

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 4 July 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Christ Is Superior to Aaron

Hebrews 4:14 - 5:4

So far in our study of the book of **Hebrews**, we have seen three ways in which Jesus Christ is superior. Christ is “better than” all the **prophets**; He is “better than” all the **angels**; and He is “better than” **Moses**. Thirteen times in the book of **Hebrews**, Paul used the word “**better**” to describe Jesus.

Now, we need to realise that there is a big difference between the word “**better**” and the word “**greater**.” When Jesus was here on earth, He once told His disciples, “**My Father is greater than I.**” Many false cults latch onto that verse and say, “See? Jesus isn’t equal to the Father. He said that his Father is *greater* than He.” They fail to see that there is a huge difference between “**greater**” and “**better**.”

What *is* the difference? Well, it’s rather simple. The word “**greater**” is translated from the word *meizon*, which means “higher in *position*.” However, the word “**better**” is translated from the word *kreitton*; and *krietton* means “better, nobler, or superior *by nature or quality*.” Do you see the difference? A person may be *lower in rank* than others, yet be *naturally superior* to the people who are over Him. So it is with the Son of God. The Son of God *lowered* Himself in *position* when He left His throne in Heaven to become a man. In *position*, He emptied Himself of all His kingly rights, and made Himself lower than God the Father, lower than the angels, and lower even than earthly kings and rulers.

Now, no earthly illustration could ever fully capture this truth. However, the story of **Peter the Great** of Russia might give us somewhat of an idea. Peter the Great was the tsar of Russia from 1672 to 1725. During his reign, he built up the Russian navy from practically nothing into a powerful force, comparable to other European nations. How did he do this? By temporarily lowering himself in *position*. In 1697, Peter the Great left His throne in Russia, and went on a mission to Western Europe. At the invitation of William III of England and Holland, Peter went to Holland, and worked in the dockyards, so that he might learn about the latest technological advancements in shipbuilding. William III also invited him to come to England in 1698, where he worked as a common labourer in the English shipyards. All this time, few people (except for the King of England, and a few other officials) knew who he was. He went under the false name “Peter Mikhailov.” In *position*, he made himself lower than his nobles back in Russia, and lower even than the foremen in the dockyards. Yet, he never stopped being the tsar of Russia. So it was with Jesus. Even earthly rulers were “greater” than Jesus--in *position*. Yet, Jesus never stopped being “**better in nature**” than angels and men. He never stopped being God.

Why did Paul go to such great lengths to show that Christ is superior? Because many of the **professing Hebrew Christians** in his audience were about to turn away from their profession of Christ, and go back to the Jewish religion. Paul was painfully pointing out to them that if they were really willing to deny Christ, and to turn back to a religion that could not save them, then they had never truly entered into Christ’s “salvation rest” in the first place. They had come to the *threshold* of salvation; but now, they were retreating from it. He was warning them that to turn away from Jesus is to turn away from the only Way of salvation. He was also admonishing **true believers** to stand fast in their profession of Christ, and

not to assume that everyone who claims Christ's name is saved. Rather, they should exhort each other daily, in case any among them were without Christ, and deceived by their own sinful hearts.

Now, at the tail end of **chapter 4**, Paul is switching gears. He is about to tell us about another person to whom Christ is superior. As we shall see, Jesus Christ is **superior to Aaron**, and to the entire **priesthood** of the Old Testament. The title of this message is *Christ Is Superior to Aaron*.

Read Hebrews 4:14 - 5:4.

I. The character of our High Priest (4:14-16)

As Paul wrote this letter, he left no stone unturned in showing that Jesus is superior. He wanted his audience to understand that all the people and institutions that they had been taught to revere were mere types and pictures *pointing* to their true Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophets were great; the angels are great; Moses was great; and, Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, was great. Yet, none of these can save us from our sins. Only Jesus can.

