



PERSON OF CHRIST

LESSON 4

HEBREWS THROUGH TO THE REVELATION

It may well be said that the whole of the letter to the Hebrews is written on one text, "Let us draw near" (10:22). Its central idea is the new and free approach to God, which has become possible through Jesus Christ. Hebrews is unique in its presentation of Jesus: it concentrates on **WHAT HE IS DOING NOW FOR US**.

Hebrews presupposes an extensive knowledge of the Old Testament, particularly Leviticus. The opening ascription of praise to Christ (1:1-4), is able to be compared with John 1:1-18; Col. 1:15-20; Phil. 2:5-11 and other great passages setting out Christ's divinity.

Like the other New Testament writers, the writer to the Hebrews follows the outline of the common preaching, but his main emphasis, as we have already seen, concerns the present work of Christ. Through His work as High Priest and sacrifice, we are able to **DRAW NEAR** to God. To "draw near" was ever the concern of God's people. The Old Testament emphasised God's holiness and man's sinfulness - a great gulf separated them. Hebrews teaches us that through Christ, the gulf has been bridged and now we may "draw near" in confidence. To this end, the writer to the Hebrews describes Jesus under five great terms.

1. Jesus the Author

Jesus is the "archegos" of our faith (12:2). The AV renders "author", with "beginner" in the margin; the RV "author", with "captain" in the margin; the NRSV and Moffat "pioneer"; Weymouth "Prince Leader"; Phillips "source"; and The Good News Bible speaks of Jesus "on whom our faith depends from beginning to end".

Obviously, the word is not easy to render. It has two lines of meaning. Firstly, it does mean a prince, a leader, a commander. Secondly, its more characteristic meaning is that of a beginner of something which still exists. Thus, it can mean the founder of a city, of a family, of a school of philosophy, the one who blazes a trail for others to follow in his footsteps. Someone has used the analogy from a shipwreck. If a ship is wrecked, and some gallant man swims ashore with a rope along which others can follow in safety, that man is the "archegos". He went first, to make it possible for others to follow. So, Jesus is the pioneer who blazes the way into the presence of God that we may follow.

2. Jesus the Forerunner

Jesus is the "forerunner" (6:20). This is a military word, and these were the scouts who went ahead to see that it was safe for the main body to follow. It has been said that the word was used to describe the pilot boat which sailed in front of the larger vessels, as they entered the harbour of Alexandria, to show them where the right channel was. Here we have the same idea again. Jesus goes first, for us to follow.



3. Jesus the Guarantor and Mediator of the Covenant

Central to the thought of the writer to the Hebrews is the idea of the "covenant", and, in this connection he uses two other terms about Jesus. Jesus is the surety, or guarantor, of a better covenant (8:6, 9:15, 12:24). The covenant was a relationship between God and Israel in which God, in His free spontaneous grace, had chosen Israel to be his people and had offered himself as their God. The maintenance of the covenant was dependent on the keeping of the Law (Exodus 24:3-8). The sacrificial system was devised to restore the relationship when man's disobedience had broken it. Quite clearly, for all its greatness, this covenant was very imperfect.

4. Jesus the Perfect Sacrifice

It is the claim of the writer to the Hebrews that the new covenant has come in Jesus Christ. The new covenant needs a "perfect sacrifice". Jesus had made that. Once and for all, in offering himself, he has made a sacrifice that never needs to be repeated (7:27).

5. Jesus the Perfect Priest

The new covenant also needed a perfect priest. Jesus is that. Firstly, because he is completely identified with the men he came to save. A priest must be such that he can deal with weakness (5:1,2). "We have not a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (4:15). No writer in the New Testament has a deeper sense of the identification of Jesus with the human situation (2:15; 5:7,8; 12:2,3; 13:12). Secondly, the perfect priest cannot take his office upon himself: he must be divinely appointed (5:1) and it is here that the writer to the Hebrews makes his personal and unique contribution to the understanding of Jesus, for he shows us Jesus as "the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek".

HIGH PRIEST ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

This picture is brought out in two passages, which should be carefully studied, 5:1-10 and the whole of Chapter 7.

He founds his argument on two Old Testament passages.

"The Lord hath sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek". (Psalm 110:4)

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the King of Sodom went out to meet Abraham, at the Valley of Shaveh, (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek, king of Salem brought him bread and wine; and he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand". (Genesis 14:17-20).



Here, a new and unknown priesthood is described. A priesthood which as the writer to the Hebrews saw it, was the forecast and the symbol of the priesthood of Jesus Christ and its superiority to the existing Levitical priesthood.

