

## Mid Week • Hebrews 4:14-5:11

### A PRELIMINARY WORD . . .

Rather than hold a service last night, we decided to join with many others from numerous churches around the county for a candle-light vigil and prayer service at the County Government Center in Ventura.

We thought it important to show our unity and solidarity with other believers as a time like this.

But tonight – we need to take some time to deal with the many emotions and various ideas that are being voiced about what to do. Just what should the reaction of the followers of Christ be to all of this?

What is the Spirit of God saying – How does the Word of God direct us?

Many people believe this is a crucial point, maybe even a defining moment in the history of our nation.

If that is true, and I for one believe it is, then that means you and I have been uniquely positioned by God – providentially placed – to be living at this time and in this place.

If there was ever a time when God’s people could serve as salt and light, this is it.

So – tonight, we are changing things around a bit – *but only a bit*.

You see, first of all, we must remember that it is *one of the aims of terrorism* to disrupt the normal flow of life in the target society. They are called “terrorists” for good reason – their goal is to *create terror*, and by doing so, to bring the normal flow of democratic societies to a halt.

Therefore, while prudent precautions must be taken to ensure further terrorist attacks are not *successful*, we must also not give in to the terror they seek to paralyze us with.

This means we must go *back to normal life* as expeditiously as possible; school, work, shopping, travel, and church.

For that reason, we will proceed with our study in Hebrews

tonight.

It's at a time like this that we need the unshakable counsel of God more than ever.

We must not let the enemy knock us off our stride.

Second, we must address the events that have rocked our land and seek to understand them and our response, both individually and as a nation, from a *Biblical perspective*.

We will spend some time doing that tonight as well.

Third, praise and worship remind us that while our world may be shaking, God remains unshakable. Therefore we will spend some time in sober worship.

Fourth and finally, we must rally to a time of corporate prayer for our nation.

We'll take some time to pray together at the conclusion of our study.

## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the major themes of the book of Hebrews is how Jesus serves as the consummate High Priest.

In fact, that theme stretches from the last three verses of chapter 4, *all the way* through chapter 10!

Keeping in mind that this was addressed to Jewish Christians who had been raised in Judaism with its emphasis on the temple and the sacrifices, it makes perfect sense the writer would spend a lot of time showing how Christ is the *fulfillment* of all the ritual of the Mosaic Law.

Most of that ritual was performed either *directly* by the high priest or *under his auspices*.

Let me use an illustration to bring a completely modern slant to the argument the writer uses in the next several chapters of Hebrews.

When pilots are training to fly jets for the Airforce – they learn & practice in a simulator.

In fact, they spend hundreds of hours in a simulator before they ever climb in to a real jet.

In that simulator they have controls that are very much like the

controls of a real jet, but it's not a real jet!  
There's a screen that plays a computer image around them that looks realistic, but it isn't.  
After logging the necessary training hours in the simulator, the pilots get to climb aboard a real jet and take it up.  
They get to take the plane through it's paces get comfortable behind the controls.  
Now imagine a group of pilots who've been flying real fighter jets for a year or two, and suddenly the nation goes to war and they are pressed into service.  
Some of them begin to grumble and say that they'd rather just go back to the simulator and fly that because it's safer.  
If you know anything about fighter pilots you know that this is ridiculous!  
Not one of them would want to go back to the simulator after flying the real thing.  
In fact, they can't wait to get out of the sim so they can fly a real jet.  
And what they fly for is to fight, not just to have fun sailing through the wild blue yonder.

Judaism was the training simulator, if you will, for Christianity.  
It produced the nation from which the Messiah could be born.  
It received the Law of God which revealed the full-nature of sin.  
It produced a ritual that foreshadowed the death of Christ as the atoning sacrifice for sin.  
But once Christ came, the law was fulfilled and the day of training was at an end.  
Jesus opened wide the way to God for all to enter by faith – that's what the tearing of the veil in the temple was all about when He died.  
The Jewish believers to whom this was written had entered in to a new covenant with God which was far greater than the old covenant.  
How could they go back?

So now the writer turns to one of the most important parts of the Jewish system – the temple service and the priesthood.

