

Jesus the Great High Priest

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, March 3, 2024
PASSAGES	Hebrews 4; Hebrews 5; Hebrews 6
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:16:28 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Hebrews sets a great high priest in front of you and then asks, in effect, what you feel when you look at him. Matt's answer is that this priest deals gently — he brought the offering, he knew how to offer it correctly, and he was the offering. What the writer of Hebrews is afraid of is not people who know too little, but people who can hear that news forever and never take it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ What you already assume about God decides how you hear “high priest.” One envelope produced three different reactions in one school office, and none of them were about the envelope.
- ◆ The Old Testament priesthood was not a barrier keeping you at a distance from God. The priest took your offering, made sure it was offered correctly, and put the name of the Lord on you.
- ◆ Jesus does everything a priest did and one thing no priest could: he brought the offering himself. That is why your salvation is not resting on how well you handled it.
- ◆ “Being made perfect” does not mean flawed and then repaired. It means brought to completion — through his death and resurrection he became what he was always meant to be.
- ◆ You can walk away from the confession two ways: by rejecting it outright, or by piling additions onto it until it is no longer grace.
- ◆ The milk-and-solid-food complaint is not that these people need more information. It is that they keep needing the foundation laid again because they have never actually received it.
- ◆ Milk versus solid food, the warning about falling away, and the field that grows thorns are one argument made three times, not three separate threats.

► 1:16:28

Hebrews so far has been an argument that the gospel can be trusted because Jesus can be trusted: greater than Moses, greater as leader and prophet and priest and king, and finally the Creator himself. This week the letter pivots at the end of chapter 4 into a new claim — that he is also the greater, more reliable, more perfect high priest. Matt admitted straight away that this is not automatically good news to everyone in the room. We all bring assumptions to the table.

1. A subpoena, and three faces

► 1:17:39

The story he told to make the point comes from 2007, his first year teaching algebra. The prom sponsor was struggling; Matt volunteered as the helper; the sponsor promptly quit. The class had no money, so he and the students bought chips out of pocket, bagged them with hot sauce, and sold them. That became boxes of chocolate bars from Sam’s, bought with the chip money, sold, and reinvested — exponentially — with the cash coming home with him.

The school bookkeeper explained that a fundraiser needs prior approval, a firm start date, a firm stop date, approved goods from approved vendors, and receipts. He had none of these. “I was basically running a highly successful chocolate-based crime syndicate that comprised just one man and a bunch of minors selling illegally obtained goods on government property.” The bookkeeper added that she was retiring, and the district always audits a school when the bookkeeper retires.

► 1:22:28

So when a well-dressed stranger handed him an envelope at the front office at the end of that year, Matt opened it braced for jail — Mandy was pregnant. It was a subpoena naming him a character witness in a student’s parents’ divorce. The office staff already knew, and had said nothing, because watching him sweat was the best show on earth.

► 1:24:28

One encounter, three reactions: delight from the staff, panic from Matt, boredom from the process server. “Our perspectives matter,” he said — and this is the question he wanted people carrying into Hebrews. Is a great high priest a relief to you, or is it noise, or is it a threat? Are we glad Jesus is our Good Shepherd because he is trustworthy and good, or nervous about him because we suspect he is a slavish taskmaster?

2. Hold fast, and draw near

► 1:25:04

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

HEBREWS 4:14–16 ↗

Two instructions: hold fast, and draw near with confidence. Matt pressed on both. The confession being held is Christ’s sacrifice alone for our sin, and with it redemption, inclusion, adoption — and earlier in the same chapter the writer has already said it is those who believe who enter his rest, not those who performed properly beforehand. And you are only told to hold on to something if there is a pull to let go. There are two ways to let go: reject the confession outright, or pile on to it.

3. What a priest was actually for

► 1:27:09

“For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.”

HEBREWS 5:1–4 ↗

► 1:28:55

The hinge of the argument, Matt said, is that Christ likewise did not exalt himself but was appointed — a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, the priest-king who turns up in the Abraham stories. Same humility, so the same expectation follows: he acts on our behalf, and he deals gently. That is how we can trust every move he makes.

► 1:30:16

Which exposes the assumption most of us carry about the priesthood — that it existed to keep the unclean out. What did a priest actually do? He received your offering. He made sure it was offered correctly, because he was the professional who had studied Leviticus and you had not. And then he blessed you.

