

The Great High Priest

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[0 : 0 0] Now, in case you weren't here last week, or the last couple of weeks, I should say, we're on week three of a seven-week study on some of the names or titles of Christ.

We're following an excellent little book titled, *The Name Above All Names*, written by Alistair Begg and Sinclair Ferguson. And as the blurb on the back cover says, *Name Above All Names* helps us to see and meditate on the incomparable character of Christ by examining seven key qualities of Jesus' identity and ministry, to focus our gaze upon the King of Kings, and to better understand just how great Jesus really is.

With that in mind, let's consider Jesus Christ, the great high priest. Go with me to the book of Hebrews, if you will.

Book of Hebrews. I'll begin reading Hebrews chapter 4, starting at verse 14. Hebrews 4.14 Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.

Let us hold fast our profession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

[1 : 3 4] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Now, before we talk about why the book of Hebrews frequently refers to Jesus as the great high priest, it would be helpful to talk just a little bit about the book of Hebrews itself.

Why was this letter written? What was its historical context? Now, we don't know who wrote Hebrews. We don't know to whom Hebrews was written.

I've read many and sometimes very compelling theories about the author and the audience, but we don't know. The author doesn't identify himself.

He doesn't identify the precise audience. The author does, however, make it evident that he is writing to people with a very intimate knowledge of the Old Testament.

[2 : 3 1] In other words, he is writing to Christians from a Jewish background, not a Gentile background. The author assumes his audience knows and even identifies with the history of Israel, and that becomes pretty clear as you read through the letter.

He speaks of Abraham, he speaks of Moses at Mount Sinai, the Torah, God's covenant with Israel, the priests, the sacrifices, and even Israel's wandering through the wilderness for those 40 years as they made their way to the Promised Land.

It's also worth noting that he is writing to Christians. He's writing to believers. He's writing to evidently former Jews who have left their old customs, they've left their old religious practices to follow Christ.

So he's writing to Jewish Christians. Furthermore, he's writing to Jewish Christians who are now suffering persecution.

And this is very relevant. Turn a few pages over to Hebrews 10. Hebrews 10, verse 32. He says, But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

[4 : 02] For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. The author is encouraging his readers because they've suffered since becoming Christians, since first following Christ.

And he says they initially considered it a joyful privilege to suffer in the name of Christ. They were more than willing to suffer for his sake, but something has changed since then.

He's reminding them of that zeal that they once had that apparently they lost somewhere along the way. They've grown discouraged. And more to the point of Hebrews, they're seriously thinking, it would seem, about abandoning the church to return to the old covenant way of worship.

Now, before we go any further, let's pause long enough just to think about what life was like for them. As non-Jewish Christians, living well removed from the book of Hebrews, living in the 21st century, we may be dumbfounded to think that anyone would ever consider turning away from Christ for that old sacrificial system of the Old Testament.

But for them, the old system was once normal. And it had been for many, many generations. Now, when we read through Exodus, all the way through Deuteronomy, we think, wow, so many rules to follow, so many commandments to obey, so many details to keep straight.

[5 : 46] We can barely make it through those books when we're reading through the Bible in a year. But when they read Exodus through Deuteronomy, they thought, this is how we have been faithful to God since the days of Moses.

Jesus told the people of Israel, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. As Hebrews 10 implies, the gospel was liberating to many first century Jews.

That's why Paul uses the language he does in Galatians 5.1. Christ has set us free. Therefore, stand firm and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery or a yoke of bondage.

Why would anyone want to go back? Well, we find the answer here in Hebrews 10, verses 32 and 33. You endured a hard struggle with suffering, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

See, pagans didn't care much for the Jews in the first century. They were offended by the exclusive nature of Judaism. Judaism taught that Yahweh is God.

[7 : 08] End of story. Full stop. Yahweh is God, and no one should have any other gods before him. That's pretty exclusive. Well, paganism allowed people to worship as many gods as they wanted.

They could mix and match their religions if they wanted to. So the pagans didn't like the exclusive nature of the Jews' religion, but for the most part, they tolerated it.

Christianity, however, was another story altogether. I've been reading a series of books called 2,000 Years of Christ's Power, which kind of takes you through the whole of church history.

And in the first volume, the author explains why the persecution against the church became so fierce in those first few centuries. Here's what he writes.

The Christians and the Jews insisted that they alone had the true faith and the only way of salvation. The Roman world could tolerate such a view in the Jews because Jews were simply following the traditional religion of their nation and ancestors and did not go around trying to make everyone else into Jews.

