Physics, Maths and I was pretty good at the subjects where I had a teacher I liked: History and RE. But Biology was a different kettle of fish.

I hated biology, it made me feel sick when we had to cut up hearts and brains, the idea of learning the names of bits of plants bored me senseless and the lab really smelled bad. I mean really bad – and I'm sure the teacher just made the smell worse!

Every lesson he gave us homework sheets, and he wanted them to be handed in the next day. Now, I'm sure he gave me these sheets every lesson – but I never saw them once I left the classroom. Needless to say, I never handed my homework in.

On the wall my teacher had a board that he used to record detentions. You would get a detention for every piece of homework you didn't hand in. When you turned up for the detention he would rub your name off the board. Well, by the end of the term, my name got on this board no less than 13 times! I never went to a single detention that term.

That is 13 hours worth of detention. I could never pay that off! More than that – there is no way I could start to do other people's detention for them. Because I'm indebted to the teacher, there is no way I can start to get other people out of debt to him.

This is the quandary of the High Priest. His job was to pay for people's sins. His job was to make people right with God. There is no way he could do that until he had first made himself right with God.

An imperfect High Priest cannot grant anyone else an access-pass to God because he doesn't have one himself!

Do you know what Melchizedek means? King of Righteousness... King of Right-ness with God. The fact that Jesus is in the 'order of Melchizedek' – the order of 'right-ness with God' – means Jesus is the only High Priest who has access to God. The old priests were Imperfect, but Jesus is Perfect.

Point 2: They were impermanent

I've got a quite amusing story about a couple I knew from my time in Bristol – let's call them Dave and Liz just in case they are listening. They are great people and I respect them hugely but this made me smile when I first heard it.

Liz was having a bad day and feeling pretty down in the dumps. I think Dave had been off playing football all morning and she felt a bit abandoned. When he came back he got straight in the shower and needed to go out to see some friends in the afternoon. Just before he left she turned to him and asked: "why don't you tell me that you love me anymore?"

Dave responded "I told you before – nothing's changed! If it changes I'll let you know." And he went out on his way."

The funny thing about that is that I totally get where he is coming from. I think I probably thought like Dave a few years ago – but Emily has certainly changed that!

Any of you guys that are married know that it doesn't work like this. You have to say "I love you" to the wife at least once a year to keep in the good books

It's pretty similar In Jewish law... the sacrifice made once a year by the high priest kinda paid for a year's good favour from God.

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

One problem with apologising for sin and making payment is that even while we're doing it we're probably already sinning again!

Because Jesus is in the order of Melchizedek he is a permanent priest. He is constantly offering forgiveness to those who come to God through him. We don't have to try to remember all our sins. We come to God through Jesus and we're automatically forgiven.

He has said sorry to God on your behalf once for all!

When we're praying, we don't try to remember all our sins and beat ourselves up over them. We try to remember all the promises of God that are true in Jesus. It's his job to get forgiveness for us. We just have to come to God through him.

The old priests were imperfect and impermanent but Jesus is both perfect and permanent.

Point 3: They were immaterial

The final point in these few verses is that the gifts these priests were offering were immaterial.

Anyone ever bought flowers from a petrol station? How did they go down? A £40 bunch of roses sent by courier is much better! The gift has to be of value!

Product of a finite offense to an infinite God >> Product of many finite acts of reconciliation by finite people

The product of an infinite act of reconciliation by an infinite God >> Product of many finite offenses to an infinite God

It is impossible for the blood of [animals] to take away sins. Heb 10:4

The implication here is that there is nothing we can offer God that is worth enough. We need a gift of infinite value if we are to get the scales level and it needs to be offered by an infinite God if we're going to tip the scales our way.

Once made perfect, Jesus became the source of salvation for all who obey him. Not that Jesus wasn't perfect. It doesn't mean that there were things wrong with him that needed correcting. It

means once he as the sacrificial lamb was perfected. Once the sacrifice was made ready he became the source of salvation for all men.

The passage begins “Therefore since we have such a great High Priest who has gone through the heavens” We have a priest in the order of Melchizedek – a perfect priest who is able to offer the perfect sacrifice for our sin once for all time.