In order to understand why this subject receives so much attention in the letter, we need to realize just how important *religious ritual* was in the ancient world.

The various religions of the world weighed themselves against each other by the extent and formality of their rituals for approaching and worshiping their gods.

The bigger the temple and the more elaborate the ceremonies, the grander and more powerful the religion.

This makes sense when we remember that all false religion is based on man's efforts, on human works.

The greater the personal sacrifice, the more exacting and demanding the ritual, the more effort is involved, so the greater the pay-off.

This mentality had crept in to the Jewish mind as well.

And they had good reason to think their temple in Jerusalem was the most beautiful building in the world.

The highly efficient system of sacrifices and worship that was carried out by the priests in the temple compound created a profound sense of pride and superiority in the Jewish mind.

It's the writer's aim to show how the Gospel is the fruit of the roots of Judaism.

As Christians – they have a greater way of approach to God than anything that had come before.

## **CHAPTER 4 (CONTINUED . . .)**

### **Vs. 14-16**

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

Right at the outset, the author established the superiority of Jesus' role as high priest to the Jewish high priests of the past – He is a "great" high priest.

This great high priest has "passed through the heavens."

In the cosmology of the times, there were three heavens;

- the atmosphere was the first heaven,
- the stars were the second heaven,

○ and the spiritual realm of God was the third heaven.

When the writer says that our great high priest has passed through the heavens, he means that he has entered into the very throne room of the Father.

That was the primary duty of the priest – to represent the people to God.

The priest was the one who stood before God on behalf of the people.

He brought their prayer requests – provided intercession – and brought their offerings and sacrifices to God.

But the earthly priests could only go before the brazen altar – that was as far as they could proceed.

The only exception was the high priest, once a year, who would enter in to the Holy of holies on the Day of Atonement and approach the presence of God above the ark of the covenant.

Jesus' priesthood is superior in that He passed through the heavens and entered in to the very presence of God in the Heaven of heavens.

So – His priesthood is vastly superior – therefore – let us hold fast to our faith, to our confession of Christ as our mediator before God.

**15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as we are, yet without sin.**

Part of the power of the Jewish system was that when a worshipper brought a sacrifice to offer at the temple, he would hand it over to one of the priests with a little ritual of greeting and transference. There was a brief moment of *personal contact* between worshipper and priest.

They would look in to each other's eyes and soul would touch soul.

In this way, as the animal was led away by the priest to be prepared and then offered on the altar, the worshipper felt a *personal connection* to the priest and what we was doing; he felt present when the sacrifice was laid on the coals.

The writer is making this *personal connection* between his readers and Christ.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became a man and made personal

contact with humanity.

After He died and rose from the dead, He did not shed his humanity: Jesus remains a man!

And in the experience of His humanity while on earth, He encountered every emotion and experience that humans encounter in the course of their lives.

He was tempted in every area that humans are tempted – yet He didn't give in.

Think of the implications of that!

Jesus knew the temptation to revenge.

He knew the temptation to lust, to gossip, to greed, to envy.

Now, think of this – the power of a temptation is *directly proportional* to the ability of a person to carry it out.

I'm not tempted to gamble because, well – I'm not in Las Vegas right now and I don't really have any money to gamble with.

If I was standing in the casino at the MGM Grand in front of a bank of slot machines with a role of quarters in my hand – the temptation would be a lot stronger than it is right now.

A person with vast wealth has the resources to carry out his or her urges with great effect simply because of the power wealth brings.

Jesus Christ was God incarnate – He possessed ALL power!

*Therefore* each temptation He endured was many degrees *more intense* than ours because He was infinitely more capable of carrying them out

But – and here's the mystery – HE DIDN'T SIN!

In fact, He *couldn't* sin! Why? Because God *cannot* sin and He was God while He was also man.

Now – don't be confused by this.

Understand that this is one of the mysteries that confront us because of the incarnation.

As man – as the perfect man who possessed full use of His faculties, Jesus was tempted in every point that human beings are tempted and is well acquainted with the power and insidiousness of temptation.

As God – He was *incapable* of sinning – but that in NO WAY hinders or nullifies the fact that when Jesus dealt with sin, He dealt with it *as a man*.

