

Our Great High Priest

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Date: 08 April 2012

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[0:00] Good morning. I was often told that things are bigger in the United States,¹ and this is at least true for your church when compared to the assembly I'm used to.

! But I'm really very excited since God in his providence brought me here for the first time in last November to learn to know you and I'm very encouraged to see especially your constant concern for the church in Switzerland too.

The church in Payerne has indeed known growth over the 10 years and this growth is also due to your support in prayer and your financial support and the development of the church in Payerne is really encouraging.

When I first attended the church in 2001, we were about 4 to 6 people on weekly meetings, perhaps 15 on Sunday service, and these numbers have gone up to about 20 on weekly meetings and 50 on Sundays or even more.

So this is really encouraging and I'm very happy then to be here and thankful to be able to bring you the greetings of the church in Payerne.

[1:22] And thank you for your encouragements and all your support in prayer. So Pastor John has asked me to speak shortly about my conversion first and about the sense of calling to gospel ministry.

He could have asked me to speak about something easier than that, at least when it comes to the question about the calling, but we come to this later and I will start with some words about my conversion.

So to my conversion, my conversion is something I would call an unspectacular miracle. When I say unspectacular, this is because when God brought me to faith in Christ at about age 16, I'm quite sure that there wasn't a radical or spectacular visible change for people around me.

I had grown up in a well-protected home, although being a Christian in my family was and still is considered as rather something like an alternative to another lifestyle.

So it is not seen as faith and commitment to Christ as our Savior. So I was living quite a normal life.

[2:46] I went to school. I did quite some sports and music. What I can say is that by God's grace, I was protected from many bad influences, I think.

Going out, partying, and things like that was never of interest for me, and I think this is really God's grace who protected me already then. So coming to faith in Christ, at least outwardly, surely wasn't something radical or spectacular to others.

And even after, I just continued with about the same occupations, going to school, sports, some music.

So there wasn't a great change, I think. But what really changed, and this is what is miraculous about it, is that God changed my heart. And can there be a greater miracle than this?

When God works out things and brings things together to bring a sinner to recognize his sinfulness and his need of a Savior, and when he leads to repentance and to faith, when he changes a heart of unbelief and self-sufficiency to become a God-seeking and a God-fearing and a God-loving heart, as imperfect as it still is.

[4:15] Shortly before I became a Christian, I had been confirmed and accepted in the Reformed States Church in Switzerland.

You don't have the same system with the States Church, I think. So I had been accepted as a member in the States Church without believing. I wasn't a Christian at all at that moment.

I thought that I didn't need any God. I could do things by myself. And this really was the state of my heart.

I just ignored him. And this was the state of my heart when God used a friend of mine who had become a Christian shortly before to let me hear the Gospel.

And all I can say is that God just opened my heart to receive this message and to receive the truth about my sinfulness and about his saving grace and bringing me like this from unbelief to faith and life in Christ.

[5:27] So it was surely unspectacular, but it still is a miracle, and I'm still amazed about it today. I could say much more about how I spent several years in a Pentecostal church and how God finally brought me to know the Reformed Baptist churches, to join them.

And this is also where I heard and where I embraced the teaching of God's grace as I had never heard it before. But I told you that I want to keep this short to have more time for a message from Scripture afterwards.

So coming then to the question about the sense of calling to ministry, I told you that Pastor John could have asked me to speak about something easier. And the reason for that is that things are not as clear as you might perhaps think when it comes to the question of call to ministry.

If God had simply addressed me one day with the words, I want you to be a pastor in my church, it would be easy to talk about it. But this is not the way God proceeds, at least in my case.

There are testimonies of men who simply knew I have to be a pastor. And it was just clear. It's not the same for me. There are about three things that bring me to consider this question of the call to ministry.

[7:00] It is a thought I could never get rid of. It is a constant preoccupation with the spiritual needs of the people I meet. And it is the question of gifts.

The thought about ministry is a thought I had very shortly after my conversion for the first time, and I could never get rid of it. Even after about ten years in medicine, six years of studies, four years working as a doctor, I couldn't get rid of that thought if God didn't want to use me one day as a teacher or as a pastor in his church.