[8 : 18] The Christians had no such excuse. Their religion was new, unheard of, and burning with a passion to convert all pagans. So the church's exclusive, intolerant, missionary attitude to other religions marked Christians out and made them very unpopular.

To their pagan neighbors, the evangelistic devotion to Christ as the only Savior seemed highly arrogant and dangerously antisocial. So imagine you're a first century Jew.

The wider world doesn't really like you, but they tolerate you. You know, they let you be. You live in relative peace. You're free to serve and worship God without persecution, but then you hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You believe. And your world is turned upside down. Spiritually, it's the greatest thing that could ever happen to you. You are set free in Christ. Jesus has accomplished for you what you could never accomplish yourself through the law.

Physically, though, it feels like the worst thing that could ever happen to you. Suddenly, you're hated by both pagans and Jews. You are disfellowshipped, you're made an outcast, and in many cases, you are violently persecuted.

[9 : 42] In his parable of the sower, Jesus warned, as for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and then when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

This was the temptation of many Christians. Jewish Christians, in particular, were tempted to abandon Christ and return to Judaism, which is why the book of Hebrews was written.

This is why the author continually urges his readers to look to Christ over and over again. Look to Christ. Look to Christ.

Look to Christ. He's better than the angels. He's better than the Torah. All of these ways God once conveyed his word to us, he's better than it all.

Why? Because Christ is the word. He is the word. As we heard last week, he's better than Moses. He's better than the prophets.

[10 : 54] He's better than the old covenant priests who could never atone for sins. He's better than all of the sacrifices under the old covenant. Then we come to chapter 11, and we read about all of those people in the Old Testament who walked by faith.

They endured suffering all the way to the end. Then chapter 12 begins this way. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus.

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. You see how the author of Hebrews acknowledges the terrible difficulties which these Jewish Christians face?

He acknowledges it, but throughout the letter he shows them the alternative. What if? So here it is. Option one, you can persevere, as great as it may be, persevere through this suffering now, which is temporary, and receive one day eternal joys that are beyond our comprehension.

[12 : 27] That's option one. Option two, return to the old, albeit familiar way of life, and be lost forever because you'll never find salvation in it.

Look to Jesus, the author says. Fix your eyes on him. Endure to the end. Don't go back. Jesus is superior in every way.

Frankly, if salvation is what you want, Jesus is the only way. One of the major themes of Hebrews is that Jesus is our great high priest.

The significance of that title was not lost on Jewish Christians. They would have immediately understood the implications of that, but you and I, we didn't grow up under the old covenant. What does it mean for Jesus to be our great high priest?

How is he better than the countless priests in the Old Testament? Well, to answer these questions, let's also consider what the Old Testament has to say about the priesthood.

[13 : 38] Now, first of all, we should know that a formal priesthood wasn't necessary before sin entered into the world. I don't know whether that's an obvious point or not, but I'll make it. Sacrifices weren't necessary.

Atonement wasn't needed because there were no sins for which to atone. Right? Even so, God gives Adam that first man instructions for what we might consider a kind of proto-priesthood or at least a type of the priesthood to come.

You know, in Genesis 2, we read, the Lord God took the man, put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it. Now, if we were to jump ahead to the book of Numbers, we see similar instructions given to the formal priesthood.

Numbers 3.8 says, they shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle.

And as we continue, this is kind of a fascinating study if you ever have time for it, but as we continue reading about the priesthood and in particular the tabernacle and later the temple, we see a lot of garden imagery incorporated into the temple and into the tabernacle.

[14 : 54] It was like a Garden of Eden of sorts in this much smaller place. It was a place obviously where God's presence would dwell, which the priests were responsible for working and protecting just like Adam was in the Garden of Eden.

We don't have time to go into any more detail than that, but now immediately following Adam's sin in the garden, the necessity of sacrifice is introduced, right?

Blood must be shed as a punishment for sin. So God tells Adam, you will die. Because of this sin, you will die. And by the end of Genesis 3, we see God sacrificing the first animal to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness.

From Adam to Moses, we read about men acting as sort of informal priests if you will, primarily within their families.

Job, for instance, in the first chapter of Job, we read about him consecrating his children. He would rise up early in the morning and he would offer burnt offerings according to all of them.

[16 : 05] We read about Abraham building altars and offering sacrifices to God. And though we don't have any record of God commanding these men to act as kind of interim priests for their families, they seem to instinctively understand the need for atonement anyhow.

Maybe God did command them, we don't know. I'd say with the exception of one mysterious Melchizedek, we don't really read about God ordaining any kind of formal priesthood until the construction of the tabernacle in the latter part of Exodus.

