

Pray, because the Son connects us!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 August 2018

Preacher: Brian King

[0 : 00] Welcome again to those of you who are visiting or new to our church.

We just started a series on prayer and today is the second sermon in six weeks on prayer. If you look at the front of the bulletin, you'll see some of the preaching program for the next few weeks. And you'll see that today we're looking at Hebrews chapter 4 verse 14 to 5 verse 10. And we're particularly thinking about the role of the Son, the Lord Jesus, in prayer.

So if you keep your Bibles open, there's also a sermon outline. But most importantly, of course, let's ask God for his help. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that in your infinite wisdom and kindness, your Holy Spirit will take your word and bring many to know your mercy and grace afresh this morning.

All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now I just ended my prayer with that phrase, in Jesus' name. And I'm guessing that many of you do too.

[1 : 17] You've probably heard it modeled when you were a young Christian, seeing the other Christians around you say it, and you followed along. But do you know what you mean when you say that?

Do you know what you are doing when you are praying in Jesus' name? Perhaps we've never really thought about it. Perhaps we just think of it as the polite way to end a prayer, the religious equivalent of saying, yours sincerely at the end of a letter.

Perhaps it's just a nice way to add a bit of oomph to your requests. The equivalent of adding some spiritual soya sauce to the porridge of your prayers.

That way it doesn't sound so bland. Or perhaps some of us have actually been taught that it's actually very important to pray in Jesus' name.

Because it connects us to power. It's power to claim God's promises, to ensure sickness is gone, to make sure that demon of dizziness is rebuked, or something like that.

[2 : 26] It's almost like a special incantation to release power, to overwhelm whatever obstacles we're facing as we declare his name.

Ironically though, if we think of Jesus' name in that way, we end up making him less powerful, not more powerful. We end up making him smaller, not bigger.

Why? Because we end up limiting him to the wisdom of our wishes. God's ways become like our ways to change that well-known verse from Isaiah.

So for instance, perhaps we might wish for that new, better-paying job. Praying hard for it. But because our wisdom is limited, we don't realise that taking that new job will actually result in the loss of valuable family time.

Or that your new boss is actually a lousy mentor who won't shape your character in the right ways.

Or perhaps we might pray for an immediate cure to sickness. But because our wisdom is limited, we don't realise that our long-term perseverance through that sickness is going to be the key to bring certain family members to Christ.

[3 : 49] So if praying in Jesus' name is simply about claiming power to assist in getting our requests answered, then God ironically gets redeemed to our wisdom, our perception, our partial understanding of the situation.

And then of course, you have the issue of what happens when one farmer here praying in Jesus' name is asking for rain to water his petty fields.

While another farmer there also praying in Jesus' name is asking for sun so that his radishes get the sunlight they need. If Jesus' name is simply about claiming power, who is God going to answer? The one whose prayer is the greatest? The one whose faith is strongest? You can immediately see why that can't be right.

Because that means ultimately we're in charge, not God. It becomes not about how good God is, but about how good your prayer is.

[5 : 00] And I don't know about you, but if that's true, well that makes me anxious. Imagine that. Things are ultimately dependent on my wisdom in prayer.

But here's the good news I want to bring you today. That's not what praying in Jesus' name is all about. When we understand what praying in Jesus' name truly means, it will produce the opposite effect from anxiety.

When we grasp what we are doing when we pray in Jesus' name, it becomes the most freeing thing in the world. You see?

What is praying? I hope from last week, we know that praying is not just something we do. When we think of prayer as simply one of those things Christians have to do, then our focus becomes fixated on getting our technique right or getting our formula right.

We become preoccupied with whether praying in the morning or the evening is better, whether we should stand or kneel, or indeed, whether we should say in Jesus' name.

[6 : 17] Now, it's not wrong to think about those things, but that's not the heart of prayer. For the heart of prayer is simply this. You are speaking to your Father who loves you.

You are speaking to your Father who loves you. That's praying. And when we are praying in Jesus' name, we are simply approaching God the same way Jesus does, as Father.

Think about it. Who is Jesus? He's the Divine Son, something that comes up fairly often in the book of Hebrews. And as the Divine Son, he's always been in relationship with the Father.

He talks to God the Father. He trusts God the Father. He enjoys God the Father. That's how he approaches God. And the most amazing thing is that he now says to us, you can enjoy my Father as your Father.