And I still cannot go along with the idea of being and working as a doctor. My interests, my preoccupations simply are not in medicine.

And I would say it would almost need a miracle there, too, that God would bring me to fully concentrate on medicine. I have seen many people die in my work as a doctor.

And I have seen many people die so-called peacefully. But what I mean by this is that they died without pain. But they were fully ignorant of the realities of sin and of the judgment to come.

[8:23] And they were eventually passing from dying without pain, peacefully, to everlasting sufferings. And this is what I have always been preoccupied when I was working with them, that they were just ignorant of God and of a saving grace in Christ.

And this was the first preoccupation. It was not their mere physical needs, even if it is important to take care about these two, for sure. So the third aspect about this question of the call to ministry is the question of gifts.

Since I have been teaching and preaching more frequently during the last year, I have been encouraged by my church to pursue theological studies.

and the idea of preparing for ministry. And the question that comes up is, if such a gift should be further confirmed by the church, can I withhold it to the church?

If God gives a gift, can I not use it? So I feel, I see somehow a pressure coming up, a responsibility coming up in that sense.

[9:48] But I think it still needs confirmation from the church and it needs inner conviction. So these are the reasons that bring me to a point where today, I simply don't see what I could do else than aspire to ministry, even if things are not all clear yet.

And what really makes things difficult and what I've been struggling a lot with, especially these last times, is that since I have been preaching and teaching more frequently, I have really seen the difficulty of the task and the responsibility it is for a pastor to preach God's word and to lead a flock. And seen like this and seen in the same time the confrontation with my own insufficiency, ministry can appear very frightening.

And I often have this question, but who am I to do this? And how to do it rightly? I have a little Bible knowledge. I didn't grow up with the Bible.

I have been absorbed by medicine for many years. I have a lot of work to catch up with. So there's many factors when looking at myself, I just have to say who am I to do this? It is a noble task, but it

is a difficult one too.

[11:25] And so if the church should further confirm a gift, a call, I think this is very much about learning to depend fully on the Lord and on His grace to fulfill whatever He wants to fulfill and to do it by His strength.

So this is a time of evaluation, it is a time of spiritual battles, and if I can ask you to pray, my request for prayer would really be that the Lord brings me to a full dependence on Him, that He brings me to a full conviction and that I could accept His call wholeheartedly and joyfully if it is His will.

And I would also like to urge you to pray for your pastors because their task is a difficult one. They need your prayer. If you have any questions, I think it's easier if you come to me afterwards, and I would be happy to answer if I can.

But we will go on to a message from Scripture, and I ask you to open your Bible at the book of Hebrews, the book of Hebrews, and the message will be a message about Christ, the great high priest.

The book of Hebrews, where in chapter 1 to 4, the author is treating about Christ's superiority over the angels and over Moses.

[13:07] But what I suggest you to look at today is the section that follows. It begins at the end of chapter 4, and it goes right through to the end of chapter 10.

So it's about six chapters, treating of Christ the great high priest. And it truly is impossible to do a detailed study on these six chapters.

But what we want to do is rather to focus on the main point, the main point of these six chapters.

And what is that main point? The author himself makes it very clear.

He states it very clearly in chapter 8, where he says, now the main point of what we are saying is this, we do have such a high priest. The main point of what we are saying is this, we do have such a high priest.

I will be quoting quite a lot of verses and you surely will not be able to turn your pages every time.

But you can keep your Bible open on chapter 4, verses 14 to 16.

[14:13] That's the main text we will base our study on. So the main point of what we are saying is this, we do have such a high priest. It's the same statement he makes again at the end of this section in chapter 10, where he says, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God and then he applies it.

And he makes the same statement in the opening section, in the opening verses of the section at the end of chapter 4. And that's the text we are going to read together.

And all he does in between these three statements is to underline, to develop, and to apply this truth, Christ, the great high priest.