Now, how was it that once-professing followers of Jesus were able to convince themselves that they should abandon Jesus? Perhaps some of them reasoned that Christianity was inferior to Judaism **because it has no elite priesthood**. As they remembered the impressive, beautiful, sensually-appealing ceremonies of the Temple, and compared it to the simple, crude worship of Christianity, perhaps they began to question whether Christianity was real, after all. Perhaps they thought, "While we are crammed together in a small house to worship Jesus, our relatives are worshipping God in a gigantic Temple, dripping with gold and marble, and filled with the smell of sweet incense. While our pastors are dressed in rough clothing, the priests of Judaism are clothed in beautiful garments." To this day, people still follow this line of reasoning. They like their religion because it has a strong appeal to the senses—as well as to human pride. They look at their stunningly beautiful cathedrals, synagogues, or temples, and at their mysterious, beautifully-robed clergy, and say, "Isn't it beautiful? *It must be true!*"

For some of Paul's readers, Christianity's lack of an Aaronic priesthood might have been their big "hang-up." If so, Paul was about to show them that Christ is *superior* to Aaron, and to the Aaronic priesthood. In **verses 14-16**, Paul is giving us an "introduction" to this whole topic, which will continue on through **chapter 7**. Let's look again at **verse 14**. (**Read verse 14.**)

Paul is now getting down to the very heart of the Judaic religion. He is now talking about the high priest. The high priest was the man who made atonement for the sins of the whole nation of Israel. He was the one who went before God for the people. No one was more important than the high priest. Yet, there is Someone who is infinitely more important than all the high priests put together. **Jesus Christ** is our "**great high priest**." He isn't just *another* high priest; He is the *great High Priest*. No high priest of the Old Testament was ever called by such a title. Let's look at some of the claims that Paul makes concerning our Great High Priest.

First of all, Paul says that our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, **has made a once-for-all journey through the heavenly Temple**. Look again at **verse 14**. (**Read verse 14.**) Paul says that our Great High Priest is "**passed into the heavens**." What does he mean by this? At first glance, it would seem that He is talking about when Jesus ascended back to Heaven after His resurrection. However, he is talking about something much deeper than this. Remember the

special journey that the Old Testament high priests made once per year? On Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the high priest took a vessel of goat's blood from the altar of sacrifice, and carried it through the outer court of the Temple, and into the Holy Place. He passed through the veil into the Holy of Holies (which was a symbol of God's throne room), and sprinkled the blood onto the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant (which was a symbol of the throne of God). Once this was done, the sins of Israel were "covered" for another year. From beginning to end, the high priest's journey on the Day of Atonement was a prophetic picture of Jesus Christ, our *true* High Priest. After offering Himself as the perfect Sacrifice for sins, Christ entered into the *heavenly* Temple, and into the very throne room of God the Father, and presented His blood as the perfect, once-for-all atonement for our sins. He then *sat down* on that throne! The high priests of Old Testament times never sat down while they were in the Temple, because his work was never done; but Christ *is seated on His throne*, to show that His atoning work for our sins is done! (By the way, this isn't merely symbolic: there is a literal Temple in heaven! The earthly temple that God ordained for the Jewish nation was patterned after the heavenly one!)

Read Hebrews 9:23-24.

Read Revelation 7:13-15.

As our true High Priest, Christ has made a once-for-all journey through the Heavenly Temple. His atoning work for us is finished. However, Paul has another point to make about our High Priest--namely, **our High Priest has experienced our temptations.** (Hebrews 4:15.)

As a Man, Jesus knew what it *felt like* to face temptation. He has been touched with the "*feeling of our infirmities.*" Now, Jesus never had any *internal inclination* to sin, as we do. He did not have a sin nature, and He never gave in to sin. (This is why Paul is sure to point out that He was "*yet without sin.*") Nonetheless, Jesus did have the full *force of temptation* coming at Him from *without*.

You know, we often complain about how sorely the devil tempts us. However, **we have never known the full force of temptation that Satan could throw at us, if God were to allow him to do so.** Jesus, on the other hand, *has* felt the full force of temptation.