He resisted it *as a man*, and *not* as God.

To do so would have been to remove Himself from His ability to *serve* as our Great High Priest.

Remember in the wilderness, the very first temptation the devil hit Jesus with?

Jesus had been fasting for 40 days and was hungry.

The devil said, “If you are the Son of God, turn these stones in to bread.”

What was Jesus’ reply? “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

You see the temptation satan offered?

He appealed to Jesus’ powers of deity – He said, If you are the Son of GOD! Turn these stones into bread.”

But Jesus served the devil notice that He would not perform His mission through the powers of deity.

Earth had been given to man, lost by man, and could only be reclaimed by a man.

So he said – “MAN, shall not live by bread alone, but He shall live by his cleaving to the revelation of God.”

The writer wants his readers to realize that their personal connection to Jesus as High Priest is greater than any connection a person had to the priest of the temple.

For their connection to Jesus is a living one of constant fellowship by the Spirit.

When they cry out for help to God, they can have the confidence of knowing that Jesus, who intercedes for them before the Father knows precisely what they are going through.

He’s been there and done that – even more, He’s here now and going through it with us.

**16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

Friends I can think of no greater verse to bring us both comfort and counsel than this.

This is without doubt or debate a *Time of Need*.

The events of yesterday will go down not only in the History of our Nation but in the History of our World as a tragedy of *epic*

proportions.

The fallout and ramifications of the terror attacks yesterday will be far-reaching.

This verse reminds us the first and best place we need to go for help is to God!

Why? Because His throne is a place of GRACE! Of unmerited favor and blessing.

And friends, *grace* is what we need right now!

As we look at the moral and spiritual climate of our nation, we realize that what we DESERVE is judgment from God.

Indeed – what we witnessed yesterday may very well be a manifestation of judgment.

This is what I will be speaking about Sunday as we take a closer look at this verse.

But judgment is NOT what we are to plead for.

As we come to God's throne – we look for grace and we plead for mercy.

It is help we need right now.

And the only help that can bring genuine healing to our land is the grace and mercy of God.

Anything less, anything else will be only a temporary and false solution that will prove our undoing.

I feel the need to try to bring some Biblical guidance to the events of yesterday and our reaction to them.

You see, it's important we discern the difference between our individual reaction as Christians and citizens of the Kingdom of God, and as Americans and citizens of the United States of America.

Listening to the news yesterday and today, what we hear a lot of is the outrage and anger.

As President Bush said in his speech – there is “a quiet, unyielding anger.”

Later speeches by government officials have declared the intent to investigate and find out who is responsible for these attacks, and then exact swift retaliation.

While most of the world expresses it's grief and sense of anger at what happened here in America, there are reports of certain



groups who rejoice and delight in our pain and suffering. They consider the terrorists to be heroes!

This only serves to inflame our sense of outrage and the desire to exact revenge.

Let me speak for myself – because I imagine what I feel is what many of you feel.

As I watch the replays of the attacks and listen to the reports, I find my emotions swinging wildly about.

I alternate between the deepest sense of sorrow to a intense anger and desire for revenge.

Then, I just get kind of numb and it feels surreal – like a really horrible but vivid nightmare that I hope to wake up from.

What's the right way to respond to all this? What would the Lord have us do at this Time of Need?

First of all, as the followers of Christ, it's absolutely critical that as individuals we do not allow ourselves to give in to the temptation to hate.

That would be playing right in to the devil's hands.

Jesus made it clear that we are to love our enemies and seek to do good to them.

I realize that is an incredibly difficult thing to hear right now, but it is nevertheless true and was lived out by Christ Himself when he was hanging on the cross and said, "Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing."

The issue of forgiveness was taught again and again by the Lord.

In fact, He said the absence of forgiveness and the presence of a bitter and resentful spirit that desires to exact revenge was evidence of a bad heart that wasn't born again.

Hatred, harbored and nurtured in the heart is equivalent to murder, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.

We must be ultra careful that we repent of any hatred for these poor deluded people who have been taken captive by satan to produce a harvest of hatred in their acts of terror.

If we do not repent of hatred toward the terrorists, then that hatred can easily blossom in to a larger hatred called *racism*, where we grow to hate the people of a specific ethnic or national background.