You're invited into the most intimate friendship group in the universe. Remember last week how he taught his disciples to pray? By beginning with Father.

[7 : 42] Well, that's what praying in Jesus' name is all about. It's about making a connection with the most loving, most generous, and yes, most powerful person in the entire universe.

Because Jesus doesn't connect us to an impersonal force of power, he connects us to God the Father. God the Father. But here's the big question for us this morning.

How do we know that connection works? How can we be certain that connection to the Father doesn't fail? And how can we be sure he wants to connect with us?

I'm sure most of us have caught banks or airlines before. And you know how they love to put you on hold? Sorry, all our lines are busy.

Please hold until one of our customer representatives are free to talk to you. And then you have to listen to Kenny G and wait for half an hour before you finally give up.

[8 : 47] You might have dialed the number you're speaking into your phone, but you're not actually connected to anyone. And perhaps that's our fear about prayer this morning.

We worry that when we pray, we've dialed the number, we are speaking, but we're not actually connected to God.

We are being put permanently on hold. After all, perhaps God doesn't really want to see us or have anything to do with us.

That's our fear. the connection is only one way. I mean, just look at Hebrews 4, verse 13, which is the verse right before our passage this morning. This is what it says.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

[9 : 51] In other words, God knows everything about us. the fact that we shouted at our children right before we went to prayer meeting. The way we get distracted by our smartphones when we resolve to do some Bible reading.

The hard evidence that we are hypocrites, that there's a gap between what we should be and what we actually are. God knows our faults.

So he may be our father, but perhaps he's actually ashamed of us. That's our fear. Because we haven't lived up to his expectations, to his standards.

Perhaps he's disappointed with us, rightly giving us the silent treatment. We should have known better, right? Yes, yes, he loves us, but right now he has to punish us.

Perhaps even disown us. And when we believe that, we shut down. We're ashamed. We know that we're unworthy to come before God, and so better to avoid him.

[11 : 05] When we do pray, we just mumble a few stock phrases and quickly be done with it. Prayer becomes a painful thing because we keep thinking, I don't belong here in the same room as God.

even though it's silly because he knows everything, we feel as if we can't let our true selves be seen by God. So we don't pray.

Better to avoid him, keep secrets from him, not not be in his presence, rather than be exposed and feel small and humiliated and even resentful.

to us the connection is broken. Well, this morning, our passage before us tells us differently.

Our passage tells us we can be certain our connection to God never fails. Even though we remain struggling sinners, our prayers are always heard, always received, always welcomed.

[12 : 12] God isn't trying to hang up. He doesn't slam the phone down. Why? Because of the one in whose name we pray, Jesus.

And Hebrews chapter 4 verse 14 tells us who he is. He's the great high priest. Now, that word priest to our ears is a very religious word, isn't it?

It's not a word you use often in the marketplace or the workplace. And yet, the very thing a high priest does would be familiar to both the marketplace and the workplace.

Because in the Bible, the high priest is a mediator. He specializes in conflict resolution. He's the middleman enduring smooth transactions.

And that's what we need. A mediator, a middleman, a specialist in conflict resolution. We need a connector, someone to bring a holy God to sinful humanity, and sinful humanity to a holy God.

[13 : 33] And Jesus is our great high priest, verse 14 tells us. He brings us to God, and God to us.

But now comes the question, what makes him so great? What makes him better than all the other human high priests? After all, when we read the Old Testament, we discover the other priests are like streamers unified, promising much, but unable to consistently deliver high quality connection. Is he any better? Well, that's what chapter 5, verse 1 to 10 is all about. Hebrews chapter 5 is going to show us the flawless qualifications of this high priest.

And so that's what we're going to look at first. and then towards the end of our time, we're going to unpack the implications. So let's look at what makes Jesus such a great high priest.

Make sure you have the Bible open in front of you. Number one, he has to be a genuine representative, a genuine representative. In chapter 5, verse 1, we're told how a high priest is chosen in the Old Testament.

[14 : 53] 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 sins.

So first of all, he has to be a human being. An angel won't qualify. He has to be one of us. And he has a special task.

He offers gifts of thanksgiving and devotion. And every year, on the day of atonement, he offers sin offerings. That's a special day mentioned in Leviticus 16 where the high priest alone would enter the innermost part of the tabernacle, the Holy of Holies.