How do I know this? Well, just think about it. Time and time again, *we* have given in to temptation before Satan had pulled out even *half* the weapons in his arsenal! He doesn't even *have* to throw his full arsenal at us. For example, if all Satan has to do to keep a Christian ineffective for Christ is to tempt him with **lustful thoughts**, then he doesn't need to go any further. He has that Christian right where he wants him to be--weak and powerless for Christ. If all it takes for Satan to keep you weak and **ineffective in your witness** is to keep tempting you with a dirty or addictive habit that you don't want to give up, then he doesn't need to go any further. He has you where he wants you. If all it takes to keep you weak and ineffective for Christ is to throw **a little money and success** at you, so that you will be filled with pride and self-sufficiency, and not depend on the Lord, then he's got you where he wants you. If all it takes to **keep you from growing in the Lord** is to tempt you with the desire to watch a television programme instead of coming to church, then he has you where he wants you.

Now, I am not saying that Satan *won't* tempt you into greater wickedness. He certainly will! If you will keep walking into his snares, then he would be more than happy to help entice you into an enormous, destructive, life-scarring sin! However, since you give in to temptation so easily, Satan doesn't have to throw his *full arsenal* at you. As long as you are not any real threat to his kingdom, he is happy enough to let you "play church," all the while keeping you snared in seemingly "little" fleshly temptations, which make you useless for God's service. However, with Jesus, it was a different story. Satan was permitted to pull *out all the stops* on God's Son. Now, maybe you're thinking, "Pastor, you don't understand. I *know* Satan has pulled out all the stops on me. The temptation that I go through is so hard, that I cannot possibly overcome it!" If that is what you think, you are absolutely wrong! **First Corinthians 10:13**, says, "***There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.***" According to this verse, God keeps a hedge of protection around those who belong to Him—not only to protect them physically, but to protect them from the full onslaught of Satan's wiles. He knows our weaknesses; and He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to endure. We *can* be victorious, if we will only trust Him!

We are tempted only *in measure*; but with our Great High Priest, this wasn't so. We are told that Jesus was tempted in *all* points like as we are. Satan was allowed to throw *everything* at Him. Remember the magnitude of Satan's temptation of Christ in **Luke 4**? Satan hit Christ with the "***lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life***" on its highest plain! He tempted Christ with the most evil sin of all--the sin of overt, wilful, knowing worship of Satan. In exchange, Satan offered to give Jesus **all the kingdoms of the world right here and now**, without His having to go to the cross. That's "Temptation 2.0"! You think you've had the "book" thrown at you? You haven't! Jesus, on the other hand, *has* had it thrown at Him. He is truly able to be "***touched with the feeling of our infirmities.***" He's been there!

Now, what else do we need to know about our High Priest? Paul says that **our High Priest has made full access to God's throne possible for us. (Read verse 16 again.)**

For a Jew, the very idea of going *boldly* to God was strange. To them, God was far off, and was not to be approached too closely. Even the high priest of Israel took his life into his hands when he entered the Holy of Holies (which represents God's throne room). If he were ceremonially defiled, God could strike him dead. Yet, because Jesus Christ, our sinless, undefiled High Priest, has paid for our sins once and for all, we are able to come *boldly* to the throne with all our needs! Jesus Christ Himself *sits* on that throne, as our eternal Advocate!

Read Revelation 5:1-7.

Did you notice what John said about the Lamb? He said that the Lamb was in the *midst* of the throne—in the very *seat* of it. The fact that Christ *sits* on God's throne shows that He is *the King!* He is God! Yet, the fact that He *stands up* in the midst of the throne *in the role of an Advocate for man* shows that He is also our *High Priest*—our Mediator. Furthermore, Jesus is described as the *Lamb which was slain*. This shows that He is our *Sacrifice*. Jesus is **King, High Priest, and Sacrifice**, all rolled up in One!

Christian, if this doesn't excite you, it should! Because of what Christ did for you on the cross, you can go *directly* to God the Father. First of all, you can go to Him for **Mercy**. Mercy means “*not* getting what you deserve.” What we deserve is eternity in hell; yet, instead, we can come to Christ for forgiveness of sin, and cleansing. You can also go to Him for **Grace**. Grace is “*getting* what we *don't* deserve.” Grace is divine favour and assistance. God graciously invites His children simply to *ask Him* to supply their needs.

Read Matthew 7:7-11.

