

Jesus is a Better Priestly Encourager

(Hebrews 4:14-5:10)

It used to be the longest you're supposed to run – 42km – that's the distance, according to Greek tradition, that the messenger ran from the battle at Marathon to Athens, bringing news that they'd defeated the Persians (in 490 BC).

Away with tradition; we're the generation of *extreme sports!*

I'd like you to imagine – in my case it *really* would be to 'imagine' – that you and I are ULTRA-marathon runners.

Not just running far *longer*, but in much *harder* conditions (squishy sand in dry desert!) Like the Marathon des Sables through Morocco's Sahara Desert, 248 km!

But what really caught my attention is the Gobi Desert ultra-marathon in China at 400km! Gruelling, painful, exhausting, for some – lethal.

. . . Like the *Christian race* today, for some.

In that gruelling Ultra Gobi race, imagine what a difference it would make being "fresh" at the very start, running just behind the reigning Gobi ultra-marathon **CHAMPION**.

You watch his technique and follow his example. Maybe before you're short of breath you ask him for some tips, and he's happy to share them.

Serious fatigue kicks in, and you start falling behind, struggling on but badly dehydrated . . . and then imagine the champion looking back at you lagging, weaving & flailing – in an act of ***enormous sympathy*** – decides to STOP mid-race and come back to help you, to give you his water and to set a pace that keeps you right behind him for the rest of the race, because, he says, "I KNOW the pain, I UNDERSTAND your anguish."

Wouldn't that *motivate* you! Wouldn't you *deeply desire* to keep the pace with the Champ!

If you watched 60-minutes last week, you'd have seen that's exactly what ultra-marathon champion Dion Leonard did . . . for a *dog* that was following him!

Even though the Bible does call us "dogs", that's not the point!

The point is the *sympathetic compassion* Dion showed this little desert dog he'd later name Gobi: giving him his water. So Gobi ran the race to the end right beside Dion – who adopted Gobi, & brought him to a place of 'rest' at Dion's home in the UK.

That's a picture of what Jesus does for us – and MUCH MORE! – as our ***sympathetic*** Great High Priest.

Enduring through the *OT* wilderness is what the author of Hebrews has been discussing the last 2 chapters. His point: the *Christian* journey can be a brutal *spiritual* wilderness, as we press on in a fallen, sinful world towards the complete rest of a new Heaven & Earth Jesus, because He took on human flesh, has run our race through our wilderness!

He knows human weakness & suffering & has been tempted like us . . . So, He can ***genuinely sympathise*** with us, and He encourages us to ***confidently approach***

Him for grace & mercy in times of need – so that we can be victorious against sin and endure the Christian race to the end . . . like Him!

This should give us great motivation to endure, keep pace with our Champ! Finish the race!

The MAIN IDEA of today's passage is this:

*We endure in the Faith by confidence in a Better Mediator who **fully sympathises** with us!*

Our Title: **Jesus is a Better Priestly Encourager**

In our Protestant circles, the word "priest" itself needs some explaining.

And we are also in a new "section" in the letters to the Hebrews.

So let me explain my title & main idea, and frame the next few chapters/coming weeks

Chapters 1 & 2 were about Jesus being a Better *Messenger* than angels, and a Better *Deliverer* than angels. As God's Son, Jesus delivers us from sin & death itself, so he brings a better message of eternal hope.

Chapters 3 & 4 were about Jesus bringing a Better *Rest* than Moses & Joshua could. Their rest was partial & temporary, not complete & eternal, like Jesus' rest.

The new section is from 4:14 to 7:28, and it's all about Jesus having a Better *Priesthood* – better than Aaron's priestly line, because Jesus' priesthood is in the order of Melchizedek, a rather mysterious figure from the OT.

See the larger structure, 5:6, 10:

Jesus was appointed as high priest by God who said to Him . . . :

"You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." [Psa 110:4]

. . . He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Then again, in chapter 7 verse 1, he picks up the theme right where he left off,
For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham ...

Left off? That's right. Because right in the middle of discussing all this, in chapter 6 the author 'interrupts' himself with the mother of all warnings: *don't fall away!*

The 1st half of his Melchizedek argument emphasises:

Jesus is a Better Priestly *Encourager* (4:14 – 5:10), *sympathising* with our trials.

The 2nd half emphasises will be

Jesus is a Better Priestly *Advocate* (7:1-28), *interceding* for us at God's right hand!

