

Dr. David A. deSilva, Hebrews, Session 5

Hebrews 4:14-5:10: A Great High Priest

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Abstract

This session of Dr. David deSilva's lecture series on Hebrews focuses on Hebrews 4:14–5:10, exploring the theme of Jesus Christ as our great and sympathetic high priest. DeSilva breaks down the passage into three key moves: analyzing the general function of priests, establishing Jesus' divine appointment to this office, and examining his preparation through suffering and obedience. The discussion highlights the dual nature of Jesus' priesthood—possessing divine authority and cosmological proximity as Son while remaining intimately sympathetic to human weakness through his earthly trials. Ultimately, this passage reassures believers of the availability of timely divine help and urges ongoing obedience and confident prayer.

Outline

I. Introduction to Hebrews 4:14–5:10: A Great High Priest

A. Transition and Contrast in the Sermon's Rhetoric

1. Hebrews 4:12–13: Appeal to fear of encountering God due to faithlessness
2. Hebrews 4:14–16: Appeal to confidence and drawing near to God in connection with Jesus

B. Structural Connection to Earlier Material

1. Based on Hebrews 2:16–3:1, where a sympathetic and faithful high priest was first introduced
2. Initiates the detailed study of Jesus' priesthood (which continues in Chapter 7)

C. The Three Key Analytical Moves of Chapter 5

1. Function of priests in general (Hebrews 5:1–3)
2. Jesus' divine appointment to the office (Hebrews 5:4–6)
3. Jesus' preparation to fill the office (Hebrews 5:7–10)

D. Strategic Pause and Digression

1. Pause in exposition from Hebrews 5:11 to 6:20
2. Challenging the audience to pay attention and avoid drifting

II. The Core Appeal of the Sermon: Boldly Holding Fast (Hebrews 4:14–16)

A. The Core Exhortations

1. "Let us hold on to our confession" (Hebrews 4:14)
2. "Let us draw near with boldness to the throne of favor" (Hebrews 4:16)

B. Structural Framing (The Inclusio / Bracketing)

1. Paralleled exactly in Hebrews 10:19–23 on the other side of the central priestly discourse
2. Both sections begin with having a great high priest, exhort holding fast, and urge drawing near

C. Believers' Gains vs. Social/Economic Losses

1. Focus on what believers "have" rather than what they lost socially or economically
2. Boldness to enter the heavenly sanctuary, an anchor for the soul, and a heavenly altar

D. The Significance of Jesus as the "Son of God"

1. Not just status, but strategic proximity to the divine fount of favor
2. Ability to successfully secure timely mercy and help for his followers

E. Cosmology and the Ascension

1. Crossing through the heavens (plural in Greek, indicating the visible/temporary material creation)
2. Entering the eternal realm (abiding reality) on the far side of the visible heavens

F. The Meaning of "Confession" (Homologia)

1. Not a static body of beliefs, but an active, spoken, and lived witness
2. Act of parrhesia (boldness) in the face of unsupportive neighbors

G. The Sympathetic Character of Jesus as High Priest

1. Tested in every way as humans are, but without sin
2. Combines the benefits of a superhuman mediator with a fully sympathetic human experience

III. The Definition and Qualities of a Priest (Hebrews 5:1–3)

A. General Role of a Priest (Based on the Pentateuch)

1. Taken from among human beings to stand on their behalf in things regarding God
2. Act as "brokers" to secure divine benefits and offer gifts/sacrifices for sins

B. The Essential Quality of Sympathy

1. Ability to moderate passions toward the "ignorant and wandering" (accidental or non-willful sins)
2. Derived from the priest's own personal liability to weakness and sin

C. Levitical High Priest vs. Jesus' Sinlessness

1. Levitical priests must offer sin offerings for themselves first (Leviticus 16 Day of Atonement)
2. Jesus, being sinless, requires no self-atonement, making his mediation perfect

IV. Divine Appointment to the Priesthood (Hebrews 5:4–6)

A. The Requirement of a Divine Call

1. Priesthood is an appointed honor, not an office taken on own initiative (e.g., Aaron)
2. Strict boundaries in Israelite tradition (restricted to Tribe of Levi and specific clans)

B. Scriptural Warrant for Jesus' Appointment

1. Synthesis of two Messianic Texts:

a. Psalm 2:7: "You are my son, today I have begotten you" (Dignity of Kingship)

b. Psalm 110:4: "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Dignity of Priesthood)

2. Psalm 110 as royal and messianic warrant for a non-Levitical priesthood

C. The Literal Reading of "Forever"

1. Resurrection to an indestructible life enables Jesus to serve in perpetuity

V. Jesus' Preparation and Perfection through Suffering (Hebrews 5:7–10)

A. Passionate Piety in the "Days of His Flesh"

1. Offering prayers and intercessions with loud cries and tears
2. Prayers to the "one who was able to save him from death"
3. Parallel with Second Temple literature on the prayers of the pious (e.g., 2 and 3 Maccabees) rather than just Gethsemane

B. Heard on Account of Piety, Not Nepotism

1. "Although he was a son" (Greek *kaiper*) qualifies his being heard
2. God's response was due to virtue and dedication, not favoritism (fair model for believers)

C. Learning Obedience (Greek Pun: *emathen*, *epathen*)

1. Learned obedience from the things he suffered
2. Pioneer for believers undergoing their own educational discipline (Chapter 12)

D. Being "Perfected" (*Telos*)

1. Not fixing flaws, but bringing to completion or final goal
2. Culminates in ascension, passing into the heavenly realm, and being seated at God's right hand
3. Becoming the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

VI. Practical and Pastoral Applications for Today

A. The Importance of Persistent Prayer

1. Accessing the "throne of favor" as a primary benefit won by Jesus

B. Embodying Sympathy in Christian Ministry

1. Remembering personal weakness and dependence on God to maintain a gentle, non-judgmental spirit

C. Reframing Hardship and Suffering

1. Sufferings endured for alignment with Jesus are training ground for spiritual maturity and obedience

D. The Cost and Priorities of Witness

1. Choosing divine allegiance over societal approval, moving closer to the center of the cosmos