And there he has to take in a couple of goats for the people and sprinkle the blood of those animal sacrifices all over the altar and sanctuary. In doing so, atonement is made and sins committed during the entire year, is forgiven.

But although he has a special task, he's not a special class of human being. Verse 2, he is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray since he himself is subject to weakness.

[16 : 15] like those to whom he ministers to, the Old Testament high priest is predisposed to sin. He tends to stumble.

Like every other human being on this earth, even though he doesn't always intend to, he finds himself saying words that he regrets, having thoughts that would shock his friends, giving off an attitude problem when he's tired.

so he knows what it's like. He's not apathetic, pretending sin doesn't matter. Otherwise, why would he bother being a priest offering sacrifices?

But he's not angry, not harsh, knowing from personal experience how he himself is prone to wonder.

After all, verse 3, this is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. So he deals gently with those under his care.

[17 : 25] That's the Old Testament high priest. But what about Jesus? Well, like those priests, Jesus was a genuine human being. For although the beginning of verse 8 tells us he is the divine son, verse 7 reminds us that Jesus is fully man.

He lived life here on earth. And while he was here on earth, verse 8 again, he learned obedience from what he suffered. What does that mean?

Well, let me tell you what it doesn't mean first. It doesn't mean that Jesus previously disobeyed, and therefore now he had to learn obedience. Earlier in Hebrews, Jesus had already been called a faithful high priest, and we know that doesn't mean that he was previously unfaithful.

Rather, this is similar to what we mean when we say of someone. He had to learn from the school of hard knocks. And so Jesus had to go through the school of human hard knocks.

He had to go through the fullness of human experience. Through his sufferings in particular, he understood what it meant to be always obedient to the Father's will.

[18 : 51] Think of his anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, verse 7. He offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death.

And as chapter 4, verse 15 puts it, he has been tempted in every way, just as we are. But here's the key difference between Jesus and the other human high priests.

He was without sin. Like us, he was tempted, but unlike us, he never gave in. In the wilderness, he didn't listen to the devil, but to his father.

In the garden, he prayed, not my will, but yours be done. On the cross, in humility, he deliberately stayed weak for the sake of others.

He graduated with flying colors from the school of hard knocks. That's what verse 9 means when it says he was made perfect. another way of saying it is that he scored a perfect 4.0 CGPA.

[20 : 10] He was perfect, and yet as a real man with real human experiences, he can sympathize with us. He can deal gently with us.

Just watch the way he restores Peter in John 21. Go home and read it on your own later. To paraphrase the great preacher Spurgeon, Christ did not have the character of sin, but he did have the character of suffering.

His were true infirmities or weaknesses. There was no evil about him, but still he had the infirmity of misery, and he had it to a greater extent than we have.

Jesus is a great high priest because he was a genuine representative. He was fully qualified, truly human, truly frail and experienced in suffering, and yet without sin.

But that's not all. Here's qualification number two. He has to be appointed by God. Appointed by God. That's the second condition for the high priest in the Old Testament given in chapter 5, verse 4.

[21 : 35] And no one takes this honour on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was. The priest must not only be human to represent humans, but be approved by God to make representation before God.

That honour in Israel's history fell to Aaron, who in Exodus 28 was appointed without fanfare. And since then, the priesthood belonged to Aaron's descendants, the tribe of Levi.

But what about Jesus? Well, like the Old Testament priest, he too was appointed by God. But the key difference is that he comes from a more ancient order, the order of Melchizedek.

Just look at verses 5 and 6 with me. In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, you are my son, today I have become your father. And he says in another place, you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. This guy, Melchizedek, is a bit of a mysterious figure.

[22 : 50] He appears in Genesis 14 where he is identified both as the king of Salem and as a priest. And after winning some battles, Abraham meets him and gives him an offering.

And then Melchizedek blesses him. And then he vanishes from the scene before reappearing in Psalm 110 verse 4, which is quoted here in Hebrews. And so Jesus is identified as someone who is just like this priest-king, Melchizedek.

He's the king of righteousness. That's what Melchizedek means. And he's the king of peace because that's what Salem or Shalom means.

He has been appointed by God to bring about peace and righteousness. righteousness. And that's what ultimately makes Jesus such a great high priest.

