

Christ our Great High Priest

By Paris Reidhead*

Our Theme, OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST. The Text and Scripture, that which has been read, Hebrews 4:14 - 5:14.

God wants a Holy people. This is a Holy Bible. It tells us about a Holy God, who became flesh among us, who was none other than the Holy Son, who died and rose from the dead that He might pour forth the Holy Spirit to minister in procuring for the Son a Holy people. This is a most Holy Faith, and a Holy Scripture that tells us of it.

Holiness is the Theme of this Book from Genesis through Revelation. "Be ye holy, for I am Holy"(Lev 20:7), is the clear commandment to the people of God. You only understand the purpose of God in salvation when you realize that Jesus Christ came into the world that He might save His people from their sins. God's purpose in Grace was to take from Satan's dominion a people held in the bondage to sin and flesh, deliver them from that tyranny, translate them into the Kingdom of His dear Son, and make them in the image and in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

This, I say, God provided perfectly through His Son, and His Son is ready, and willing, and able to perfect in everyone who comes to Him. We understand that in His Sovereignty God ordained that for those that are the heirs of salvation, the redeemed, all things must work together for good to them that love Him, to them that are the called according to His purpose. His purpose is that He might conform His people to the image of His Son. God's purpose in Grace is to make you like Jesus Christ; to do this, He became what you were in order that you might become what He is. "He was made to be sin for us that you might be made the Righteousness of God in Him." (II Cor. 5:21)

Now, God the Father purposed our salvation. God, the Son provided our salvation. God, the Holy Spirit waits to perfect in us all that the Father purposed and the Son provided by means of the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest. It is because He ever liveth to make intercession for us that He is able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him.

I want you to see this in the 14th verse in this 4th Chapter of Hebrews: "Seeing then that we have a great high priest. This has been mentioned twice before, in verses 16 and 17 of the 2nd Chapter; For verily Christ took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."

And the second reference to the High Priest is in verse 1 of Chapter 3: Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.

The High Priest of our profession. Let me illustrate something of what this means. I will have to use a common illustration for a deep spiritual truth. You go into Department Store to do some shopping, and you come up to the counter, and there is a priest (a priestess perhaps) representing the Concern. She is behind the counter. And you come to her. She says, "What can I do for you?" And you say, "I am really not sure." "Well, would you like this?" "I don't think so. If I did like it, I don't think I could afford it. In fact, I don't really know if I should be here shopping or not. I am not sure whether I should get this." And after a few moments of this, the high priest looks at you and says, "All right. When you've made up your mind, come and see me." And she turns and goes to wait on someone who understands. But if you come to this counter, and you stand there and you say, "I want that," she is the priestess of your profession, your confession. She takes it out. She boxes it. She wraps it, says it will be \$7. There are certain assumptions that she makes, that if you did not understand that there was a price, you would not ask for it. If you not want it, you would not ask for it. If you did not know it was yours for the buying, you would not ask for it. And so she is there to give you what you profess by your demeanor. A man shuffles up to the counter, all ragged and dirty and dishevelled and unshaven, shoes out, and he looks at that, and there is a suit for \$49.50, and he says, "I'll take that." And the Clerk looks at him and says, "Well all right, under certain considerations you'll take it. It looks to me from your appearance that you don't have the \$49.50 that's necessary to take it. Do you?" "Well, no, but I just thought, Let-him that asks receives." "Oh no. You see there are certain conditions that are involved in the receiving. I am sorry." And he escorts the tramp to the door. But if you come in with the insignia of sufficient prosperity to be able to afford the suit, they will try it on courteously. And you say, "I'll take it." And they will have it all marked and ready for tailoring to fit you, because they are the priests of your confession.

Now, Jesus Christ, is said to be the Apostle and the High Priest of our profession. Let me illustrate it. There are certain things that have been provided for them who love God. There are certain provisions that grace has made. There are certain purposes that God has had. There are things that have been accomplished. There are privileges that have been extended. And Jesus Christ is the One who is there, that when you come and you confess with His Word, when you profess what His Book teaches, when you stand on the grounds that He has established and follow the principles that He has fixed, then He does that which is there. He is the One who makes effective in your life what has been accomplished.