God installs Aaron and his sons with the help of the Levites to essentially stand between God and his people. They served a mediating role, offering sacrifices, applying blood to the altar, teaching God's covenant people, purifying the house of God, the place where God's presence would dwell, and communicating God's blessings to the people.

Now the high priest in particular was an especially significant role. According to one commentary, the most important duty of the high priest was to conduct the service on the day of atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month of every year.

Only he was allowed to enter the most holy place behind the veil to stand before God. Having made a sacrifice for himself, and for the people, he then brought the blood into the holy of holies and sprinkled it on the mercy seat, God's throne.

[17 : 47] This is according to Leviticus 16. He did this to make atonement for himself and the people, for all their sins committed during the year just ended. It is this particular service that is compared to the ministry of Jesus as our high priests, of course, in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews. In short, the old covenant priesthood, the high priest in particular, they served as mediators between God and his people.

They offered sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice to essentially appease God, to prevent his wrath against them for their sin.

According to Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, he says the priest would slaughter something like two million lambs just at Passover once a year.

Two million lambs. He describes the blood running down from the temple mount like a river, a red river of blood down into the Kidron Valley below.

[18 : 58] Gruesome sight. The priest had to offer these sacrifices. continually, because sin requires the shedding of blood. Year after year, generation after generation without ceasing.

But, as the book of Hebrews points out, all of that blood was insufficient. The millions and millions and millions of gallons of blood, all insufficient.

The priests themselves were insufficient. Now, let's briefly read through a few relevant passages here in Hebrews to get a sense of how the old covenant priesthood fell short, and we'll also see how Christ perfectly fulfills their role as, namely, mediator.

Turn back to Hebrews chapter 7. Hebrews 7, verses 23 through 25 says, the former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office.

But Christ holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

[20 : 23] So this passage shows us that the former priests were inadequate mediators. Their intercessions were never enough. Theoretically, the only way they could ever assuage God's wrath forever would be to never cease in making intercessions for the people.

But obviously, that was impossible. That couldn't be. They all died. And that points to the bigger problem. What's the bigger problem? Well, they themselves were sinners.

They had their own sins that needed atonement. They required atonement for themselves. So their intercessions are only going to go so far. Let's continue reading.

For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, speaking of Jesus, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

He has no need like those high priests to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

[21 : 35] For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a son who has been made perfect forever. J.B.

Phillips has a very helpful paraphrase of this text. He says, here is the high priest we need, a man who is holy, faultless, unstained, beyond the very reach of sin, and lifted to the very heavens.

There is no need for him like the high priest we know to offer up sacrifice, first for our own sins and then for the people's. He made one sacrifice, once for all, when he offered up himself.

I've heard it said that our sin debt was so great that only God himself could pay it. Christ was the only adequate sacrifice for sin because number one, he was a man, not an animal.

He was a man. And number two, he was perfectly righteous. Perfectly righteous. no other priest before him could make that claim or anything close to it.

[22 : 48] Now, interestingly enough, the author of Hebrews doesn't present Jesus as merely the sacrifice. He's also the high priest. So as the high priest, he offers himself as the sacrifice.

Let's jump ahead a few verses to Hebrews 8, verses 5 and 6. speaking of the former priests, they serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.

For when Moses was about to erect the tent, the tabernacle, he was instructed by God saying, see that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain. But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better since it is enacted on better promises.

In other words, the old covenant was insufficient. God, or let me put it this way, if the old covenant was sufficient, let's say, God would not have needed to promise a new covenant.

It would have been completely unnecessary. Remember that the author of Hebrews is trying to dissuade Jewish Christians from turning back to the old covenant. What do you gain by going back, he says?

[24 : 06] What do you gain? The answer is, of course, nothing. Instead, you have everything to lose. You would exchange the great high priest who offered the perfect and only sufficient sacrifice for what?

Inadequate priests offering inadequate sacrifices that will never procure salvation. That's what you would go back to.

Turn over to Hebrews 9. verses 11 and 12. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

salvation. In Christ, we have a better priest. We have a better sacrifice. According to this passage, we have a better tabernacle. Ultimately, it is only in Christ that we have eternal salvation at all.

Now, I'll read just one more passage along these lines. Hebrews 12, starting at verse 18, and as I read this, think back to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

[25 : 44] Hebrews 12, 18, For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.

Remember the fear of the Israelites and the presence of God there at Mount Sinai. For they could not endure the order that was given. Even if a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.

Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I tremble with fear. But you, but you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable angels and festivals and festal or festive gathering and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven and to God, the judge of all and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Fear, judgment, death. The author of Hebrews is asking the Jewish Christians, do you really want to go back to that? Do you really want to go back to that? Isn't it far better to know Jesus, the great high priest?