We endure in the Faith by confidence in a Better Advocate who fully Defends us!

That's how his breakdown goes and where we are headed.

This morning, in 4:4 – 5:10, we focus on the first emphasis

Jesus is a Better Priestly *Encourager* (4:14 – 5:10), *sympathising* with our trials.

Outline:

- Our Confidence: our *Great High Priest!* (4:14–16)
- His Qualifications: Prototype vs Perfect High Priest (5:1–10)

Since Chapter 4 has the *encouragement & the appeals to action* and Chapter 5 is the reasoning & credentials grounding those appeals,

We're going to start in chapter 5, then finish off with 4:14-16! . . .

HIS QUALIFICATIONS: 'PROTOTYPE' VS PERFECT HIGH PRIEST (5:1-10)

Let's consider . . .

A] The 'Prototype' High Priest (5:1-4)

B] Our Perfect High Priest (5:5-10)

A] The 'Prototype' High Priest (5:1-4)

For those not familiar with the Old Testament, the image conjured up by the designation "priest" needs explaining.

For the younger generation here, a **biblical** high priest is not a gun toting character in a PlayStation 4 game!

Nor is a **biblical** priest some mythical figure with staff in hand, adorned with an aura of mystic light – a priestly monk who suddenly busts a Kung Fu move to save the day, whether human or cartoon (no thanks, Oogway).

We might be a bit uncomfortable with this word that keeps repeating itself . . . "priest". You might be thinking

'Smells & bells! We're not Catholic! We're Protestant!

*We uphold the priesthood of ALL believers, and so we have "**pastors**" not "priests"!*

Right you are about the priesthood of all believers & having pastors/spiritual shepherds

Yet, we really do **need one** HIGH Priest – **but not** a pagan one or a Catholic one!

In the bible, a priest is a **MEDIATOR**, who represents the people before God.

A mediator, to deal with our sin and broker peace with holy God. Hebrews 5:1,

"For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to ACT ON BEHALF OF MEN in relation to God, to offer gifts and SACRIFICES for SINS."

(Here's a picture of a priest "*stretching out the neck*" of the sacrificial lamb, the meaning behind the word "exposed" we saw in 4:13 last week)

Now a HIGH priest was very special . . . as there is only one of them at a time.

Under the old covenant the **only** person allowed into God's special presence was the high priest, who entered the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement, to sprinkle sacrificial blood onto the mercy seat, the lid of the ark of the covenant.

This was a ceremonial law that brought forgiveness for the Nation's sin's, if the regulations were adhered to.

More of this will be addressed in chapters 8-10 of Hebrews, which we will consider then.

The main points in 5:1-4 are this . . .

1] the gist of what a High Priest DOES – a *mediator* brokering peace with God by representing the people with an accompanying sacrifice for sin.

While **KINGS & PROPHETS** represented *God to the people* (Laws, ethics, statutes)
PRIESTS represented the *people to God* (presenting us cleansed, forgiven).

Kings & Prophets at times brought the hammer of God's word, for *repentance*.
While Priests brought the altar to God's people, for *reconciliation*.

2nd, OT priests are *flawed* mediators, meant to have . . .

2] Compassionate solidarity with the people due to the priest's shared weakness & sin:

5:1 – every high priest chosen from among men. Solidarity with man.

5:2 – He can deal **GENTLY** with the ignorant & wayward, since he himself is beset w/weakness.

"Weakness" can mean either physical ailment, or spiritual weakness (sinfulness).

Here it means sinfulness/spiritual weakness, as verse 3 makes clear

Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.

And as a sinner, the high priest being required to offer a sacrifice for himself,
This encouraged compassion, gentleness as the text says.

Finally, a High Priest was

3] Appointed by God (v.4)

And no one takes this honour for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first high priest and representative of the people, chosen "from among men."

But who chose him? Did the people through some kind of *democratic* process choose him?
No. *Nor* was the Priesthood a volunteer position. Only God appointed high priests.

The process was no different with Jesus, which is precisely the author's transition point:

B] Our Perfect High Priest (5:5-10)

So also Christ did not exalt Himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by God who said to him,

"You are my Son, today I have begotten you" [citing Psa 2:7]

as he says also in another place,

"You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

Jewish Christians knew OT law required priests to come from the line of Aaron [*Levi's* tribe].
They needed assurance Jesus [*tribe of Judah*] had a 'legit' priesthood, established by God!