We could talk about the nature of Jesus’s sacrifice and his priesthood for hours without even scratching the surface. The key for us today is to ask the question you’ve probably had in your mind for a while now: “so what?!”

Chapter 4 verse 16 really answers this question for us: “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.”

THE APPLICATION

We are imperfect, impermanent and immaterial.

The point is that as Christians we sometimes feel the need to behave in a certain way to please God. All other religions are based on this idea. Islam has the 5 pillars and Buddhism requires us to work towards enlightenment but much closer to home we find this belief entrenched in society.

We are surrounded by people that say Christians ‘MUST DO’ such and such... take communion in a certain way, receive the spirit in a certain way, relate to their church in a certain way, and even pray in a certain way.

Whatever we do it is not sufficient. We can’t DO anything to please God. Whatever we do is imperfect. Whatever we do is impermanent. Whatever we do is immaterial.

We come to God in prayer not because we deserve it, not because he’s turned a blind eye to our sin, not because we’ve hidden our sin successfully. Not even because we’ve learned the correct formula. We come to God in prayer because of Jesus.

It is our faith in Jesus that pleases God. It is our faith in Jesus that allows God to smile on us. It is our faith in Jesus that allows us to pray. Hebrews 11 says without faith it is impossible to please God.

I love how Erwin Lutzer puts it when he said: “When the mask of self-righteousness has been torn from us and we stand stripped of all our accustomed defences, then we are candidates for God’s generous grace.”

When we pray, God doesn’t want our platitudes. We don’t have to pretend anymore. He wants us to stand before him like little kids who have just been in a fight in the playground: covered in mud, with torn clothes and a bloody nose.

He wants real unadulterated people coming before him. Real people without their masks. Real people not hiding behind the veil of religion.

I have a 16 week-old son called Ethan sitting in the front row. He's not great at many things. His skills currently consist of filling his nappy, kissing or eating Sophie the giraffe and chucking up whenever I hold him!

Imagine he turned to me this afternoon and managed to apologise to me for throwing up on me. I'd be amazed he could talk at 4 months, but it would be ridiculous for a different reason. I don't mind him being sick on me – not because I like the sick, or even that I don't notice... it's hard not to notice the smell! I don't mind him being sick on me because he's my son. If he's being sick on me it means that we're close! Of course I'll pick him up again. Of course he'll sit on my lap again as we sing nursery rhymes. It's because of who he is, not what he does that I love him.

Hebrews tells us that it is not what we do that makes us beautiful to God. Only Jesus can do that. Only a Jesus that is in the order of Melchizedek can do that. Only a Jesus who is perfect, permanent and who offers that sacrifice of infinite worth.

We should worry less about what we do and worry more about whose name we're doing it in.

If I come to church in my name or if I do community service in my name I won't please God. We need to come to Church in the name of Jesus. We need to serve our community in the name of Jesus. We need to live in the name of Jesus. We need to pray in the name of Jesus.

THE END BIT

Remember my biology class? I never did those detentions... I reckoned that the teacher would forget them over the summer holidays – and he did – or I managed to avoid him so well during the following year that he gave up on me.

The thing is we all know we're indebted to God. We can try to do the detentions, but we'll never be able to clear that board. We can hide from him, but we miss out on so much life that he wants to give us. We can even try to deny the whole thing, but a day will come when he'll be undeniable.

The solution? The solution is to approach the throne of grace with confidence. Not confidence because we've been at church for years. Not confidence because we've worked it all out. Not confidence because we've had powerful spiritual experiences.

Our confidence is Jesus. Jesus in the order of Melchizedek. Our approach is prayer. Continuous, living, hurting, real, mask-free prayer. Our throne room is overflowing with mercy and grace.

Dwight Moody said: "A man can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough today to last him for the next 6 months, nor can he inhale sufficient air into his lungs with one breath to sustain life for a week to come. We are permitted to draw upon God's store of grace from day to day as we need it."

PRAYER

Grace for people who have

1. Sin
2. Doubt
3. Masks
4. Little or no faith