You know, through him, we're not scared to touch a mountain. Christ brings us right into the city of the living God where people aren't cowering in fear.

[27 : 14] Instead, they have joined the angels in celebration. Now, granted, most of us don't like change. Hebrews isn't talking about a few trivial traditions here.

The situation here is really even worse than the Old Testament Israelites. Remember, complaining to Moses that life was better in slavery in Egypt, the food was better, the accommodations were better, maybe we should just go back.

In this case, the author of Hebrews is writing to people who are tempted to return to a religious system that would ultimately damn them forever. They could never be saved.

He tells them there is no salvation, there is no heaven, there is no eternal life apart from Christ, our great high priest. Consider this passage from Hebrews 10.

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

[28 : 32] Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by one who is trampled underfoot the Son of God and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace.

For we know him who said, vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

You've heard the truth of the gospel. You've heard the truth of Christ, he says. If you reject that, what's left? Apart from Christ, what's left?

a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire, he says. According to John's gospel, just before Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit while hanging on the cross, he said, it is finished.

Powerful statement. But what did he mean by that? What did he finish? Is he merely talking about his life on earth? That's part of it, but he's talking about so much more.

[29 : 52] So much more. Hebrews 2 says, starting at verse 14, Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, Christ himself likewise partook of the same things, but through death he might, that through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

What did Christ finish? In short, it was our salvation. He accomplished, he procured, he secured our salvation.

Specifically, though, the author of Hebrews here addresses two things. First, Jesus destroyed the power of death, that is, the devil. He rescued us from the bondage that our sin put us under.

And second, as a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, he made propitiation for our sins.

[31 : 21] Propitiation, that's a great word. Your translation of the Bible might say atoning sacrifice, which is accurate, but I think the word propitiation carries even more weight.

It means to appease. In this case, it means to appease God. It means to assuage his wrath against us because of our sin.

Begg and Ferguson, in the book, they use the Old Testament Day of Atonement to explain this, and I'll just read what they wrote. There is a remarkable picture of this in the Old Testament on the annual Day of Atonement.

On that day, the high priest would take two goats. One of them would be slain and its blood offered as a sacrifice. But over the other, he would confess the sins of the people before it was taken out into the wilderness by the hand of a man who was ready to do it.

This scapegoat carried into the wilderness the sins confessed over its head. It was then released into no man's land, bearing the people's sin and guilt.

[32 : 30] This presents a vivid illustration of the two aspects of Jesus' atoning work on the cross. Jesus shed his own blood as the high priest who gave himself on the cross as the final sacrifice for our sins.

But on the cross, he was also taken through the power of the Spirit into the no man's land between heaven and earth. In that lonely wilderness where he bore our sins, he experienced an indescribable sense of alienation from God.

He was rejected by man and tasted death as the wages of our sin and as the curse of God. Jesus went into the presence of God as if he were the only sinner in the world, enduring the wrath of God.

Entering into the unspeakable black hole of desolation, he cried out, My God, my God, why am I forsaken by you? There in the darkness, he became both the sacrifice and the scapegoat for our sins.

His blood shed for us, sets guilty consciences free and brings us peace with God. That's a powerful image.

[33 : 43] As I often say when I'm preaching at funerals, we have a lot of troubles in this world. But the greatest trouble you and I could ever face is the consequence of our own sin.

Apart from the propitiation of Christ, our future holds nothing less than the terrifying wrath of God. Much deserved wrath, by the way.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But Christ, but Christ, as the great high priest, has once for all assuaged his wrath.

He has appeased God once and for all on behalf of everyone who will trust in him for salvation. As Jesus himself declared on the cross, it is finished.

It's done. There's nothing left for the old covenant priesthood to do. They're wasting their time continually slaughtering those animals on the altar.

[34 : 54] It's done. It's finished. Even so, I don't mean to suggest that Christ served as our great high priest 2,000 years ago, offered his sacrifice, and then called it a day.

That's not how it works. The great high priest is still at work. And he always will be.

He still performs his priestly duties in other ways. Namely, he is with us whenever we worship God. He's with us whenever we pray. In fact, I think it's fitting to call him our worship leader.

We may have someone who stands up here on Sunday morning and guides us through the songs and the prayers and the readings, but ultimately, it is Christ who leads the worship. Look again at Hebrews chapter 2, verse 10.

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.

[36 : 06] That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, I will tell of your name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise. And again, I will put my trust in him.

And again, behold, I and the children God has given me. So the author of Hebrews here cites Psalm 22. He's putting the words of Psalm 22 into the mouth of Jesus.