It's so important to the author, he structures the verses as a chiasm [the *middle* is the key]:

- A The old office of high priest (v. 1)
- B The sacrifice offered by the high priest (v. 1)
- C The weakness of the high priest (vv. 2-3)
- D The appointment of the high priest (v. 4)
- D' The appointment of Christ, the new priest (vv. 5-6)
- C' The suffering of the new priest (vv. 7-8)
- B' The sacrificial provision of the new priest (v. 9)
- A' The new office of high priest (v. 10)

Verses 7-10 describe the Path to Jesus' Better Priesthood

⁷ *In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers & supplications, with loud cries & tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence.*

⁸ *Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered.*

⁹ *And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,*

¹⁰ *being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.*

Some big questions here! Let's provide some simple answers . . .

Verse 7

Where did Jesus cry loudly with tears to be "saved from death"?

At His prayer in Gethsemane, to be saved from death, "if possible", He said.

Yet, Jesus finished that prayer – "*not My will, but Yours be done.*"

This is the demonstration of Jesus "**reverence**" that verse 7 speaks of.

Rather than giving into a natural desire to escape death, in the Garden Jesus submitted Himself to the Father's will – arrest & crucifixion . . . dying as a sacrifice to save the world, any & all who would repent & trust in Jesus.

And because of this reverence, Jesus prayer "was heard" (Heb 7:10)

"Wait a minute – "*Heard?* '*Spared from death?* *But He died!*", you might say.

Indeed. But He also was **resurrected!** Forever "spared from death" in the end!

Chapter 7 makes this very point: as Great High Priest, Jesus

*"is able also to save completely/to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He **ALWAYS LIVES** to intercede for us . . . at the right hand of the Throne of the Majesty in Heaven!" (7:25; 8:1)*

[Drawing near + Intercession + Throne (we'll see the 'connection' in 4:14-16)]

Verses 8-9

Pretend you're a Sunday School teacher & a student asks you, "*Hebrews 5:8-9 says that Jesus 'learned obedience' and 'became perfect.'* Does that mean that Jesus was disobedient was flawed/imperfect before that?"

How would you answer?! Again, the key is the Son *submitting* to the Father's will.

In this context to "learn obedience" means to discover in personal experience what

OBEDIENCE really means in the face of SUFFERING.

*Only by coming to share our human condition could the Son of God know this experience.*¹

And in verse 9, the verb "made perfect" means to finish/complete:

In fact, the same word is in a verse I just quoted from chapter 7,

"Jesus is able to save completely/to the uttermost" (7:25)

It's also in Romans 10:4,

*"Christ is the **END/FULFILMENT** of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."*

So "made perfect" does **NOT** here convey the idea of overcoming a moral imperfection.

(4:15 already clearly established that Jesus is "**without sin**"!)

¹ George Guthrie, *Hebrews* (NIVAC series).

Hebrews 5:9 is saying that by *not shrinking back from suffering, by making it all the way to the "end"* of His temptation [crucifixion], Jesus was made "complete" in the sense of being able to fulfil his role as our great high priest, bringing peace with God.

Professor Don Carson asks this excellent question²:

*Who is tempted **more**? The person who is tempted and resists, tempted and resists, tempted and then gives in?*

Or the person who is tempted and resists, and tempted and resists, and tempted and resists, and resists and resists and resists, and never gives in?

I'd say the 1 who never stops resisting is tempted more, tempted longer, tempted deeper. No giving in, *no going numb* – enduring temptation in *full* measure, like He endured the cross

Verse 10

"a high priest, after the order of Melchizedek." [Psa 110:4]

Remember - **KINGS & PROPHETS** represented *God to the people*
PRIESTS represented the *people to God*

But in Abraham's day (Gen 14), this OT character named Melchizedek was a Priest-King.
"For this Melchizedek, KING of Salem, PRIEST of the Most High God, met Abraham..."
 Heb (7:1)

In chapter 7, we will return to consider more about Melchizedek.
 The only matter pointed out in chapter 5 is that Jesus, being in the line of Melchizedek is BOTH King & Great High Priest.

Heb 5:5 quotes Psalm 2 – speaking of the Great King coming in the lineage of David.
 Heb 5:6 quotes Psalm 110 speaking of the Great High Priest in the lineage of Melchizy!