No friends – hatred is not part of the lifestyle of the followers of Christ.

On the contrary, we are a people of love and must seek to look at those who would do us harm through the eyes of God – who loves them as much as He loves us and longs for them to come to faith in His Son.

Rather than desire a slow and painful death for them, we ought to pray for their salvation!

This is how we ought to respond as *individual believers* in Christ.

As individuals band together to constitute The Church of Jesus Christ we need to take this further.

The Church ought to rally and unite with a consistent voice at this time – holding forth the agenda of the Kingdom of God, rather than the Agenda of Americanism.

What I means is this – while each of us ought to renew our commitment to our citizenship as Americans in the face of this bold attempt to rip America apart, The Church must not allow itself to become the political pawn and mouthpiece of a national policy on how to deal with terrorism.

As The Church, we are called to play the role of Prophet to our generation – not soldier or statesman.

While our national intelligence agencies go to work to find the physical culprits, Christians ought to seek the Lord for the spiritual causes of this tragedy.

And once we find them, we ought to be diligent to lead in repentance and prayer for the restoring of mercy and grace for our troubled and broken nation.

I will be speaking more to this issue on Sunday.

Finally – what’s the right course for our nation? What ought our leaders, the president and congress do?

First of all – this is no time for partisanship and finger-pointing.

I was so gratified to hear that Congress and the President are in complete union regarding the events of yesterday.

Second, we must not confuse the moral and spiritual obligation of individual Christians and the mandate of the Church as the covenant people of God with the duty of our nation’s

government.

Our elected officials have the God-ordained task of protecting the people and interests of the country from both foreign and domestic threats.

In Romans 13 we read that God gives to government the power of the sword to keep the peace.

When that peace and tranquility are threatened or violated, it is the solemn duty of government to take whatever measures are necessary to deal with it in a just manner.

Christian philosophers and theologians have done a more than sufficient job of proving time and again how the Bible reveals wars of defense are morally justifiable.

Indeed – God judges nations on how they treat the innocent and defenseless among them.

Yesterday – the innocent and defenseless were purposely targeted. It is the moral and God-ordained duty of our government to ensure justice is carried out.

But at the same time – the government must ensure that it is justice that is being carried out, not revenge for revenge sake and to satisfy the blood-lust of a voting populace.

Here are some of the practical things we can do . . .

- Pray for our hearts to be in the right place – repenting of any hatred we find there.
- Praying for the salvation of terrorists.
- Praying for protection for our nation and it's people.
- Praying for discernment as to what degree we are seeing the judgment of God and a genuine, national repentance from the sins that have come to mark our age.
- Praying for the leadership of The Church to unite in a prophetic voice to this generation boldly declaring the counsel of God.
- Prayer for our government officials and those charged with the task of investigating this tragedy.
- Prayer that in whatever actions are carried out to bring the perpetrators to justice, it is indeed justice that is done, and not mere revenge for revenge's sake.
- Pray that God would bring comfort to the families and that the

enemy would not find a foothold to bring dishonor to God or falsely accuse Him.

- Donate Blood and Money to the Red Cross.

## CHAPTER 5

The writer now draws the link between Jesus as our great High Priest and the regular priests who served in the temple.

### **Vs. 1-4**

**<sup>1</sup>For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. <sup>2</sup>He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. <sup>3</sup>Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer *sacrifices* for sins. <sup>4</sup>And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.**

When priests officiated in the temple and took the people's offerings to the altar, they were able to identify with the people because as men, they were well acquainted with the kinds of struggles and issues people went through.

But not just *any* many could officiate as a priest.

Being human and being able to identify with men and women isn't the only qualification to being a priest.

One must be called and ordained by God.

The priesthood wasn't something a man could aspire to.

In Israel, you had to be born into the priestly tribe of Levi.

And in order to be a high priest, you had to be born into the family of Aaron.

### **Vs. 5-11**

**<sup>5</sup>So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, *but it was* He who said to Him:**

***"You are My Son, Today I have begotten You."***●

**[Psalm 2:7]**

After showing the qualifications of a priest in vs. 1-4, the writer shows that Christ had those qualifications.