Now, one of the principles least understood by the children of God is the power of words. I want you to realize that everything that God created, He created by Words. He spoke and worlds came into being, and stars blazed and found their orbits. Everything that God has done He did by Word. He created by Word. He spoke. Now He said, I have given unto them Thy

Words. Remember when our Lord stood there beside the withered fig tree, He had spoken to the fig tree that promised fruit and it had none. And He said, Die, Wither. And it withered. And when they came back, they said, This is a strange thing. This has withered from the roots up. Usually a tree dies from the top down. But this withered at the Word of the Son of God. And our Lord Jesus looked at His disciples, and said, You think this is marvelous? You think this is remarkable? I want to say to you something, that if you have faith of a grain of mustard seed and you say to this mountain, (Matt. 17:20) --- Ah, there is the secret, if you say to this mountain. He did not say, Pray for it. He said, "If you shall say to this mountain. Be removed. Be cast into the sea. And doubt not in your heart, it will be even as you say." The power of word. The authority of word. That is why you should watch what you say. Someone comes to you and says, How do you feel? Well now, if you doubt -- If you say, I feel terrible. I am feeling worse every day. It's getting worse. It's more difficult. Well if you doubt not in your heart, it shall be even as you say. How's your job coming? Oh, terrible. Everything is wrong. Nothing is right. I just... Well, if you doubt not in your heart, it will be as you says. The power of word. That is why a Christian should never witness a negative testimony. That is why a Christian should never consent to submit to using the words of his lips against himself, or against the Church, or against... He is the high priest of our profession. And He is there to effect what we profess. Now He is there as our High Priest, our intermediary, our intercessor, our advocate, our representative.

You know it is nice to know somebody in Government. I am told that Government is pretty well accomplished not by how much you know, but who you know. I do not have any reason for believing it is true, but I have not any reason for believing it is not true either. But I am certain of this, that it is marvelous to know somebody in the Heavenly Government, to have someone there that represents you. And you do. If you are in Jesus Christ, you have Someone there that represents you. You have a Great High Priest, Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Notice this, in the 14th verse, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is who He was, the eternal Son, without beginning. He said, I am the Alpha. Before anything was, I am. He did not ever begin to be Son. There never came a time when the Father began to beget the Son. He is the everlasting Son. He has existed, glorious in all that He is, without ever beginning. This is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest.

But, you see, the Eternal Son was manifest as Jesus. Jehovah became a Saviour, for God became flesh in the fullness of time. God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made unto the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law. And this One who came was none other than God, very God of very God, who said to those who accused Him, He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. I and the Father are one.

Now, He was given a nature like ours, a body like ours, and personality similar to ours. Our Lord Jesus became very man. Oh I am so glad for that Nicene Testimony there in the Council of Nicea. For there were those you know that challenged the Son of God and said He was not a man at all. He was just a theophany -- just appeared as a man. He was not actually flesh. This was a horrible thing, a heresy that threatened to destroy the Church at that time. Now within the last seventy years or one hundred years we have had another heresy: He was not God - just a man. And the attacks on the Son of God, one on His humanity, one on His deity, and both were answered perfectly in that announcement from the Council at Nicea, He is very Man of very Man, and very God of very God. That means that He had a nature like yours, a body like yours, a personality similar to yours, that in all things He might be like unto His brethren. He was tempted. This is the issue. He was tested in all points like as we are, in body suffering, He was hungry -- 40 days, 40 nights without food. Every cell in His body cried out for nourishment, and Satan's temptation to Him was, You are the Son of God. You have the power to change those stones into bread. Why should you suffer. And the answer was, He suffered in the will of God. And the will of God was more important to Him than the nourishment of His flesh. But every cell in His body screamed out in the agony that it could experience, wanting nourishment. For it was better that He should obey the will of God, than that He should satisfy the needs of the flesh.