Jesus both represented God to the people as King, enforcing justice & repentance
 And represent the people to God as Priest, effecting mercy & reconciliation

And He did this at the **CROSS**: where Infinite Justice & Infinite Mercy meet.

Sin's price is paid – the law is satisfied!

and

The sinner is cleansed, forgiven – mercy is complete!

As William Cowper put it into lyrics,

***To see the Law by Christ FULFILLED, to hear His PARDONING voice,
 Transforms a slave into a child, and duty into choice!***

Jesus is more than just an *Exemplary Priest*, He's an **Effective** priest, who can actually pay our sin, BECAUSE he endured suffering to the end – **without sin**.

This brings us back to Chapter 4, verses 14-16, which have the APPLICATION for us.

OUR CONFIDENCE: OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST! (4:14-16)

² "The Book of Hebrews" (Part 3 or 4), Lecture from Trinity International University, 2013. Quotation slightly paraphrased.

High priests are common in Scripture, but only one great high priest exists — Jesus, the Son of God.

¹⁴ *Since then we have a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession*

¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tempted, as we are — YET without sin.*

¹⁶ *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

2 Appeals are made in these verses:

Plea #1 (v.14): Let us HOLD FAST/FIRMLY TO our confession

Plea #2 (v.16): Let us WITH CONFIDENCE DRAW NEAR to the throne of grace

Plea #1 is straight-forward:

Sometimes "confession" means someone *admitting wrong/sin*.

But here the word "confession" clearly mean an 'affirmation of truth.'

. . . Like the London Baptist or the Westminster Confession of Faith

A public profession of faith may be more what the author has in mind, maybe one was baptised and testified before a congregation to indicate one's commitment to Christ.

To hold fast one's profession means to **live out** one's beliefs and not back down.

This was modelled by the reformer Martin Luther. When the Catholic Church threatened the kill Luther if he did not recant/renounce his beliefs & teachings, he replied:

"I cannot and will not recant anything; my conscience is captive to the word of God. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God."

Plea #2 – v. 16, Drawing near with Confidence – is **grounded** in verse 15:

¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tempted, as we are — YET without sin.*

Double negative makes a positive:

we do not have one unable = He is ABLE to sympathise with our weakness.

While Jesus – in *sympathising* – is like the 'prototype' priest of the OT.

He is different to the OT high priest, who sinned & had to sacrifice for Himself.

Jesus never sinned & therefore did not sacrifice FOR Himself, but sacrificed HIMSELF – for us.

Jesus could not sympathise with us & accomplish our forgiveness by His sacrifice if he did not also identify with us in our temptations and remain without sin.

The point of Hebrews 4:15 could not be more relevant.

Jesus can sympathize with our temptation to turn & run in the face of persecution.

He felt the *same* urge — but *declined* it. So Jesus can help us face the challenge!

Just as the author of Hebrews has a tough side, speaking 'tough love' in strident warnings

He also has a tender side, a side encouraging people to *draw near to God, for grace & mercy in time of need.*

The author is very much like Jesus in this way.

There were times when Jesus showed tough love, speaking truth needed in the moment. Other times Jesus weep, because that's what was needed.

*When Jesus drew near and saw Jerusalem, He **wept** over it,
"If only you had known on this day the things that make for peace!"*

British pastor Dick Lucas calls this 'pairing' of tough & tender ministry:

The Ministry of **Truth** and the Ministry of **Tears**

Sometimes on the same occasion, Jesus *alternated* between tears & truth . . .

When Lazarus died, both Martha & Mary said the exact same thing, word-for-word:

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (v. 21 + 32)

To Martha, Jesus spoke **Truth**: *Don't you believe? I am the Resurrection & the Life!*

To Mary, Jesus 'spoke' with **Tears**: *"Jesus wept"*³

Sometimes – like Mary, or Job – we need only someone to sit down & weep with us. Other times, the last thing we need it pity – we need a spiritual kick on the back side.

But in our lives we need BOTH ministries – Truth & Tears – intertwined.

- The ministry of Truth without Tears is too brutal & cold – we won't listen.
- The ministry of Tears without Truth is too sentimental – we won't benefit.

But when a truth-teller sheds tears . . . that's what gives the tears their power.

We need a Great High Priest, who encourages us *comprehensively*, with Truth & Tears.

Why can Jesus be that encourager?

Pastor Tim Keller shares about a medical doctor he saw, who happened to be a member at his church. The doctor had a terrible 'bedside manner.'

A few years later, Keller went back to the doctor whose manner was totally different.

