

INTRODUCTION

I was going to start with a joke about a roof, but I decided it was over your heads. Or I was going to start with a joke that is so funny it would make your hair fall out...but I see some of you have already heard it. And some of you have heard it twice!

Okay, so here's one. A priest, a rabbi, and a minister walk into a bar. The bartender says, "Hey, is this a joke?"

There are lots of versions of jokes about a rabbi, priest, and a minister. I don't want to be too analytical, but why do we make a priest and a minister two different people? It's because in the Roman Catholic Church, there are priests. And in non-Catholic churches we have ministers. But is that a false, artificial distinction? I'll let you decide a little later.

So to answer the question, "How well do you know your priest?" You may be thinking, I don't know any priest very well. If that's what you're thinking, then you are probably thinking about a Catholic priest. If you are born again, you have a priest. His name is Jesus. And during this message I hope you will come to know your High Priest Jesus in a deeper and more intimate way. Let's jump right into our text.

When we were studying Hebrews 2, I mentioned we would talk more about Jesus as our High Priest, so let's first read Hebrews 2:17-18:

"For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

• • •

Hebrews 4:14-16. "Therefore, 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. For 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. Let 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."

The idea of a High Priest is foreign to us, but it was a very important office to the Jews. The writer of Hebrews is stressing how Jesus is superior. He is superior to the prophets, to angels, and to Moses. Now we see that Jesus is the greatest High Priest. In the Old Testament period, there were three separate national offices that were important. There was Prophet, Priest, and King. These three men were the most important VIPs of the nation. Jesus fulfills all of these three positions in His life. He was the great prophet when He came to announce the Kingdom of Heaven two thousand years ago. He is currently our High Priest who is ever making intercession for us. And one day, He will be the King over the whole earth. Literally.

Of these three offices, we're going to focus today on Jesus, our High Priest. First, let's take a few minutes to fully appreciate a portrait of our High Priest. Then we'll talk about the consequences of understanding Jesus as our High Priest.

There are many wonderful portraits of Christ in the Bible. When you're in an art gallery, you shouldn't rush through and merely glance at the art. You should stop and carefully appreciate all the details of the work. Join me this morning as put our EYES ON JESUS to consider four important details in this portrait of our High Priest.

I. He is a great high priest

The Bible says, "We have a great high priest." There were many Jewish High Priests, but there is only one GREAT high priest. The word in Hebrews is a form of the word "mega." In this form it's the word "*megan*," so if your name is Megan, you're a great person, that's what your name means.

Our English word "priest" comes from the Greek word *hierus* from which we get our English word "hierarchy." In the Old Testament there was a spiritual hierarchy between the priests and people. Only the priests could approach the altar and the Temple building. There were a series of walls that kept Gentiles, women, and even men away from the presence of God. Only the priests performed duties in the Temple. The people brought their sacrifices and offerings, but they were basically spectators.

And there is a very strict hierarchy in the Catholic Church to this day. The Pope is called Pontiff, which means bridge. Catholics consider the Pope as the bridge to God. There is only one Pope, and below him there are about 200 Cardinals, and below them are about 5,000 Bishops. And below them are about 500,000 priests. And at the bottom of the hierarchy are the Deacons, and then the laity, or people.

Lest you misunderstand what I'm saying, I don't want you to think I am bashing the Catholic Church. I believe there are many born-again Catholics who are going to heaven. I even believe there are some born-again Baptists going to heaven! When you stand before God, you won't be asked if you were a Baptist, a Catholic, or a Presbyterian. You'll be asked what you did with Jesus.

However, like the Protestant Reformers, Martin Luther, John Calvin and others, I believe the Catholic Church created an artificial hierarchy that is never taught in the Bible. Go back to the early church. There was no hierarchy. All the believers shared everything in common. The Apostles were a one-generation group of leaders God gave to the church. But after about three hundred years, the church in Rome established a strict division between the clergy—the professional priests—and the people. Today you can go into churches and there is a rail across the front that separates the holy place where only the priests can go and perform their religious duties. The ordinary masses are kept out in the viewing area except to approach the priest for his offering of a sacrament.

Some Protestant churches still embrace this false hierarchy today. They make a division between the clergy and the laity. But the New Testament teaches that we have one High Priest Jesus, and that we are all priests. That's called the doctrine of the priesthood of believers. In 26 years, you've never heard me use the term "layman" or "laywoman." We're all equal at the foot of the cross. Let me show you the correct hierarchy of the church. It's very simple. There are only two levels. Jesus Christ, our High Priest is the head of the church, and below Him on one level are all the redeemed people. He is our great High Priest. That's the only hierarchy in the New Testament.