As the Son of God Himself, He is more than qualified to serve as High Priest.

Now, the writer knew that this might cause some of his readers to say, “Wait a minute – there’s only one high priesthood established in Scripture and that’s the Tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron. Jesus was from the Tribe of Judah and the Family of Jesse! He doesn’t qualify.”

So the writer dispels this challenge by going back *before* the establishment of the Tribe of Levi as the priestly tribe and shows there is a higher priesthood that pre-dates and surpasses the Levitical priesthood.

**<sup>6</sup>As He also says in another place:**

***“You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek”;*** ● [Psalm 110:4]

**<sup>7</sup>who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, <sup>8</sup>though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. <sup>9</sup>And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, <sup>10</sup>called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” <sup>11</sup>of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.**

There is a lot here and a good portion of it I will leave till later since he comes back to this issue of Melchizedek in chapter 7.

But let’s get the basic sense of what he’s saying here . . .

He says that Jesus’ priesthood is of a higher status than the priests of the Tribe of Levi because it is of a higher order – it’s the order of this guy Melchizedek, who we read about in Genesis.

Having just mentioned him, the writer then returns to Christ and says that Jesus performed the tasks of his office as high priest perfectly!

By becoming a man, Jesus acquired for God something important –

first-hand experience of what it means to be human.

As the writer says it here – “He learned obedience by the things He suffered.”

This does not mean that He moved from disobedience to obedience.

Rather, He learned obedience by *actually obeying!*

And this obedience produced in Jesus something more and greater than *simple innocence*.

To be *innocent* means to have done *no wrong*.

In that sense then, innocence is a *negative* word as it refers to the *absence* of wrong – but it does not mean the *presence* of good – just the absence of wrong.

Jesus wasn't merely innocent – He did what was right!

And this doing of what was right produced in Him actual virtue.

Of course – remember that we are speaking of the humanity of Christ here.

The author's point is that Jesus' humanity wasn't merely God play-acting at being man.

Jesus experienced the full gamut of what it means to be human and actually built a lifestyle of virtue as He lived among us.

That's what he means in v. 9 when he says that Jesus was perfected – the word simply meaning complete or mature.

Because Jesus is a perfect high priest, He has become the basis of salvation for all who obey Him, and the obedience He commands is abiding faith in Him as Lord and Savior.

The writer finishes it off with a little comment about how his readers seem to have become a bit dense in their apprehension of the Gospel of Christ.

In fact, this stirs him to give a sharp rebuke to his readers . . .

### **Vs. 12-14**

**12**For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. **13**For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. **14**But solid food belongs to those who are of full

**age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**

In a word, he calls them spiritually immature!

Enough time had passed that they ought to have been playing the role of teachers of the novices of the faith.

But they were still in the novice stage themselves – actually, they had *reverted* to that!

The writer felt that the things he was writing to them were the basics of the faith and ought to have been settled in their hearts long before.

Think of that, what we've been studying, as deep as it sounds to us, the writer calls the milk of the Christian Faith!

Wow- I wonder then what the meat is?

The point of these verse is this – our understanding of the Faith ought to be growing.

Our personal *apprehension* of the Bible and our *application* of it's truths ought to be in evidence in our intellectual and spiritual lives.

If all we can stomach are endless evangelistic sermons or stories about this missionary or that prophet – something is desperately wrong with us.

If a few years have passed since we've come to faith in Christ and we are no more like him than the first week of our conversion, again, something is terribly wrong.

The new birth creates new life – and life by it's very nature and definition grows!

## **CONCLUSION**

The Hebrew Christians were like a bunch of spiritual babies, sitting in their spiritual playpen crying for a bottle of milk.

The author tells them it's time to grow up!

The pressure and trial they were enduring they were buckling under all because they refused to grow up.

God intended to use that pressure to produce some *strength* in them – like a consistent, stiff summer breeze strengthens the wood fibers of a tree and helps it to stand when the winter storms come.

But they were being blown all over because they'd lost their

confidence in Christ.

Our nation is now reeling under a storm of terror.

How will we, the people of Christ respond?

May God give us the grace and the strength to hold forth hope and  
comfort to our world.