When Keller mentioned this to the Doctor, the Doc's reply was:

Two years I had a kidney stone myself. Now I was the one sitting up on the table.

It was agonising. I realised had no idea what my patients were going through.

*So I decided that day I would never treat my patients the same way again now that I've been on the table.*⁴

Hear this:

Christianity is the only religion in the world where God Himself gets up on the table for us! He takes on flesh so he can take on our afflictions!

To think that Jesus *cannot sympathise* with us in numerous ways – because in His day there was no internet addiction or road rage or weapons of mass destruction – is to miss the point entirely.

³ See John 11:25-26, 35

⁴ from Keller's sermon "Wonderful Counsellor"

What is common to man, what Jesus has completely solidarity with us *as man*, is the opportunity/temptation to “fuel” the . . .

- lust in the heart that leads to addiction
- Pride in the soul that leads to road rage
- hatred that leads to war, anxiety about the future

The word “sympathize” does not necessitate sharing another’s exact experience. As in Hebrews 10:34, the hearers are said to have *sympathised* with prisoners, though not being prisoners themselves.

Matt 26:38-39 and Luke 22:42-44 are clear: Jesus *genuinely desired* not to ‘drink the cup’. But for “desire” to *turn into* “sin”, James is clear that such desire must “conceive” (1:14-15), that is, *yield/give in* to the temptation/desire. Instead, Jesus “checked” His desire, *realigned* it, and *submitted* it to the Father’s will. In the end, the cross was why Jesus came, and He knew that (John 12:27).

The incarnation brings not only sympathy from Jesus, but also the ability to be ***tempted*** and yet ***without sin***. (in Jesus becoming God-man, adding on human nature ‘balances out’ the truth of God being untemptable [James 1:13], without removing the truth that God cannot sin).s

You know, Jesus’ suffering & sympathy ***EXCEED*** ours, because He gave up so much more! We are familiar with limited ways and suffer in limited ways.

Jesus gave the perfections of the heavenly realm, gave up *perfect fellowship* with Father & Spirit, emptied Himself of the glory He deserves, to come down & taste scandalous death, hanging on cross for us, *forsaken* by His Heavenly Father, taking on ALL our condemnation

We **cannot** fully sympathise with Him – for we’ve not given up that! But He **can** fully sympathise with us!

The Prophet Isaiah, looking ahead to the coming of Jesus, calls Him,

“a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief; despised and rejected by men” (Isa 53:3)

Jesus sighs at a *broken* world when He heals the deaf mute, He sighs deeply in His Spirit, and says to those trying to trap Him, “*why does this generation seek a sign.*” He weeps at the loss of friend to death, seeing death’s impact on family in a fallen world – Why? . . . Jesus allows Himself to be ***drained*** by us and to ***share sorrows*** with us.⁵

- Are you jobless, nearly broke? “*The Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head!*” (Lk 9:58)
- Have you been treated with deep injustice? So has He, beyond compare!
- Have you been ditched by friends in a time of great need? So has He – Gethsemane!
- Have you been betrayed? So has He . . . and by the kiss of a friend!
- He understands the hurt caused by your spouse, by your super-harsh parent, your spiteful brother or sister . . . or when your best friend sells you out for another friend . . . a boyfriend or girlfriend “trades you in” for a better model.

JESUS **KNOWS** our suffering!

⁵ Point made by Tim Keller, “Wonderful Counsellor”

VERSE 16 - PLEA #2

¹⁶ *Let us then with **CONFIDENCE** draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

The present tense form of "let us draw near", indicates a *constant* drawing near, an ongoing aspect of the Christian's relationship with God.

Under the old covenant only 1 person was allowed into God's presence 1 day/year. The high priest, who entered the Most Holy Place only on the Day of Atonement.

The nation may have been granted forgiveness, but they were still locked out from the special presence of God.

But under Jesus' high priesthood, we can come before the throne of God **EVERY DAY** as well as on the **LAST DAY** with confidence – because we know Christ has made peace for us with the Father.

Above all else, Jesus' high priesthood is about **open access** to God.

Rather than a priest who stands between God and humanity, Jesus **takes us to** God. He not only has passed through the heavens, seated at God's right hand, but He also has paved the way for us to join Him in that adventure.⁶

What does this 'drawing near to God's throne' look like? PRAYER.