By the way, that's why I don't really care to be called "Reverend." First, no one should be revered except God. Second, that title is never applied to anyone in the Bible. And third—you can ask my wife—there are times when I'm not very reverent. On second thought, please don't ask her.

In Matthew 23 Jesus criticized the Pharisees because they loved to be addressed in public as "rabbi" or "Father." I've had people call me everything from Father Dykes to The Right Reverend Doctor Dykes—and I wince when I hear those titles. When a new member asks me what they can call me, my usual reply is "David." Or if you prefer you can call me "Pastor," which is like a nickname for what I do. We have only one Priest

II. He has gone through the heavens

The Bible says, "We have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens." The Jewish Temple in Jerusalem only contained two important rooms. The rest of the area was open to the sky. There was a Most Holy Place, where only priests could enter. Then there was a tall, thick curtain separating this room from the holiest place on earth. It was called the Holy of Holies. It was heaven on earth, because there the Shekinah glory of God dwelt. Once a year, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would lift the corner of the curtain and go through into the heavenly presence of Yahweh. There was no place to sit, so the High Priest had to stand and conduct his rituals of purification and then exit through the same curtain.

But Jesus is superior because He went through the heavens into the eternal presence of the Father and He sat down at the right hand of God. The word "heaven" is used in three ways in the Bible. It refers to the atmosphere around the earth, the sky. The Bible speaks of birds flying in the heavens. Second, it refers to the stellar sky, what we would call outer space. And third, it refers to the dwelling place of God. In 2 Corinthians 12:2 Paul writes about "a man in Christ" who was caught up to the third heaven. He calls it paradise. The idea of the "seventh heaven" comes from Islamic tradition, not the Bible.

Jesus, our High Priest, didn't have to simply go through a curtain. He stood on the Mount of Olives and ascended up through the sky into the very presence of God. Where is heaven? Let's do a little experiment. When I count to three, everyone point to heaven. One two, three, point!

That's great, so hell must be in the opposite direction. But to all our friends in the Philippines, they would point that way for heaven (down) and that way for hell (up). But we shouldn't think of the third heaven in terms of time and space. To use a term coined by Star Trek, heaven is

beyond the space/time continuum. As we're going to see later in this message, God's throne of grace is closer than you can imagine. And Jesus our great high priest has entered there, not for a few hours a year, but as our High Priest forever!

III. He understands our weaknesses

The Bible says, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." If you are a grammarian, you know this is called a double negative. I recall having an English teacher in Junior High School who used to say, "Don't never use double negatives." But in the Greek language, this double negative is employed to intensify the meaning of the claim. So, let's turn a negative into a positive in English. We DO have a High Priest who IS able to sympathize with our weaknesses. That means Jesus really cares about how we feel and what we're going through.

There were some wicked, uncaring High Priests in the history of Israel. In 1 Samuel we read about the High Priest Eli. He accused Hannah of being drunk when she was prostrate in prayer asking for a child. He didn't control his two sons who desecrated the Temple. God sent a messenger to tell Eli. "You've blown it. Because you're such a bad priest, your sons are going to die on the same day and I'm going to take the priesthood away from you and give it to a pure priest." Years later, his sons were killed in battle the same day the Ark of the Covenant was stolen by the Philistines. When Eli heard the news, he fell over dead. That same day his daughter-in-law gave birth to a son. He was named Ichabod, which means, "The glory has departed." God said He was going to raise up a pure priest. This was a Messianic prophecy about Jesus, because He was the only pure High Priest, and He came to restore God's glory. In fact the Bible says He was full of grace and glory.

Here's the bottom line: Jesus cares for you. Jesus is God. The two most important discoveries you'll ever make are these. God exists. And He cares for you. In Matthew 10 Jesus said sparrows are so common that two are sold for a penny, yet God knows when just one of them falls to the ground. Then He said, "And the very hairs of your head are numbered. And you are worth more than many sparrows." Sparrows are the most common birds in the world, and yet the Creator notices when one falls. It doesn't say He notices when they fly, but when they fall. That means when it struggles, and perhaps dies. And the truth is we are all creatures full of weakness who often fail and fall. And Jesus our High Priest really cares. And He is not a High Priest who points the finger of accusation and condemnation toward sinners. He didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

There's an old song that originated during the dark period of American slavery that says, "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows my sorrow." Have you ever felt that way? Then the song says, "Nobody knows but Jesus." Those are profound words that are still true. There is someone who knows and someone who cares, and His name is Jesus.