Brethren, God's grace is not confined merely to *salvation* (being saved from sin's penalty, and going to heaven). God's grace is *super abundant*. God is ready and able to give us every gift that we need to live our Christian lives. **Divine power** to overcome temptation is a gift of grace. **Wisdom** to know God's will, and how to perform it, is a gift of grace. Our daily bread, food, shelter, job, money, education, health, and even the mental and physical ability to earn our bread, are all gifts of His grace. All these things are available in limitless supply (according to His will) when we come to Him. Are you availing of His grace, Christian?

Paul has shown us the character of our High Priest. He has shown us some of the attributes of Christ in His High-Priestly role. Now, he is ready to dig deeper. Paul now gives us...

II. The qualifications of our high priest (5:1-4)

(Read verses 5:1-4 again.) Having introduced Christ as our High Priest, Paul is now listing the *qualifications* of a high priest. Over the next couple chapters, Paul will prove that Jesus Christ not only meets the qualifications of High Priest, but that He meets them *perfectly*.

The first qualification of a high priest is that **he must be taken from among men to offer up gifts and sacrifices to God.** **(Read verse 1 again.)**

Paul has already gone to great lengths to show that Christ is a true Man. Yet, *all* the Old Testament high priests were men. How, then, is Christ superior to them? To answer that question, we need to look at the second part of **verse 1**. Not only was the high priest taken from among men: he was ordained from among men to **offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins**.

Now, the Old Testament priests certainly could do that. In fact, they did it quite expertly! It is estimated that on Passover evening in Christ's day, a quarter million lambs were slain within a 2 ½ hour time frame. It would have been necessary for the 600 priests to slay 4 lambs per minute in order to get it done! To be sure, the priests were *very* skilled at offering up gifts and sacrifices to God. However, there was a problem: these offerings were only symbolic! Those sacrifices couldn't actually take away sins. Jesus, on the other hand, was, *Himself*, the perfect Sacrifice! His offering of Himself took away our sin!

Read Hebrews 10:1-14.

The next qualification of a high priest is that **he was able to have compassion on the ignorant and erring.** **(Read verse 2 again.)**

Now, to an extent, the Old Testament priests *could* meet this qualification. God had provided special sacrifices for sins that were committed in ignorance; and the priest was well-trained to offer up this particular sacrifice. Of course, beyond the *symbolic* act of offering sacrifices for the sins committed in ignorance, the high priest also needed to be a man of who was *personally* compassionate and longsuffering toward sinners. In this respect, the Old Testament priests could meet this qualification, as well. Remember when **Aaron** fell on his face, along with his brother Moses, and pleaded for the nation of Israel, that God would not wipe them out for their rebellion? That wasn't a mere symbolic act; that was real emotion and compassion!

However, even on this point, there was a problem for the Old Testament priests. **The problem is that the priests were sinners!** Even the most compassionate high priest who ever walked the face of the earth was still a sinner. In fact, because the high priests were sinners, they had to offer up sacrifices for *themselves* before they could offer up the sacrifice for the nation of Israel!

Read Leviticus 16:6, 11-17.

There was a flaw in the Old Testament sacrificial system. The flaw was that the high priest of Israel was, himself, a sinner! The high priest's sacrifice of a bullock for himself and his family was merely a temporary "remedy" for the situation. However, the *real* remedy to this problem was not to be found in the *Old Covenant*. One day, God would correct this problem by sending the *true* High Priest, Jesus Christ, to pay for the sins of *every man* (including all the Old Testament high priests)! Christ is not only our perfect Sacrifice for sins: He is also our true High Priest, who is able to show *perfect* compassion toward sinners.