- The word "confidence"/"boldness" is used in the NT as how we should prayer.
- 'Throne of Grace' is used in the early church to describe prayer.

What **sort** of prayer? – for "grace & mercy in Time of NEED"

This is not "O, please, please, please God – free tickets to the State of Origin!"

It's Jesus who opens the way and takes us to God's presence.

So really, it is praying LIKE Jesus did . . . doing the Father's will, which is glorious, though often NOT easy.

It most likely means not praying like we too often do:

"My will be done"; instead of "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven"

Here's a TOUGH QUESTION: Does *your* prayer life look like a non-Christian's prayer life?

- . . . Praying mostly for nice & decent things, but mostly self-centred "my will" requests?
Good job, attractive spouse, healthy child, education, food & clothing.

Go ahead and pray for these *good* things, Christians!

But we must also pray for MORE than these. *Bigger* things . . . *Better* things.

Jesus told His disciples (Matt 6:32),

Gentiles seek after all these things, and Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

*But **SEEK FIRST** the kingdom of God & His righteousness, & these things will be added to you.*

Just as a child must learn to die to selfishness in the process maturity, so we as spiritual children of God must learn – like Jesus – to submit our wills to the will of the Father as we grow in the faith. Richard Foster, in his book on Prayer, titles one chapter, "The Prayer of Relinquishment" (letting go). Foster writes:

⁶ George Guthrie, *Hebrews* (NIVAC series). See Hebrews 2:10; 6:20; 10:19–20

As we learn to pray we discover an interesting progression. In the beginning our will is in struggle with God's will. We beg. We pout. We demand. We expect God to perform like a magician or shower us with blessings like Father Christmas. We major in instant solutions and manipulative prayers.

As difficult as this time of struggle is . . . It is an essential part of our growing and deepening in things spiritual. To be sure, it is an inferior stage, but only in the sense that a child is at an inferior stage to that of an adult . . .

In time, however, we begin to enter into a grace-filled releasing of our will and a flowing into the will of the Father.⁷

We want to walk in the Garden of *Eden* never having entered the Garden of *Gethsemane*!

As we mature, we realise God is *worthy* and *trust-worthy* . . . so His will really is best!

Examining your prayer life, of course, would include consistency, frequency, and such. But this passage is more about liberty to run to God, and examining the content of your prayer life – grace & mercy in times of need to endure the race & fight the good fight.

John Piper shares this key insight about prayer

*"Life is war. That's not all it is. But it is always that. Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth. Prayer is primarily a WARTIME WALKIE-TALKIE for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. **It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den.**"⁸*

Q: What is something you might have recently avoided praying about, because you fear submitting that issue to God's will?! Whatever that is, it's probably *important* to give over to God. Maybe your internet use? a strained relationship? Conflict at work or school? Serving God in missions or in church or at the Church plant?

Richard Foster confesses,

O Lord . . . The truth of the matter is I hate the very idea of letting go. I really want to be in control . . . That's it, isn't it? I'm afraid to give up control, afraid of what might happen. Heal my fear, Lord.

How good of you to reveal my blind spots even in the midst of my stumbling attempts to pray. Thank you, Jesus, please, teach me your way of relinquishment.

Our "time of need" is often! So the door to God's throne of grace & mercy never closes! Grace immeasurable, inexhaustible.... like taking a bucket from the ocean.

Granted *not with reluctance*, but with loving sympathy, as Dion gave drink to little Gobi

Jesus really does change everything, as our Great High Priest.

And I just love testimonies when people "get this", and finally SEE Jesus rightly!... like Sarah Irving–Stonebraker, an Australian senior lecturer in history at W. Sydney Uni. Raised a "leftist, atheist, religious critic", here is the part of Sarah's testimony relevant to our passage of Jesus genuinely sympathising with us:

⁷ Foster, Prayer: *Finding the Heart's True Home* (NY: Harper Collins, 1992), 47.

⁸ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 41.

Christianity was also, to my surprise, **RADICAL** – far more radical than the leftist ideologies with which I had previously been enamored. The love of God was unlike anything which I expected, or of which I could make sense. In becoming fully human in Jesus, God behaved decidedly unlike a god. Why deign to walk through death's dark valley, or hold the weeping limbs of lepers, if you are God? Why submit to humiliation and death on a cross, in order to save those who hate you? God suffered punishment in our place because of a radical love. This sacrificial love is utterly opposed to the individualism, consumerism, exploitation, and objectification, of our culture.