So please read with me in chapter 4, verses 14 to 16. Chapter 4, 14 to 16.

Since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

[15:28] for we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we do have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet he did not sin.

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

What do you think? Why does the author insist so much on this truth, on this fact, we do have such a high priest? Why is that so important?

We do have such a high priest. It is because the first readers of this letter knew very well that they needed one because of their sin.

But they were tempted to think they were lacking him. They were in danger to fall into unbelief and discouragement.

[16:44] And do we not often struggle with the same temptation of turning away from faith and giving in to discouragement when we have to face the reality of recurring sin, the reality of our weakness?

What do you do when sin and guilt weighs on your conscience? How do you cope with your weakness and your failures?

prayers? The first readers had to face this too. And this is what having a high priest is about. And that is why the altar is reminding it with such insistence three times at least in these six chapters.

It is the main point. We do have such a high priest. Now, the first point of the study, the high priest we needed.

The high priest we needed. I told you that the first readers were conscious about their need of a high priest.

[17 : 58] But why were they so conscious about it? It's because they were Hebrews. They were Christians of Jewish origin. Jews.

They were Jews who had heard the gospel and believed in the gospel. They had come to faith in Jesus Christ. But being Jews at the origin, they were part of a people who had known for centuries or even more than a thousand years as the center of their religious life, the tabernacle and the priesthood.

And they knew that they needed the priest and especially the high priest as the one destined to serve as their representative before God.

They knew they needed him. Because it is the high priest who is appointed to represent the people before God in matters related to God.

And they knew that it is impossible for a sinner to stand in the presence of God without being cleansed and purified from sin. All their religious life turned around this in the tabernacle.

[19 : 21] Listen to chapter 5, verse 1. Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God to offer gifts and sacrifices for what?

For sins. And we find the same in chapter 9. But only the high priest entered the inner room and that only once a year and never without blood which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in the ignorance.

So this was what the first readers of this letter, Jewish by their origin but Christians, this is what they were conscious about. The need of a high priest to represent them before God.

The need of one who would offer the blood of sacrifices to cover their sins. sins. Now you can ask, why were they then tempted to fall into unbelief and discouragement?

Just try to think about their circumstances. They had come to faith in Christ as the long awaited Messiah, as the one who would deliver them from sin.

[20 : 57] But sin was still there in their daily life, recurring sin. And professing faith in Christ, they were suddenly excluded from the temple, from the temple service.

They were rejected by the Jews, by their own people, and they had no more participation in the ministry of the priests as they were used to it before.

But their need of a high priest was still there, because sin was still there. So how to come before God when consciousness of sin weighs upon them?

What priests could offer to God's sacrifices and gifts in their behalf? And how to receive mercy and grace in times of need, when weakness is overwhelming?

all the sacrificial system they had relied on before seemed to be abolished for them. They had no participation anymore in it.

[22 : 10] But they still knew that they needed a high priest, and they had always needed a high priest who was a descendant from the tribe of Levi. Levi or Levi?

Levi. But Christ wasn't from the tribe of Levi. He was from Judah. So according to the law, he couldn't be their high priest.

So their temptation was to turn back, to turn away from the faith in Christ they had professed, and to be discouraged, and to return back to Judaism.

But how does that apply to us? We too need a high priest. We do need a high priest just in the same way as they did.

Because there is no difference, Jewish or not, there is no difference. We have all sinned, and we all need to be delivered from sin. If you, Lord, kept a record of sin, who could stand?

[23 : 24] Psalm 130. Who could stand if you kept a record of sin? What do you do when sin and guilt weighs on your conscience?

We cannot approach God with our sin. He is the Holy One who hates sin. And how not to be discouraged when facing our weaknesses, when sin shows up again and again?

And doesn't it do like that? Sometimes we might think we got rid of a sin, of a particular sin, just to fall again. sin. So the Hebrew Christians who received these letters first were facing the same struggles as we do.

And they knew about their need of a high priest. And it is the same need for us. But what they ignored when they were tempted to turn back to the priest in the tabernacle is that their true need was about a greater high priest.