In thirst. They say there is no pain quite so excruciating, no experience that is quite so tormenting as thirst. I have only known what it was for a matter of four or five hours, when in Africa, canteen empty and no water at all along the road that I had to go, and no one to give any, and no cars passing with any, I had to push a bicycle for about seven miles one afternoon through the hot sun. And my canteen, with the cork out, and dry and dust in it, all I could think about was water. My eyes closed, and I could see great tumblers of water with ice clinking, and frost on the outside. I was just tormented by this thought of water, and need for it. My mouth -- my tongue began to swell and stuck to the roof of my mouth. It was a horrible thing, and this was a matter of three hours. What if it were three days? What if it were thirty days? What if it were as in the case of our Lord that He might go beyond any human could stand, any man alone could, stand, so that He should know it in measure that you could not know it. In weariness. Our Lord labored, Our Lord walked. And I think that perhaps in pain. There was none that could suffer as did He, because He was suffering, not for His Own sins, but for ours. And there was the double grief of the pain inflicted upon Him by wicked men, and the pain inflicted upon Him by wicked sinners. Your weight added to the mutilation that men poured upon Him. But not only in bodily sufferings -- in loneliness. Perhaps one of the most pathetic statements in the New Testament is that one where you see the Lord Jesus at Midnight, having been with His disciples through the evening in fellowship, opening the Word to them, and it says, And they went to their house, and He abode in the mountain -- in the Garden, for no man had bid Him. And as they left, talking to each other, Was not this a wonderful fellowship? Oh, weren't these lovely truths? And arm in arm they went down the path in the flickering torch, and the Lord remained all alone, to go off and find a rock on which to lay His head, and to wrap Himself in the robe that covered Him, because no man bid Him come to his home. He knew loneliness as no other could ever know. No place to lay His head, -because the foxes have holes, and the bird's nests, but the Son of Man has not a place to lay His head. (Matt 8:20)

In persecution from men. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered as none other could. He was pursued by a bitter, relentless, animosity that would not, wait until He died, and did everything then to say that He had not risen from the dead. They called Him every name that the vile minds of men could imagine: A wine bibber. A glutton. Possessed by an evil spirit. A deceiver. There was not anything too loathsome or vile to level at the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then there were the attacks from Satan. We see Him there in the Wilderness when Satan comes at Him, vulnerable now because the flesh is weakened. And our Lord has to resist that three-fold temptation. And then in Gethsemene, and then at the Cross when the darkness that surrounds Him undoubtedly is the movement of the government from the regions of chains there to the scene of the Cross, to surround the Son of God.

And finally, that of the most awful of sufferings, when our Lord Jesus had to know those hours of estrangement from His Father, and cried out, "My God, Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34) I submit to you that there is no experience that can ever come to you, no temptation that can ever press upon you, no allurements that can ever cease upon your imagination, but what your great High Priest is there knowing full its power, its draw, its weight, and its sting.

He was by this means of identifying Himself with us prepared to sympathize with us. Now we can understand the full force of temptation. You say, No one has ever been tempted like I am. Brother Reidhead, if you just knew. If you just knew what I am going through. If you just knew the darts of the enemy that have been thrown at me this past week. If you just knew...I suppose I do not know. Perhaps I do, more than you think. But I know One who does. I know One who understands more than you have ever allowed that He could, that He has been tempted in all points like as you are. And there is no pressure that has come to you, but what He has felt it. It has to fall first on Him before it can fall on you.

