

The Hebrews Initiative:
The Conviction of our Confession Leads to our Confidence
Hebrews 4:14-5:6

October 4, 2015

Dr. Steve Horn

Text Introduction: We are in a series that we are calling the Hebrews Initiative. It is an important journey. Though not exactly the same, our circumstances are similar to that of the original recipients of Hebrews. As such, it is my prayer that this study will provide significant encouragement for us to persevere in this post-Christian and at times anti-Christian world in which we find ourselves living.

In chapter 1, we learned from this anonymous author to the Hebrews that “It all starts and ends with Jesus.” That is, in Jesus, God revealed Himself to us, represented Himself to us, and reconciled us to Himself. Then, He took His rightful place and rules and reigns in eternity.

In chapter 2, we saw a great phrase—“so great a salvation.” We discovered there that this great salvation that is promised is only possible because of a great Savior—Jesus Christ—and that this great salvation and great Savior demand a great surrender.

Last week, we considered this calling to not harden our hearts. It is a lesson rooted in history, in the hardening of the hearts of Old Testament Israel. The hope is that in reviewing history, we would be all the more diligent to guard our hearts today.

Our journey continues today in chapter 4 and into chapter 5.

Text: ¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens—Jesus the Son of God—let us hold fast to the confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Therefore let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us at the proper time.

5 For every high priest taken from men is appointed in service to God for the people, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he is also subject to weakness. ³Because of this, he must make a sin offering for himself as well as for the people. ⁴No one takes this honor on himself; instead, a person is called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵In the same way, the Messiah did not exalt Himself to become a high priest, but the One who said to Him, You are My Son; today I have become Your Father, ⁶also said in another passage, You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

Introduction: Martin Luther said of this text that the writer of Hebrews scared us in the preceding passage regarding the dangers of hardening our hearts, but now comforts us through a reminder of Jesus as our Great High Priest.

Now, remember when we started a few weeks ago I said that part of our challenge is that at times this book is difficult. This can be one of those texts. What is this emphasis on the high priest? Who is Melchizedek? What do either have to do with me or our times?

So, let me see if I can make the complex simple. My approach is going to be simple this morning. I want to see if I can summarize the big idea of this text. I want to begin to amplify that big idea some for us. Finally, I want, as always, to help us to apply this text and this idea so that the theological does become the practical.

The Big Idea Summarized:

Jesus is our Great High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

There are two separate ideas here. Jesus is being compared to the “great high priest” in the order of “Melchizedek.” So, we can begin by talking about what these two ideas mean and to see the point of the comparison.

Because He is our Great High Priest He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses both physically and spiritually, but without sin. Like the priests of the Old Testament, He was also divinely appointed.

“In the order of Melchizedek” emphasizes that He is a king of righteousness, but also a king of peace. “King of Righteousness” comes from the basic meaning of his name. “King of Peace” comes from the fact that Melchizedek was the “King of Salem.” “Salem” is a cognate of “shalom” meaning peace. So the idea again, is that Melchizedek is both King of righteousness and King of peace. How do we find our peace with God? We find it in the righteousness of Jesus. The other important item that we learn from his being as “the order of Melchizedek” is that this is a priestly role forever.

What is impact of bringing the Hebrews back to this priestly role in the order of Melchizedek?

- Jesus sympathizes with us.
- Jesus was divinely appointed.
- Jesus brings us to peace with God through His righteousness.
- Jesus’ role is forever.—it is without end.

The Big Idea Amplified:

So...Here is the big idea!

Jesus' comprehension and character as High Priest leads to His compassion and completeness as Savior which leads therefore to our confidence to hold on to the confession and to Him.

The Big Idea Applied or “So What?”

We find our application in this text in the two “Let us” clauses.

Let us hold on to our confession with confidence.

What is the confession? He was the Son of Man (human), but He was the Son of God (Divine). He sympathizes with our weaknesses (because He was man), but He is the perfect sacrifice for our sin because He was sinless (because He is God.) He literally died (because He was man), but He literally rose again (because He was God).

Or, as the writer of Hebrews put it as He began this theological treatise back in 1:2b-3.

God has appointed Him heir of all things and made the universe through Him.³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of His nature, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Or, as Paul put it in Romans 10:8-10.

This is the message of faith that we proclaim:⁹ If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.

This is our confession!

Ultimately, there is no other name by which we are saved. That's our confession as Christians. He is not a way among many ways to be reconciled to God. He is the way, the truth, and the life—no one goes to the Father except through Him!

We have to hold on to that confession with confidence. But, it is not just a confession or a precept that we are holding on to, but we also holding on to a person, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us hold on to Christ with confidence.

Every phrase of verse 16 is cherished.

"Let us approach the throne"—In the Old Covenant, the high priest went in to the Holy of Holies to offer sacrifice for sin. In this New Covenant of grace, we (Let us) approach the throne of grace.

"With boldness"—Here we have a mixture of humility with boldness. Humility because we are not worthy, but boldness, because He has invited us.

"Receive mercy"

"Find grace"

"to Help us"

"At the proper time"

This is a call to keep going to the well of grace. We are saved by grace. We continue to walk in Him and in holiness by grace.

One of history's most well-known martyrs was Polycarp. He became Bishop of Smyrna and is believed to have been a disciple of John—the author of the Gospel, letters of John, and Revelation. He was arrested for not proclaiming Caesar as Lord. As he was led into the arena of his martyrdom, witnesses testify that they heard a voice saying "Be strong, and show yourself a man, O Polycarp!" Again, no one saw one who spoke these words. It is as though the words came down from Heaven.

At the urging of the authorities to declare Caesar as Lord, Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour? And when the proconsul yet again pressed him, and said, Swear by the fortune of Cæsar, he answered,

Since you are vainly urgent that, as you say, I should swear by the fortune of Cæsar, and pretend not to know who and what I am, hear me declare with boldness, I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day, and you shall hear them.

The proconsul then said to him, I have wild beasts at hand; to these will I cast you, unless you repent.

But he answered, Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous.

But again the proconsul said to him, I will cause you to be consumed by fire, seeing you despise the wild beasts, if you will not repent.

But Polycarp said, You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why do you tarry? Bring forth what you will.

Polycarp's last words were that of his prayer, "O Father, I thank you, that you have called me to this day and hour and have counted me worthy to receive my place among the number of the holy matrys.

The conviction of Polycarp's confession led to his confidence. May the same be true of us.