He brings about both peace and righteousness as the source of our salvation. Verse 9, time. And once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

[24 : 13] Like the human high priest, Jesus enters the holy of holies. But he enters the real thing. Just look at 4 verse 14. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended not into the human sanctuary but into heaven, Jesus enters the very presence of God.

And just like on the day of atonement, blood has to be sprinkled. But it's not animals this time, but the blood of the great high priest himself, shed on the cross before he rises and ascends into heaven.

And he doesn't come out of the tabernacle like the human high priest, only to have to cleanse himself and repeat this ritual all over again the following year.

No. Later on in Hebrews, in chapter 7, verse 23 to 26, we are told what this great high priest is doing now in heaven.

It's on the screen. Now, there have been many of those priests, that's the human priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office. But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

[25 : 36] Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest truly meets our need, one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

This is the great high priest in whose name we pray. He's eminently qualified. Have you ever tried booking the royal penthouse at Hotel President Wilson in Geneva, Switzerland?

it's got a super exclusive suite, which goes at about \$59,000 per night. And if I tried to book it in my name, well, I'll be laughed out.

But if I booked it in the name of Bill Gates, you can bet that I'll be getting the five-star treatment, because he's eminently qualified.

Well, this is the kind of access that Jesus grants us before God. So what does all this mean? Well, I think the key word is right there in chapter 4, verse 16.

[27 : 04] Here's the key implication. Confidence. Because of Jesus, we have complete confidence to come before God with extreme boldness.

Because of Jesus, we can march into the throne room without the need to make an appointment. Because of Jesus, we don't have to worry about having the right words to say or having the right credentials before we can speak to him.

We don't have to be a pastor, a super-Christian, or a long-term Bible study attendee. In Jesus' name, we can pray with confidence.

What underlies this confidence? What is it that we can be confident about? Well, let me just highlight two things. Firstly, we can be confident that Jesus knows what you're going through. Jesus knows what you're going through. He really does. perhaps we are thinking, oh, sure, he became human, but he's still God, right?

[28 : 17] But imagine for a moment a strong and wealthy king. He has every privilege in the world, dressed by the most talented tailors, fed by the best cooks, protected by the finest soldiers, attended to by the most brilliant doctors.

men. But imagine he decides to live in the slums of his city as a beggar. So now he has to put on the torn, smelly clothes of the homeless.

He has to go hungry and beg for food. Upon falling sick, he has no access to good health care. And when insulted and even beaten up by gangsters, he simply has to tolerate it.

Now this king, through all this, is still king. He hasn't stopped being king. He still possesses all those privileges.

But because he is genuinely living as a beggar, he cannot live according to all the privileges he has as king. He really experiences what it's like to be a beggar.

[29 : 26] And that's Jesus. He really does know what you're going through. Look at how emphatic 4 verse 15 is. For 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. Any physical pain you're going through now? He experienced it on the cross.

People who are being unfair to you and mistreating you, he experienced it on the cross. Betrayal by those close to you, he experienced it on the cross.

Seeing your life's work and accomplishments lying in ruins, he experienced it on the cross. Hatred by enemies, he experienced it on the cross.

A feeling of shame because of something that happened to you, he experienced it on the cross.

Fatigue, loneliness, grief, he experienced it on the cross.

[30 : 32] A sense of abandonment by God himself, he experienced it on the cross. God knows what it's like to experience the fallenness of this life.

And in Christ, he knows the full force of temptation, the desire to rage against others, the propensity to turn inwards for self-pity, the willingness to turn to created things for ultimate comfort.

God, and he resisted the full force of temptation on our behalf. And that's why we can take all those things to him, our circumstances, our sin.

He knows. He can connect with your experience. And he will deal gently with us. For we come in the name of this great high priest.

So come with confidence and tell him all about it. Secondly, we can be confident that Jesus connects us to God as the perfect representative.

[31 : 47] He's the all-sufficient mediator. And because he represents us, there is no need for us to ever worry that our prayers are unacceptable. There is no need for us to ever worry that our prayers are ineffective.

There is no need for us to ever worry that our prayers will receive a rejection slip. Think again about the fact that we pray in Jesus' name.

And what that means is that we come to God not on the basis of the strength of my faith, or my goodness, or my very best works, or my past performance in my prayer life, we come on the basis of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

And that means Jesus turns you into someone who can pray. Many of us probably think of ourselves as being bad at prayer. We're not like those prayer warriors, whoever they are, we think. But that's the wrong way to think about it. As the pastor Tim Chester insightfully puts it, prayer is not something you can be good or bad at.