And then, our Lord Jesus can say perfectly, what He said prophetically there in Exodus 3:7, "I know their sorrows." He said this of Israel in captivity. But He can say it now of His people, as there He holds your name written on His nail, pierced hands to the Father, and He says, I know their sorrows. I know their grief. I know their agony. I know their battle. I have been through it, Father. Is it not marvelous to have a Great High Priest that can sympathize with you. Why it has come to the place now that He so acutely feels everything that happens to every member of His Body, that He says, Whoso persecuteth them, persecuteth Me. And. My dear heart, you can not touch a member of the Body of Christ without touching Christ. Did you know that? You can not slander a member of the Body of Christ without slandering Christ. Remember that. Whoso persecuteth them, persecuteth Me. He has identified Himself with His people. And the persecutions that are being leveled against His Church, for instance in China, are not being leveled against individuals. They are being leveled against the Son of God, and He so counts it as against Him. It does not make any difference what the source of the troubles may be. Perhaps your difficulties have come from men. Men have turned their backs on you and despised you, and reviled you and persecuted you. He knows about it. He had men do that. Or devils may have sent demons of the pit to assail you and assault you and destroy you. He knows all about that. Perhaps it is from your body... weariness and sickness. He knows what it is to be physically in pain and suffering. Or, from your mind. The great distresses that come from the imagination of the human spirit.

Or perhaps, even from His Own Hand in chastisement. For the Father chastens whom He loves, and scourges His own children. Perhaps this is the source. But He sympathizes even then. Nothing can touch the child of God, but what it has to go through the nail pierced Hand of the Son of God to reach him.

Now, notice the preeminence of this wonderful High Priest. All priests were ordained of God to offer sins. The Priest was taken from the people. Aaron was taken from Israel. He was a man who had been tempted, tested, tried, passed through all the experiences of his fellows, when someone came and said to him, I was overtaken in awful temptation. Aaron understood it. I was led aside by my lust. Aaron understood it. Aaron was a man also. And this was the purpose of choosing a Priest from among men. Because by this means, he had the compassion to become encompassed with the peoples' infirmities. The difficulty with Aaron, however, was he had to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people, for he was a sinner with them. Oh can it ever be realized that there is only One without sin, and that is Jesus Christ; that the one who stands before you and teaches the Word or any other ministry is in just as great need of the cleansing of the precious Blood. Paul it was, the chief of the Apostles, who said, I am the chief of sinners, for he himself had come, having had the Blood of the Body of Christ upon his hands as he had slain those who were members of Christ. No. Aaron, as all who have served in any other way, have needed the cleansing of the precious Blood.

But Christ, in every way, is preeminent. He is the perfect High Priest. First, He was called. He did not take this honour to Himself. No man takes this to himself. He was called. The Father said, "Thou art My Son. Today I have begotten Thee." In another place He said, "Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." But Aaron was a priest for a few years, and he was succeeded by another. But our Lord Jesus had an eternal Priesthood. Not after the order of Aaron. Aaron was simply a priest. Christ was a Priest in a preeminent way. He was a King and Priest after Melchizedek, for Melchizedek was the king of Salem, the King of Peace, the Prince of Peace, as well as the Priest of the Most High God. And so our Lord Jesus Christ reigns as King of kings, and Lord of Lords, and our Great High Priest, preeminent in every way.

He was declared to be our High Priest, and ready to be it, adequate for it by the sufferings that He experienced, all these things through which He passed. He learned obedience by the things that He suffered, by the prayer that He poured forth. He did as all should do in suffering. Our Lord gave us an example. When you are tested you ought to do what He did. Aaron was put under pressure. Jesus Christ was put under pressure by temptation. When you are, you ought to do what He did, for our Lord prayed. And this has become the example for all who follow Him. You, too, are to pray. Our Lord had submitted to the experiences,

saying, Father, not My will, but Thine be done. He learned obedience; perfect obedience was rendered to the Father by this One, our great High Priest. And thus, He became the Author of eternal salvation. He became the Author not of a temporary forgiveness as Aaron offered, but eternal salvation.