And this is what the author really reminds them with his main point. We do have such a high priest, a different one, a greater one, a perfect one.

[24 : 51] This will be our second point. The high priest we have, who he is, how he is. do you know it would have been foolish for these Christians to return back to Judaism?

It would have meant going back from things perfect to things imperfect. What was the problem with the human high priests serving in the tabernacle?

They did offer sacrifices and gifts for sin. Was that not enough? No, it wasn't. Listen to chapter 7 verse 11. If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood, why was there still need for another priest to come?

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood, why was there still a need for another priest to come? the Levitical priesthood was not perfect.

We read a little further that the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness who need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people.

[26 : 24] They had to sacrifice for their own sins first. They weren't perfect. It was imperfect priests offering imperfect sacrifices and these sacrifices could not definitely take away sin.

We read in chapter 10 that day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties.

Again and again he offers the same sacrifices.

which can never take away sins. They can never take away sins. But that is what the Jews and what we need that our sins be taken away.

But the human priests, the sacrifice offered by them couldn't do that, taking away sins. And so the sacrifices under the old covenant, rather than taking away sin, were a reminder of the need of a greater sacrifice, of a greater high priest to come, a perfect one.

God and such is the great high priest we have, Jesus Christ. So let us just pick out three of the facts demonstrating Christ's perfection as our high priest.

[28 : 00] There are many things to say about this. Even the author himself says, I think it's in chapter five, there are many things to say about this. We will not be able to detail all this.

And it is wonderfully developed in all these chapters. And I can just encourage you to read through these six chapters and to see how God has appointed Christ to be the great high priest, how everything is fulfilled in him.

But we will just be able merely to quote some of these facts without developing them further. The first fact, Christ is a priest of a higher order.

I told you that Christ was from the tribe of Judah. So how could he be priest? As the law appointed the descendants from Levi to be priests.

How is this possible? He could. Because he is priest in another order, in a higher order.

[29 : 09] It is the order of Melchizedek. There is a whole chapter at least, chapter 7, treating about just this, showing that though he was not a Levite, he could be high priest.

And it is even a priesthood of a higher order than the Levite priesthood. I will just quote one passage to underline this, in chapter 7, verse 16 and 17.

He has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry, like it was the case for the Levites, but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.

See how different it is? The human high priest always died. It was always their descendants coming up and taking over the priesthood.

the basis for the priesthood of Jesus Christ is the power of an indestructible life. For it is declared, you are priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

[30 : 37] So I just encourage you, read through this and see how marvelously God has prepared everything for Christ to become the great high priest.

Priest of a higher order. The second fact, Christ is high priest of a heavenly tabernacle.

What do we remember today in particular? It's the resurrection of Christ. It is, you could say, the accomplishment of his work on earth.

But what did he rise for? He rose to ascend into heaven and to fulfill there his work as our great high priest.

! So we don't stay fixed on the resurrection. We have to look further and see that he rose to ascend into heaven to fulfill his work as the great high priest.

[31 : 49] And where? In the heavenly tabernacle. Chapter 4, 14, he has ascended into heaven. Chapter 6, 20, he has become a high priest forever.

Chapter 8, verse 1, hear it again, the main point. The main point of what we are saying is this, we do have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord.

chapter 7, 24, 25, because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood and therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

He is priest of a higher order, a perfect order. He serves and intercedes for us forever, permanently, constantly in the heavenly tabernacle.

But what about the sacrifices? His sacrifice also is a perfect one. Listen to chapter 9, verse 26.

[33 : 25] He has appeared once for all, at the culmination of the ages, to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Remember about the imperfect priests and their imperfect sacrifices? What difference with Christ? Chapter 7 again.

Christ like the other priests. He does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people.

He sacrificed for their sins once for all, when he offered himself. You see the difference?

it is once for all that he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin.

[34 : 30] And their sins, I will, and their lawless acts, I will remember no more. And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

It is such a high priest who truly meets our need. Chapter 7, verse 26, such a high priest truly meets our need.