IV. He was tempted like us but never sinned

Our text continues, "We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." The reason Jesus can sympathize with our weaknesses is because He put on human flesh and experienced every temptation that we face. Jesus has been tempted in EVERY way we are. That word "every" means this: every single temptation. You will never face a temptation Jesus hasn't faced and overcome. He was tempted to complain to God when John the Baptist was beheaded, but instead He honored John. He was tempted to steal by not paying His taxes, but He resisted and paid up by sending Peter to find a coin in the mouth of a fish. He was tempted to lust when Mary wiped His feet with His hair, but instead He honored her as the only one who recognized He was going to die. He was tempted to lie to save His life, but He resisted and claimed deity and was charged with blasphemy. He was tempted to take revenge when He was wrongly accused, but He kept quiet and absorbed their insults.

Every High Priest who entered the Holy of Holies was sinner. But Jesus is the only sinless man who ever walked this planet. That's who our High Priest is. He is the great High Priest who has gone through the heavens, who sympathizes with our weaknesses and faced every temptation we have. Isn't that an amazing portrait? So what are the consequences of having Jesus as our High Priest? Let me give you three reasons to rejoice because Jesus is our High Priest.

A. Because Jesus is my High Priest I can: Persevere when I face trouble

The Bible says, "Since we have a great high priest...let us hold firmly to the faith we profess." (Hebrews 4:14)

This letter was written to Hebrew Christians who were being tempted to reject Jesus and to return to their Jewish religion. It was written before the Jewish Temple was destroyed, so there was a High Priest in Jerusalem who was still active. So the writer is encouraging them not go back to a system of priests and sacrifices.

And the message to us is that we shouldn't be satisfied with any religious system requiring us to go through any priest other than Jesus to relate to God. Our priest gives us strength to persevere through trouble from without. As I've said before, those of us who hold onto a biblical view of morality are going to face ridicule and persecution in the days to come. As our culture moves further away from absolute truth, those of us who hold onto the truth of the Bible are going to be labeled as old-fashioned, intolerant, and worst of all, we're called "haters." And yet I don't hate anyone or anything except the devil and sin.

A good example of what we are going to see is how the mainstream media is already attacking Vice President-elect Pence's evangelical faith. I'm not sure about Mr. Trump's faith; I suppose we will discover that in the days to come. But Mike Pence has been a very active evangelical believer for years. He and his wife attend an Evangelical Free church in Indianapolis. E. Free are third cousins to Baptists. Chuck Swindoll is an E. Free pastor. Pence has been attacked for his stance on the sanctity of life, his belief in the Biblical definition of marriage. And he has been

roasted and will be excoriated for his audacious claim that Jesus can change the lifestyle of a homosexual.

Here's the challenge all of us face in the years to come. Will we hold onto our Biblical faith, or will we let go and grab hold of the popular, shifting values of anything-goes-as-long-as-I'm-not-hurting-you morality? Are you willing to grip firmly and to hold onto the truth of the faith we profess? We live in a culture that will try to rip that belief out of your hands and heart, so hold on firmly!

B. Because Jesus is my High Priest I can: Resist any temptation

The Bible says, "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:18)

It will help you overcome temptation if, in the moment of temptation, you understand that Jesus faced that same temptation—and He resisted it. And He showed us how to resist temptation.

In the desert, He overcame the three basic categories of temptation mentioned in 1 John 2: The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. His flesh cried out for bread, but He resisted Satan's suggestion to turn stones into bread. The lust of the eyes is when we see riches we covet, and Satan offered Him all the riches of the world. He resisted. The pride of life, seeks attention and celebrity. Jesus would have gained instant stardom if angels had caught Him jumping off the pinnacle of the Temple. But He resisted. Jesus could have just snapped his holy fingers and Satan would have been vanquished. But instead Jesus faced Satan as a man. He quoted three scriptures from the book of Deuteronomy to repel Satan's attack. When you are tempted cry out to Jesus and go to His Word and use it as the sword of the Spirit against the enemy.

C. Because Jesus is my High Priest I can: Approach God's throne with confidence

The Bible says, "Let 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." (Hebrews 4:16)

To the ancient world, the term "throne of grace" was an oxymoron. There were no thrones of grace. There were only thrones of royalty, which meant thrones of judgment, authority, and the power of life and death. It was a terrifying experience to approach a throne in ancient times. If the king didn't raise his scepter to accept you, you were killed on the spot.