But to whom was this eternal salvation given. And what is the evidence that you are one for whom His Priesthood is exercised. The Scripture is clear. He has become the Author of eternal salvation unto as many as obey Him. What is the evidence that you are in Jesus Christ? That first, you have a hatred for sin, and a hunger for God, a heart of compassion for the lost; a hatred for sin is going to lead you to the place where your desire is to obey Him, not simply to say you obey Him. Not simply to pass in certain superficial ways as a Christian, but with a genuine desire to please Jesus Christ in everything.

How many there are that presumptuously say, well I have a great High Priest, who is interceding for me. I have an advocate with the Father. And so, I can sin, and confess it, and be forgiven. I challenge you, and urge you, and exhort you - to read through the Old Testament and see if you can find any place that there was offering provided, or forgiveness offered for presumptuous sin. There is none. That is the one sin for which there, was no provision. Presumptuous sin. Where one presumed on the Grace of God to go and do something saying, "If I do it I can still come back and be forgiven." No. There is for the one who stumbles, for the one that is overtaken in a fault, for the one who is led aside, for the one who is caught in the vortex and driven by the wind. For that one there is. But for the one who calculatingly says, "Well I can go ahead and do this. It is all right. Then I can confess it and be forgiven because I have a High Priest." This is presumptuous sin. There we have the Scripture now. He has become the Author of eternal salvation to as many as obey Him. The tribal marks for those whom the Son of God intercedes is that those are the ones, having a new heart, the law written on the heart, a desire, a purpose to obey Him. It is in the purpose to obey Him, and the failure, because of the flesh and because of the failure to appropriate Grace, that His priesthood is exercised. But where there is that presumptuous thing, that setting of the teeth, clenching of the jaw, and saying, I am going to do this, and then come back and ask Him to forgive me, this is not covered by any provision that Grace offers. But it is when there is a heart to obey God, and then the failure. But the desire of the heart is to please Him. He has become the Author of eternal salvation unto as many as obey Him. This is the preeminence of His Priesthood.

Now, I would have you see the progress that is to be expected by people who have the ministry of such a great High Priest: God's provision was to procure for Himself a mature people, perfect. In the 1st verse of the 6th Chapter of Hebrews you read, "Let us therefore go on unto perfection." This word perfection is the word maturity, fully developed, fully mature, come to growth, and come to maturity. And this is what He is expecting. This is what has been provided in the sacrifice of Christ. This is the result of the ministry of the great High Priest. But what does the Writer of Hebrews find? This is what He finds, that there are a people that ought to understand the truth that He now wishes to establish concerning the Melchizedek Priesthood, for He has made us to be kings and priests also. But instead of being able to comprehend it, He says, You are dull of hearing. You are ignorant. They are ignorant in Divine things.

Now this ignorance demonstrates something. First, it could demonstrate a lack of life...a name to live, but of being dead. For you remember we said, the three evidences that you are born of God are hatred for sin, and a hunger for God. And if you have been born of God you want to know about God. You have a desire for God, a longing to be like Him. And if this people here had been such that they had no desire for God, no appetite for the things of God, it would indicate a lack of life. But we are not thinking that it is to this point. We are thinking that there is something else here in this people, that there is a willful remiss or neglect that has brought guilt, mind you, that has brought guilt.

Someone might say, "Well of course. You know our Pastor just does not make the truth so that I can understand it. I don't see it." Now you couldn't explain. You could not assume that. That would not be necessarily here, but somewhere in this present day, with all the immature Christians. You could say, "Well it is the teachers we have had. It is the teaching we have had. This is where the problem lies." But in Hebrews are people that are taught by the Apostles. (That would not hold water there.) Who would be a more effective teacher than the Apostles. Who would be better able to expound the truth than the Apostles? If this is Paul writing it, who is better able to unfold it. If it is Peter, who is better able to explain it? You can not say in Hebrews that it is because of lack of proper teaching. They had the Apostles themselves as teachers, and yet it was, "Seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again." (Hebrews 5:11-12)

There is a willfulness there. A dullness of hearing indicates a preoccupation with lesser things. You remember how as a student in school you would be paying attention to the wrong things and the teacher would ask a question and announce your name. And you would be so preoccupied, dull of hearing. Why? Because you had ear trouble? No. Because you had eye trouble. You were looking at the wrong thing. You were thinking about the wrong thing. Your eyes were focused, and your attention was focused on the wrong thing. And because of preoccupation with something other than Jesus Christ, something less than His purpose, less than His plan, less than what He wanted to do. You were a people that He said were dull of hearing, indifferent to heavenly things because you were preoccupied with earthly things.