Just as **RADICAL**, I realized, was the new creation which Christ began to initiate To live as a Christian is a call to be part of this new, radical, creation. I am not passively awaiting a place in the clouds. I am redeemed by Christ, so **now I have work to do**. With God's grace, I've been elected to serve – in **whatever** way God sees fit – to build for His Kingdom. We have a sure hope that God is transforming this broken, unjust world, into Christ's Kingdom, the New Creation.⁹

Amen! Let's together run with endurance God's race set before us, following Jesus our sympathetic Great High Priest who **ENCOURAGES** us the entire way!

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Great High Priest, in praise to You, I close with the words of a hymn that best sums up this wonderful passage from Your word:¹⁰

*Where high the heavenly temple stands –
That house of God not made with hands,
A Great High Priest our nature wears,
The patron of mankind appears!*

*He who for men their surety stood,
And poured on earth His precious blood . . .*

*Though now ascended up on high,
He bends on earth a brother's eye;
Partaker of the human name,
He knows the frailty of our frame.*

*Our fellow Sufferer yet retains
A fellow feeling of our pains;
And still remembers in the skies
His tears, and agonies, and cries.*

*In every pang that rends the heart,
The Man of Sorrows had a part!
He sympathizes with our grief,
And to the sufferer sends relief.*

*With boldness, therefore, at the throne,
Let us make all our sorrows known;
And ask the aid of heavenly power
To help us in the evil hour.*

Amen!

⁹ <http://www.veritas.org/oxford-atheism-to-jesus/>

¹⁰ "Where High the Heavenly Temple Stands" by Michael Bruce, 1764

Discussion Qs

Main idea:

*We endure in the Faith by confidence in a Better Mediator who **fully sympathises** with us!*

- 1] How did little Gobi *respond* to Dion Leonard's sympathetic sharing of precious water?
How are you *motivated* by those who genuinely sympathise with you in life?

His Qualifications: Prototype vs Perfect High Priest (5:1-10)

• The 'Prototype' High Priest (5:1-4)

- 2] What was the main purpose of Old Testament priests? (see 5:1)
(How was this different to the purpose of kings and prophets?)
- 3] Why were OT high priests to be *gentle/humble/sympathetic*? (see 5:2-3)
- 4] What was a *requirement* for the appointment of a high priest? (see 5:4 and Exodus 28:1)

• Our "Perfect" High Priest (5:5-10)

- 5] How does Melchizedek¹¹ relate to the point of the passage? (5:5-6, 10)
(Why does God establishing a new priestly line matter especially to struggling Jewish Christians?)
- 6] What similarities are there between the 'prototype' priest & Jesus "perfect" priesthood? (5:5-6)
- 7] What does it mean (and not mean) that Jesus "*learned obedience in suffering*"? (5:8)
What does it mean (and not mean) that Jesus "*was made perfect*"? (5:9)

Our Confidence: our Great High Priest! (4:14-16)

- 8] How does the above relate to Jesus' humanity and solidarity, *sympathising* with us?
- 9] How is Jesus' "weakness" different to the prototype high priest? (4:15)
- 10] How could Jesus BOTH be God (who *cannot sin*) AND still be genuinely "tempted"?
A] Does the Gethsemane account describe *genuine desire* not to 'drink the cup'?
[read Matt 26:38-39 and Luke 22:42-44]
B] What does James says is required for "desire" to *turn into* "sin"? (James 1:14-15)
C] So how does Jesus being God-man 'balance out' God not being tempted (James 1:13?)
- 11] Why can Jesus sympathise more with us, than us with Him?
- 12] How does Jesus' experience of temptation and sinlessness give us hope & motivate us?
- 13] How has Jesus' "ministry of Tears" impacted you and motivated you . . .
A] in the past?
B] about approaching Him now for grace & mercy in time of need?
- 14] What "better" access to God's throne of grace does Jesus' priesthood bring? (5:16)
a] How should this *new, continual* access impact your times of prayer, praise & worship?
B] How should Jesus *example* (of submission in suffering [5:7] & 'not My will but thine')
impact your prayer life "*in time of need*"?
How might it change **what** you tend to ask for?
(How does *your* prayer need to be different from a non-Christian's prayer life?)
How does Jesus victory impact the **confidence** with which you ask?

¹¹ Much more will be said about Melchizedek in chapter 7 – *who* he was, *what* he did. **Hold off** that discussion until then.