But I have good news for you today. God's throne is a throne of grace. According to Revelation 20, there will be another throne, a Great White Throne, which will be used once as a throne of Judgment. But at this moment, God's throne is a throne of grace.

And I have some more good news. Because of Jesus, our High Priest, you can approach God's throne with confidence. There are many places in this world where we can't enter. This world is

littered with warning signs such as RESTRICTED ACCESS, AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY. You see those signs at the hospital, at the airports, and at military installations. If I wanted to get in to see President Obama, or Queen Elizabeth, or Pope Francis, I would be denied access. But that's okay, because I have full and complete access to the throne of grace.

And the good news continues. When we approach the throne of grace, we receive two amazing gifts, mercy and grace, to help us in our time of need. Mercy and grace are different, but they are two sides of the same coin. MERCY is God withholding the punishment I deserve. GRACE is God giving me the forgiveness I don't deserve. In other words mercy is God saying, "No punishment for you, even though you deserve it." Grace is God saying, "Forgiveness for you, even though you don't deserve it."

A billionaire was desperately seeking God. He was visiting the Oval Office and saw a golden phone. He asked, "What's that?" President Obama said, "Oh, that's a phone line to God. But I seldom use it because it's a billion dollars a minute."

Still searching, the billionaire later happened to be visiting the Texas Capitol in Austin. In the Governor's Office he saw a golden phone on the wall and asked, "What's that?" Governor Abbott said, "Oh, that's a phone line to God." The billionaire said, "How much does it cost?" Governor Abbott said, "Oh, it's free, because here in Texas, it's a local call."

Now before you swoon from your Texas pride, I've got to tell you that the throne of grace is a local call from anywhere on earth. Even though Jesus went through the heavens to arrive at God's throne, you and I don't have to travel millions of light years to get there. The throne of heaven is closer than you may think.

My friend, Ray Stedman, expressed it well: "The throne of grace is not in remote space; it is right in the heart of a believer in whom Jesus Christ dwells. To come to the throne of grace does not mean to address an appeal across the reaches of space to some distant point in heaven. It means to reckon upon the One who indwells us. The throne of grace is that close to us, that available to us."

CONCLUSION

This promise should energize our prayer lives. We can approach and ask with confidence because Jesus, our High Priest, has promised that we could ask the Father anything in His name and He would grant it. One of my spiritual mentors was Ron Dunn. He used to tell the story of how he was at a carnival with his son and each ride required a certain number of tickets. So he bought a long trail of tickets. Then he would stand there and tear off the required number and hand them to his son.

After several rides, his son passed by and got his tickets, and then there was a strange boy who held out his hand to Ron to get tickets. Ron looked at the boy, and held back the tickets. He said, "I don't know you. You can't have any of these tickets!" Then Ron's son turned around and

said, "Dad, this is my new friend, and I told him that you'd give him the tickets." Ron said, "On the basis of what my son said, I was glad to give the tickets to his friend."

It is only because of Jesus, our High Priest that we are able to approach God's throne of grace. When we approach God the Father, we have a High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, who says, "Father, I told him or her that they could ask anything in my name and you'd give it to them." And the Father says, "On the basis of what my Son said, I'm happy to grant your request."

We often say, "It's not WHAT you know, it's WHO you know." And that is certainly true spiritually. When you know Jesus intimately, you will hold onto your faith with perseverance; you'll face and overcome temptation; and you will approach the throne of grace with great confidence and assurance.

OUTLINE

A portrait of our High Priest:

- I. He is a great high priest
- II. He has gone through the heavens
- III. He understands our weaknesses
- IV. He was tempted like us but never sinned

Because Jesus is my High Priest, I can:

A. Persevere when I face trouble

"Since we have a great high priest...let us hold firmly to the faith we profess." *Hebrews 4:14*

B. Resist any temptation

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."
Hebrews 2:18

C. Approach God's throne with confidence

"Let 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." *Hebrews 4:16*

MERCY is God withholding the punishment I deserve.

GRACE is God giving me the forgiveness I don't deserve.

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations and/or use material that is not under copyright. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material stimulate your own Spirit-driven preparation—*it is never intended as a substitute for your own study of Scripture.*

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, it is good scholarship (not to mention the right thing to do) to cite the source. If you are teaching, you may simply preface your remarks by saying something like: **“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”** This simple citation also applies to any work you may publish, too, as I routinely publish my material in books that are protected by copyright.

This careful effort on your part may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you. I trust you will find that additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners.

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*