[33 : 04] It's not a skill to master or a discipline to practice. It's more like being a passenger in a car. I can choose to get into the car or not. But once I'm in it, I can't claim to be good or bad at being transported along.

The car does all the work. I just sit there. And in prayer, Jesus has done all the hard work. And I just talk. You see, God hears you through the perfect connection of his son.

So it doesn't matter whether you're eloquent or not. It's not about the rhetoric. It's about the relationship. So approach him with confidence.

And if Jesus is the high priest who connects us perfectly to God, well, that also means that we don't need some other special person or some special technique or some special ritual to make our prayers better.

prayer. There was a famous Carmelite nun called Teresa of Avila who lived centuries ago. And she wrote this book called *The Interior Castle*.

[34 : 18] And hearing how she talks about prayer just makes my head spin. She imagines the soul like a castle with seven mansions. And to advance in prayer to reach God, we have to go on a spiritual journey through these seven mansions.

Then there's all these spiritual things that we're told to do like meditation, active recollection, whatever that is, devotion to Mary, and so on.

But the Bible says we don't need all that. We only need to trust that God's son, Jesus, connects us to God.

And then we speak to God. That's it. Nothing more, nothing less. Wander into a bookstore nowadays and under the prayer section, you can find all sorts of books like *Celtic Prayer*, *Warfare Prayer*, *Prayer Altars*, and so on, ready to tell you how to become more advanced in your prayer life.

But the Bible says Christ is enough. As the Bible puts it elsewhere in *Colossians 2*, verse 8, See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

[35 : 48] Our great high priest is enough for us to speak to God. Well, as we finish, I just want to draw your attention to one more thing from this passage, and that is to see that prayer in Jesus' name is part and parcel of holding fast to God.

Notice the logic of chapter 4, verse 14 to 16. What's the main exhortation is right there at the end of verse 14. Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Why do we do so? Verses 14 and 15 tell us. Because we have a great high priest who can empathize with us. But how are we then to hold fast?

Verse 16, by approaching God's throne with confidence. I don't think verse 16 is meant to be a separate instruction. Rather, it's actually telling us how, we hold fast.

It's as we continuously come to God, ready to receive his mercy and grace. And if so, then that gives us renewed motivation to pray.

[37 : 08] My little toddler, Lucas, loves to climb up and downstairs. But as he climbs up, he often needs to hold tightly to my hand. He'll say, Papa, and then immediately reach to grab my hand.

And that's a little illustration of our relationship to God. When we pray in Jesus' name, we cry, Papa, and as we do so, we grab hold his hand.

And we grip his open hands tightly. God and that's what it means to hold firmly to the faith we profess. It means holding on tightly to the God of this gospel.

It means coming to him in prayer. Because that's our greatest need of all, to receive his mercy and grace. And there's no need to be shy about it.

God encourages us to. God in many ways, all we've been thinking about this morning is the gospel applied to prayer. For the basis of prayer is the basis of our relationship to God.

[38 : 16] And that basis is the gospel. The great truth that Jesus' death and resurrection has brought us near to God. And that's why we keep holding fast to it.

If you're not a Christian here this morning, which means you don't know Jesus as your great high priest, well the invitation is right there right now for you to reach out and grab hold of God's open hands.

And when that happens, we can be supremely confident that we can approach God anytime, anywhere. Pray because the sun connects us.

let's connect with him now. Father, it is a great joy that we can indeed call you Father, that you're not just a God out there, far away, but you've come close to us in the person of your son Jesus Christ.

thank you that your son Jesus is this great high priest for us, the mediator, the middleman, the conflict resolution specialist who brings us close to you.

[39 : 42] Thank you that in your name, in the name of your son, we can approach you anytime, anywhere, with great confidence, we can run into your presence.

So, Father, please help us to take hold of that privilege. Help us to run to you continuously for your mercy and grace, knowing that you know exactly what we're going through, whatever our experiences this morning.

Lord, you know that there are probably some of us this morning who are going through difficult times. Lord, let them know that they can reach out to you. And, Father, we pray that for those of us who might not be experiencing such times, we pray that we won't take you for granted, we won't take our great high priest for granted, but every day we seek to love you more and more as we speak to you.

All this we pray in Jesus' name.