You know it was Ezekiel who said -- made a statement that was very appropriate in this connection, and pathetic. "And lo thou art among them," said God to Ezekiel, "a very lovely song, a one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not." (Ezek. 33:32) This is what the Apostles found with the Church of the Hebrews, that they had heard the song, but they did not understand the words. They liked the music, but they did not follow the message.

Now here are some questions to ask yourself. You have agreed with me when I have spoken to you concerning the preparation of Christ to be our High Priest. I think there has been no challenge when I have talked to you about the preeminence of Christ as our High Priest. But when I talk to you about the progress that is to be expected (of someone who has this,) where are you? Where are you in relationship to it? Let me ask you something. When you hear the Word of God, whether it is on a billboard in the subway or on the radio, or in your own devotions or from the pulpit, do you examine your heart by it? Do you test your own experience by God's Word? Do you? Are you continually applying it to your heart? You ought to be, you know. When you hear truth that is set forth as God's truth, do you pray over it? Do you hold this truth before the Lord and bathe it with prayer? Do you talk about it? When you get home? Do you talk about it? Do you converse about it? They spake oft one with another about the Lord. What do you talk about when you get with your friends? Is Christ the center, The Theme? Do you meditate on God's truth? Do you know where you are? Do you know what God wants to do for you next? Do you strive to make the truth experientially yours? Or are you one of these that ought to be teachers, but instead of being teachers, you need to be taught again. Instead of eating strong meat, you eat milk. What are you? Here is a great High Priest, that has provided a full, complete, perfect salvation, and He is there to mediate it. Anything you come to Him, and present to Him, and ask of Him, He is the High Priest of your Confession. He will affect it in your life. With such great and precious promises, what manner of men ought we to be? Are we? Or could it be that somehow we have become preoccupied with the things of time and sense. I hope not. Oh, I trust there are better things of you other than that-that you would give yourself wholly to the Word in order that the Spirit of God and the High Priest, your Lord Jesus, can affect in you all that He died to make yours.

Let us bow in prayer. Our Heavenly Father, we have a Great High Priest, touched with the feelings of our weakness, tempted, tried in every way as are we. There with our names written, those of us that love Him, that have repented of our sins and have received Him as Lord and Saviour, with our names engraven upon His Hands, interceding for us, sympathizing with us, understanding all of our difficulties and problems, with a full, complete, perfect provision to make us in His image and likeness. Bring us to that place that He died that it might be ours, filled with His fullness. Oh Father, what manner of men are we? Have we become dull of hearing? Have we become preoccupied with the tinsel and the toys? Have we become led aside by the little things of no consequence? Search out our hearts. When we ought to be teachers, are we still having to be - take the milk? Meat belongs to those who by reason of age are strong. Oh, God of Grace, that such might be true of each of us here today. Stir our hearts. Let Thy Word burn deeply and do its lovely work, until we too profit from the ministry of our Great High Priest, and come to Him the High Priest of our Confession, confessing to Him Thy Word, the provisions of Thy love, to have Him effect in us and do for us all that He died to do. So apply it quickly to us, Lord. Let not the fowls of the air snatch it away, but make it profitable to the Glory of Jesus Christ in the life of each of us. Should there be one here without Him, might this be the hour when the heart is opened to receive so gracious a High Priest as our Lord Jesus Christ. In His worthy, peerless, matchless Name, the Name before which Angels fall, we come today to worship Him, the Living God. Amen.

* Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, December 4, 1960.