

Follow the Great High Priest

✦ **He paid the price of obedience. (vv.7-8)**

✦ **He leads the way to glory. (vv.8-9)**

In the Name of Jesus, God's Son our Great High Priest, dear obedient Christians:

In our human blindness people sometimes ask, "What has God done for me lately?" They don't know God. He reveals Himself on the pages of the Holy Scriptures of the Bible in order to bring His rebellious creatures back into a healthy, happy relationship with their Creator. After the failures of all the prophets, priests and kings of ancient Israel, God kept His promise and sent His Son to be the ultimate Prophet, Priest and King. Many religious leaders have claimed they are "*the Prophet*," "*but in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*" (1:2 NIV84) None of those pseudo-prophets dare to claim Christ's kingship over sin, death and hell – all the worst enemies of our bodies and souls. But where God really makes this personal for us is by revealing Jesus as our **Great High Priest**. He is the one Mediator between God and all people, the one who represents God to us and us to God. **Follow the Great High Priest.**

✦ **He paid the price of obedience. (vv.7-8)**

It takes less than an hour to listen to this series of sermons for Jewish Christians, the Bible book we call Hebrews. Few of us can imagine how difficult it was for them. Cultural Jews persecuted them as traitors for following Jesus as the Messiah. Life would be so easy to just forget Jesus and go back to Judaism. But the unidentified holy writer keeps pointing to Jesus. He is superior in every way. As God's Son, Jesus is greater than all the angels, greater than Moses, so great that Jesus is pure Sabbath-Rest for the people of God. That's why God calls out again through this preacher to the Hebrews, "*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*" (4:7)

Sometimes modern preachers will say, "I felt a call." Not even Jesus did that. He was appointed as **the Great High Priest** by God the Father in eternity before time began. Quoting from Psalms 2 and 110, the preacher says: "*Christ also did not take upon 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.'*" (5:5f NIV84) It's a fascinating study to trace out Melchizedek in Hebrews and go back to Genesis 14 where he's first mentioned with Abraham. We don't have time for the details now. But note how great and awesome this is. God's Son was appointed to come down from the glories of heaven to this sin-cursed earth in order to serve as our **Great High Priest**.

That's where this gets very personal and painful for Jesus. His Hebrew name, Yashah, literally means the Wide-Way Maker, or Deliverer. The pre-incarnate Christ was the Angel of the LORD who made a wide way through the Red Sea so Israel could cross over on dry ground. In the Exodus from Egypt He used His awesome power bring the sea back on Pharaoh and his superpower army. But "*during the days of Jesus' life on earth,*" He put His full Godhead into the narrow confines of a human body and submitted Himself to unjust laws by political and religious leaders. It was so painful for Jesus that "*he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death.*" All through His life Jesus could see the cross coming. He had the power to stop it, but His love would not let Him. Jesus felt its agony and poured out His heart to the Father to "*save him from death.*"

Didn't the Father answer with silence? Jesus was sweating great drops of blood praying, "*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.*" (Luke 22:42 NIV84) Jesus,

our **Great High Priest**, needed an angel from heaven to come and strengthen him. If the Father had sent legions of angels to rescue Jesus, it would have cost us eternal torment and suffering in hell for our sins. Jesus suffered death, then conquered death by rising again. Finally Jesus was “*heard for his reverent submission*” when the Father raised Him from the dead on Easter. What power He gives for our prayers!

You might wonder, how did Jesus “*learn obedience from what he suffered*”? Didn’t He always obey the Father in heaven? As a twelve-year-old in the temple, Jesus was busy about His heavenly Father’s business even when mother Mary and stepfather Joseph failed to understand. He surely knew obedience by experience in Gethsemane. The Greek original uses a word that could be translated, “He was *schooled* in obedience.” In the “school of hard knocks” caused by our foolishness and disobedience Jesus paid the great cost in pain and suffering for our sins to give us the obedience God demands. “*He became obedient to death – even death on a cross!*” (Philippians 2:8) By submitting in prayer and suffering all the way through the cross and tomb, Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father in the ultimate sacrifice. Our **Great High Priest** made Himself the victim to bring us into a right relationship with God. **He paid the price of obedience** in blood, sweat and tears. We will never exhaust the wonder of that!

✠ He leads the way to glory. (vv.8-9)

“*Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*” Again, you might ask, “Wasn’t Jesus already *perfect*?” Yes, in the holy, sinless sense as the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God. Here again the original Greek literally means, *he came to the goal*. Jesus had been telling His disciples for months that He would suffer and die by betrayal to the Gentiles, but that on the third day He would rise again. He would reach the goal of paying for our sins all the way to eternal life on the other side of the grave. Once he reached that goal, “*he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*”

So do you “*obey him*”? Many people think that if they try hard enough, they’ll finally get it right and be back with God. One problem with that: God does not say, “~~Be~~come holy...,” or “~~Be~~come perfect...” God says, “*Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.*” And again Jesus in the New Testament: “*Be perfect...as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” (Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48 NIV84) How can any of us “*Be holy...*” and “*Be perfect...*” when God says not one of us is good? (Romans 3:9-20)

Let’s pay more careful attention. God says Jesus is “*the source of eternal salvation.*” He’s the Author and the Cause of our salvation. Then our obedience comes willingly in a most wonderful way that only God could conceive. First, God takes away our guilt and fear by crucifying our sin on His Son Jesus. Then He gives us confidence to come with heartfelt prayers to the throne of grace by raising Jesus from the dead. He puts His Name on us in our Baptism and adopts us into His family. “*Jesus is not ashamed to call [us] brothers and sisters.*” (2:11 NIV11) His loving kindness and tender mercy gives us His body and blood to win us back to God. When we **Follow the Great High Priest**, we learn to hate sin because of what it cost Jesus for our obedience. We learn to love God’s ways because they express our gratitude to God and help our neighbor. With all our hearts we want to follow Jesus as **He leads the way to glory**.

Are you perfect now? Yes, my dear friends! By faith in Jesus you are perfect in God’s sight. God kindly counts our faith as perfect obedience because of Jesus. He says, “*By one offering [Jesus] has perfected forever those who are sanctified*” (10:14 HCSB), i.e. holy. In God’s sight we have already reached that goal of perfection. Now in our hearts and lives we want to “*live up to what we have already attained.*” (Philippians 3:16) “*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*” (10:26f NIV84) Instead our faith wants to deliberately keep giving God the glory through our own tears and suffering which will all end in **glory** with God. Amen.