And Jesus says, I will tell of God's name to the to my brothers in the midst of the congregation. I will I will sing his praise. In other words.

Whenever we worship, especially when the church gathers to worship, Jesus says, you know what? I am your great high priest. That hasn't changed. I'm right there with you as your great high priest.

I am leading your worship. How so? Well, I'll give you a couple of examples. First of all, he preaches to us. I will tell of your name to my brothers, he says.

[37 : 13] Now, when we hear the word of God read, when we hear it sung, when we hear it preached, we are hearing Christ. Jesus said, my sheep hear my voice.

They hear my voice. Paul told the Ephesians, he came and preached peace to you. Now, physically, as far as we know, Christ was never in Ephesus.

Even so, he had, in fact, preached to the Ephesians through other men. Now, not everyone recognizes his voice, but Jesus is here, and he is preaching to us week after week.

I like the story that Begg and Ferguson tell in their book. They write, a man once told us that his son had been far from the Lord, but one night he came home, one night as he came home, he happened to pick up a recording of a sermon we had preached.

The young man listened to the sermon every day for a month. On the last day of the month, he came to a living faith in Christ. What happened? He presumably did not realize what was happening to him.

[38 : 25] Christ was calling him. Only slowly did that dawn on him. He heard the same human voice again and again, but then at last, he heard the voice of Christ and responded.

Jesus preaches to us. Second, he sings. In the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise.

Now, anyone who doesn't necessarily feel themselves to be a strong singer will know that it is always very helpful to sit next to someone who is a strong singer when we're all singing together.

It has some advantages, helps us in a couple of ways. First, the good singer tends to draw out better singing in us somehow. And second, that good singer tends to cover the inadequacies of our poor singing, right?

Can't hear our poor singing as well when you're sitting next to a good singer. But even better than having a good singer near us, Jesus is in our midst whenever we worship.

[39 : 33] Our praise of God, it's far from perfect. Far from perfect. But Christ, he elevates our praise and he covers our inadequacies every time we worship.

I love how Begg and Ferguson phrase it. They say, as we assemble together for worship, the Lord Jesus comes by his spirit to be the worship leader, the liturgist. He takes us by the hand and leads us into the Father's presence.

He presents us saying, Father, here I am and the children you have given me. I present them to you in the confidence that you will accept their worship and bless them.

I like the thought of having that kind of advocate before the Father. God has a great fear. God has a great fear. God has a great fear. This is why we don't have the same fear the Israelites once had at Mount Sinai.

You know, we're not trembling as though God might strike us down if we make one false move. If we touch the wrong thing. I don't know whether it's ever been verified, but I've read several times, several accounts of priests, the high priest in the Old Testament, when they would go behind the veil, they would have a rope tied to them.

[40 : 58] That would go all the way out. Because the assumption was there's a pretty fair chance I do something wrong and I die in this place. And you're going to have to pull my body out.

We don't worship with that same kind of fear. Again, Hebrews 12 says, You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels and festive gathering and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven and to God, the judge of all and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

Welcome in, he says. You don't want to come in here. Where do you want to go? You want to go back to Mount Sinai? Okay, don't touch it.

Through the blood of Christ, we are brought right into the presence of God. Where Christ stands with us. And God accepts us because Christ stands with us as our great high priest.

And we celebrate. We don't tremble, we celebrate. As we often sing, before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea.

[42 : 15] A great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me. My name is graven on his hands. My name is written on his heart.

I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me thence depart. That's a powerful lyric when you consider it in context of what Hebrews tells us.

J.C. Ryle once said, So in one sense, Christ's work as high priest is finished once and for all.

No tongue can bid us thence depart from the presence of God. But in another sense, he never stops working. He never stops being that great high priest for us.

He will always be our priest, interceding on our behalf and serving as a faithful mediator between God and sinner. And I'll leave you with the final words of Begg and Ferguson in this chapter of their book.

[43 : 32] They conclude the chapter by simply saying, what a Savior. What a Savior. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, what a Savior indeed.

We do not deserve your Son. We do not deserve the sacrifice he made, the way that he left glory to come down to this fallen, broken, sinful place, to suffer the same weaknesses as us all.

And yet, of course, he persevered through it righteously, every step, fulfilling all righteousness, all the way to death, to death on a cross.

And now we know he stands by your side, making intercession for us. We know that through him, our prayers like this one are heard, our singing, our worship, our preaching.

It's all accepted only because of Christ. And for him, we thank you. We praise his wonderful and precious name. And we thank you for having sent him and accepting that sacrifice that he made on our behalf.

[44 : 51] What a Savior. In Christ's name, amen. We're dismissed.