Christ's compassion toward sinners is unmatched. In His compassion, He was willing to set aside His dignity as God in order to rescue us! It is this very truth that pierced the heart of a devout Muslim lady named Sahar, and wooed her to Christ. In the summer of 2012, Nabeel Qureshi (a former Muslim who received Christ as his Saviour) was speaking to a mostly Muslim audience in Oakland, California. After the lecture, Sahar came up to Nabeel and asked him, "How can you believe Jesus is God if he was born through the birth canal of a woman, and that he had to use the bathroom? Aren't these things below God?" Nabeel responded to her question by asking *her* a question. He said, "Sahar, let's imagine that you are on your way to a very important ceremony, and you are dressed in your finest clothes. You are about to arrive on time; but then you see your daughter drowning in a pool of mud. What would you do? Let her drown, and arrive looking dignified, or rescue her, but arrive at the ceremony covered in mud?" Her response was, "Of course, I would jump in the mud and save her." Nabeel then asked her, "Let's say there were others with you. Would you send someone else to save her, or would you save her yourself?" Sahar again answered that she herself would step in to rescue her daughter. Nabeel then said, "If you, being a human, love your daughter so much that you are willing to *lay aside your dignity* to save her, how much more can we expect God...to lay aside his majesty to save us?" Sahar had no real answer to this question; but about eight weeks later, Nabeel met with Sahar once again. This time, Sahar was beaming with joy, as she testified that she had left Islam, and placed her faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ! The overwhelming love and compassion of our High Priest had seized her heart!¹

Now, before we finish this morning, there is one more qualification of a high priest which we need to consider. Paul says that **a high priest is appointed by God, not by men.** (Read **Hebrew 5:1 and 4 again.**)

Only the men whom *God* appointed to the role of high priest were qualified to be in that position; and God made it very clear who was qualified for the role. First of all, a high priest had to be a descendant of Levi. Secondly, he had to be from the house of Aaron. These were requirements which *God* had laid down; and many men were able to meet those qualifications. **However, once again, there was a problem.** The problem is that **all these men died (and stayed dead)!** Someone else had to take up the office whenever a priest died. This is why a greater Priest was needed. This truth will be developed further as we go through **Hebrews**. However, I don't think I need to tell you who that perfect High Priest is. He is Jesus Christ!

Read Hebrews 7:23-25.

Jesus Christ alone is our true High Priest. He is chosen of God, and not of any man. He is our God. He is our Sacrifice. Anyone who makes Him anyone less, or who claims that someone else can do what He does, is lost, and does not know God. Yet, to this day, religious leaders make such claims. Consider these claims. **Pope Innocent III** said, "The Pope holdeth place on earth, not simply of a man, but of the true God." **Pope Nicholas** said, "I am in all, and above all, so that God Himself, and I, the Vicar of God, hath both one consistory, and I am able to do almost all that God can do." The **Lateran Council**, when addressing **Pope Julian II**, said, "Take care that we lose not that salvation, that life and breath which *thou* hast given us, for *thou* art Shepherd, *thou* art Physician, *thou* art Governor, *thou* art Husbandman, *thou*, finally, art another God on earth."² **Pope Pius X** said, "The Pope is not simply the representative of Jesus Christ: On the contrary, he is Jesus Christ Himself, under the veil of the flesh. Does the Pope speak? It is Jesus Christ who is speaking." **Pope Pius IX** said, "I alone am the Successor of the Apostles, the vicar of Jesus Christ. I am the way, the truth, and the life." **Pope John Paul II** said, "Don't go to God for forgiveness of sins: come to me."

Jesus warned, "**Take heed, that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ: and shall deceive many**" (Matthew 24:4-5). The popes are all dead: **but Jesus, our High Priest, is alive forever more!** The high priests of the *Old Testament* (many of whom were *true* men of God) are all dead; **but Jesus Christ is alive forevermore!** He, and He alone, perfectly meets the qualifications to be our High Priest.

Conclusion: Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, was "**compassed with infirmity.**" Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, was also "**compassed with infirmity.**" However, the difference between these two men is that Aaron, like every other man, was a sinner. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, was sinless. He cannot sin, because He is God. Yet, at the same time, He is also Man. Because he is true God *and* true Man, He was able to be our sinless Sacrifice, and our true High Priest. **Have you come to God by Jesus Christ?** Or are you trusting in your religion and good works? If so, your goodness will not avail; and the mouth

¹ Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), pp. 88-89, 91-92.

² https://radio7.interamerica.org/uploaded_assets/83592

of hell is opened to receive you! Won't you receive Christ instead? **If you know Christ as your Saviour**, I would ask: "Why do you so often neglect the privilege of going to the throne of grace?" Do you need cleansing? Do you need power? It is all available through your High Priest, at any time of day or night. Do you have a need in your life? If so, why don't you talk with Him about it right now?