One who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. So, Christ is the high priest we need it.

And he is the high priest we have. And thirdly, he is the high priest we can fully trust. What have we seen?

What was the danger for the first readers of this letter? These Christians of Jewish origin, what was their danger? It was the danger to fall into unbelief and to abandon their faith in Christ.

[35 : 41] it was the danger to give in to discouragement when they had to face their weakness and the problem of recurring sin. So, how does the author of the letter address that danger?

It is by reminding them that in Christ they truly have a great high priest, a greater one than those they knew before. It is the perfect one who meets all their needs.

And he is greater than any of the human high priest they had known before. It is in him that we have a better hope. And this is the faith and the hope we profess.

in this faith in a perfect high priest and in a perfect sacrifice by which he obtained for us an eternal redemption.

What the sacrifices offered by the human high priest couldn't do taking away sins, he has done it by offering himself as a perfect sacrifice once for all.

[36 : 58] And who else could do this? Where else can there be hope for the forgiveness of sin? Except in the great high priest and Jesus the son of God.

And that's how the author of the letter comes to his conclusions when he says, since we have a great high priest, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Chapter 414, chapter 10, it's about the same thing. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.

For he who promised is faithful, he is trustworthy. He truly is the great high priest we needed. So we can fully trust him, even when others mock us, for the faith we profess, because it is in him that we have a better hope.

And he is faithful. But not only has he accomplished once for all, a perfect sacrifice offering himself, and deleting by this the record of our sin, but he also empathizes with our weaknesses.

[38 : 21] That was the second danger the Christians, the Hebrew Christians, had to face, the danger of giving in to discouragement, when they had to face that problem of recurring sin.

And if you are like me, you surely know that problem, and I have no reason to think that being Americans, you are different in these matters. you know what it means to fall again and again. You know what it means to have a guilty conscience, and to experience the weakness when facing temptation. So what do you do with that?

Run away and hide? from God as Adam and Eve did? Or return to offer sacrifices ourselves through good works?

Or by returning to human priests? Running away and even the best sacrifices we could offer cannot cleanse from a guilty conscience.

[39 : 49] and they cannot help in our weakness. So let's not run away, but let's do what the letter of Hebrews, the altar, what God himself asks us to do.

Chapter 4, verse 15, let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.

And we are needy. It's not running away, but it is approaching God's throne of grace with confidence.

And why can we do so? What is our assurance? this is because we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses.

But we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are. Yet he did not sin. And isn't that comforting?

[41 : 09] To know that Christ, the great high priest, who represents us before God, knows what it means to be tempted. He knows about our weakness.

He knows what it means to be human. He was human in perfection. And has he not been tempted by Satan himself?

Perhaps even much more than we are? So he knows what it means. to be tempted. So instead of running away, let us run to God with our sin.

Let us run to God with our weakness to find mercy and grace. It is the only place we can find it. And to find help in our time of need.

Christ is there at the right hand of God to represent us as our great high priest, the one who has obtained for us forgiveness of sin when he offered himself for us once for all.

[42 : 30] Christ is the high priest we needed, and he is the great high priest, the perfect one. The one who lives forever and who intercedes for us.

He is risen from the dead, he has risen into the heavens to do his work as a high priest for us. And it is there he represents us and intercedes.

And since we have such a great high priest, let us not abandon the faith we profess, but let us hold firmly to it, and let us approach God's throne with confidence.

It is the throne of grace. I want to close in prayer. Heavenly Father, what glorious truth revealed in your word.

we do have a great high priest, one who is perfect, one who offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sins once for all.

[43 : 38] And Father, we pray that you would help us to hold firmly to the faith we profess, and we pray that you would sustain us in the weakness of our faith, even as we are to approach your throne of grace, so that we might learn to approach it with confidence and assurance, to receive their mercy and grace, and find help in our time of need.

Father, we pray that you would glorify yourself in us by making us ambassadors of a better hope in Christ, in this world of hopelessness, Father, we pray in Jesus' name and we thank you for your grace.

Amen. Amen.