“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

NUMBERS 6:24–26 ↗

Matt worked it through the eyes of a poor Israelite carrying a pigeon because he could not afford a sheep — a provision written into the law precisely for him — and having no idea how to offer it. The priest has you. “This was not a barrier of entry so as to make sure you know the Lord wants distance between you and him. It’s the opposite.” The priest puts the name of the Lord on you and brings your offering, and you, in.

► 1:31:25

“But here’s the difference,” Matt said. “He also brought the offering.” Jesus is the priest who knows how to offer it correctly and the offering itself, God made flesh presenting himself. Your salvation is solid because the competence in the transaction is not yours.

4. “Being made perfect”

► 1:33:21

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.”

HEBREWS 5:7-10 ↗

Two words got attention. First, that Jesus prayed with loud cries and tears to the one able to save him from death, “and he was heard.” It is not the case that heaven fell silent at the cross. “You’re like, well, but he died. Yeah — but he didn’t stay dead.”

► 1:33:55

Second, *perfect*. In modern English it means without flaw, which makes the sentence sound like a repair job. In Greek it can mean brought to completion, fulfilled, finalized — arriving at what a thing was always for. He was made perfect in the sense that through his suffering and resurrection he became the source of eternal salvation and our high priest. That is the completion.

5. Milk, solid food, and a frustrated preacher

► 1:35:37

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food... But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”

HEBREWS 5:11-14 ↗

Matt had the room make two columns, milk and solid food. Into milk go basic principles and childlikeness; into solid food, maturity and trained discernment. He offered a caution on that last phrase: the contrast may be less about waking up each day adjudicating good and evil than about a Hebrew idiom — in Deuteronomy the children who know neither good nor evil are simply the ones who are not yet adults. He was careful to say he could not prove it.

► 1:38:16

Then Hebrews 6:1–3: leave the elementary doctrine and go on to maturity, without laying the foundation again. This is not a claim that mature Christians graduate from Jesus to memorizing Zephaniah. The complaint is that these people need the altar call, the foundation, the basics, over and over — and the frustration is not that the basics are unimportant. It is that something in them is being heard and not received.

6. One argument, made three times

► 1:40:15

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.”

HEBREWS 6:4–6 ↗

Next Sunday is a close reading of these verses, and Matt was deliberate about not leaving them hanging alone — Hebrews was written as one sermon, so you do not lift a nugget out of it and panic. He laid out the two readings people bring. One: if someone has tasted everything and still holds Christ in contempt, there is simply nothing further to tell them; there is no secret chapter after the index. Two: Jesus died once, so you get one shot, and the moment you fail the hammer falls, because he never really wanted you. “I’m trying to leave you with some hope,” he said. “That second reading is insane.”

► 1:42:31

“For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.”

HEBREWS 6:7–8 ↗

The rain fell on both fields. The seed was sown on both. The difference is how the soil received it — which is the milk complaint again, and the warning again. Three images, one point.

7. Do you trust this Shepherd?

► 1:46:24

“Eternal life, redemption, and inclusion into God’s family doesn’t come from knowing more and more about the gospel,” Matt said — “in addiction to hearing it articulated over and over again in more and more fancy ways. It’s from believing it truly.” The question he left the room with was blunt: “I know you know about Jesus, but do you know him?”

► 1:48:47

And the throne we are told to approach is not a bench of hateful zeal. It is a throne of grace, and we are told to come to it with confidence, while it is still today. He closed by praying the priestly blessing over the church — the same words a priest once spoke over a poor man with a pigeon.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- John 10:11
- Hebrews 4:14–16
- Hebrews 4:3
- Hebrews 5:1–4
- Hebrews 5:5–6
- Genesis 14:18
- Numbers 6:24–26
- Hebrews 5:7–10
- Hebrews 5:11–14
- Deuteronomy 1:39
- Hebrews 6:1–3
- Hebrews 6:4–6
- Hebrews 6:7–8

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. When you hear that Jesus is your great high priest, what is your honest first reaction — relief, boredom, or something closer to panic? What in your history shaped that?
2. Matt described the priest as the one who received your offering, offered it correctly for you, and put God's name on you. Where have you been treating God's provision as a barrier instead of a welcome?
3. "Hold fast our confession" assumes a pull to let go. Which pull do you feel more — walking away outright, or quietly adding requirements to grace until it stops being grace?
4. The frustration in Hebrews 5 is with people who keep hearing the foundation and never receive it. Where is that description uncomfortably close to you?
5. What would it look like this week to draw near to the throne of grace with confidence rather than at a careful distance?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obFyBreWF5A&t=4588s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.