The Priesthood of Jesus Christ is a "royal" priesthood, for Melchizedek was a King. It is a "righteous" priesthood, for Melchizedek means king of righteousness. It is a "peaceful" priesthood, for Melchizedek was king of Salem, and Salem is taken to mean peace. The Levitical priesthood was entirely dependent on descent from Aaron, and such descent had to be proved and guaranteed; but there is no mention of any genealogy, of any father or mother of Melchizedek; the new priesthood, therefore, depends on personal power and quality and not on any family tree. There is no mention whatever of either the birth or death of Melchizedek; he appears as timeless; therefore the new priesthood is eternal, without beginning or end, beginning before time began and unending when time ends.

THE ETERNAL NATURE OF JESUS

There remains one thing to note. The writer to the Hebrews had an almost unique understanding of the total adequacy of the work of Jesus Christ. It stretches back into the past, for it redeems men from transgressions committed under the old covenant (9:15). It reaches forward into the future, for the work of Jesus Christ as High Priest is never ended. Even in the heavenly places he carries on his priestly work, for we have a High Priest who has passed through the heavens (4:14). He appears in the presence of God on our behalf (9:24). He continues a priest forever (7:3). He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (7:25). Here is a picture of Jesus Christ saving in past time, saving in present time, and saving forever and forever. In this picture and behind it, there is something even more far-reaching.

Its real meaning is that the life, death and Cross of Christ are not, as it were, parts of some isolated incident. The life and death of Jesus were not simply events in time; they are windows into the eternal heart of God, whereby we see the suffering and redeeming love of God which has been suffering and redeeming since the beginning of time and will continue to be, beyond the end of time. In Jesus Christ we see God, not as God for a moment became, but as God forever was and forever is, and forever will be.

FIRST PETER

The pervading characteristic of 1st Peter is its tremendous sense of the obligation which the work of Christ has laid on the Christian. Peter hardly ever mentions a gift which the Christian has received, without insisting on the responsibility and the obligation which goes with it. Peter's portrayal of Christ is our great **EXAMPLE**. The Christian believer is a man who has the Lord's example behind him and the hope of glory before him.

Salvation, for Peter, is something which is at the end of the road, rather than as it is for Paul, a present experience. Someone has put it like this. For Paul, religion is "an experience which ends in an experience of the wonder of Jesus Christ." Paul would have said, "I came in a flash to know Jesus Christ, and then I set out on the Christian way". Peter would have said, "I set out on the Christian way, and the longer I walk in it, the more I know and love my Lord". But is this to say that for Peter,



Jesus is mainly a magnetic example? We can answer that question by looking at the pictures in which Peter thinks of Jesus.

1. To Peter, Jesus is the **PERFECT EXAMPLE**. "He left us an example that we should follow in his steps" (2:21). The word is "hupogrammos" and it means the line of copperplate handwriting at the top of a page of a writing exercise book, which the scholar must copy as best he can. Jesus is the pattern for life which the Christian must ever try to reproduce.
2. To Peter, Jesus is **LORD**. In your hearts, he says, reverence Christ as Lord (3:15). The word is "kurios". It means the absolute master and owner of any person or thing; it is the word used for the Roman Emperor; it is the word which in the Greek Old Testament is used to translate the name of God. To Peter, Jesus is the undisputed Lord and Master of his life, to whom is owed an absolute loyalty and an absolute obedience and a humble worship.
3. To Peter, Jesus is the **STONE**. Peter works this out fully in 2:6-8. He uses three Old Testament quotations. He quotes Isaiah 28:16, where it is God's expressed intention to lay a tested cornerstone, a sure foundation. He quotes Psalm 118:22, which speaks of the stone which was rejected but which has become the head of the corner. He quotes Isaiah 8:14,15, which speaks of the stone over which men will stumble and fall. So then to Peter, Jesus is the only sure foundation of life; he is the One whom men rejected but who is to become head over all; he is the One over whom the unbeliever will stumble to ruin, but, one on whom the believer will build his life.
4. To Peter, Jesus is the **JUDGE**. Men will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (4:5). Jesus is not only the pattern in this life; he is also the judge in the life to come.
5. To Peter, Jesus is the **SHEPHERD**. Pasture in Palestine was scanty and hard to find. Such pasture as there was, was surrounded by deserts and cliffs in which the straying sheep might perish of hunger and thirst, or over which it might plunge to disaster. The shepherd had to be forever on the watch day and night and had to be, at any time, ready to risk his life to seek and to find the sheep which had strayed away. Jesus is the sentinel of His people's safety and the rescuer of their lost souls at the cost of his own life.



Question 1:

What are at least 6 facts we learn about Jesus from Hebrews 1:1-4?

Question 2:

Under what 5 terms does the writer to the Hebrews describe Jesus? Explain them briefly.

Question 3:

What are some aspects of Melchizedek's office as High Priest which are seen in Jesus by the writer to the Hebrews?

Question 4:

Peter says that Jesus is the "Perfect Example" (1 Peter 2:21). What are some things Jesus said or did which we should copy? The following references are just suggestions: (Luke 3:21; 6:27f; 6:37f; 11:1-13; Matt. 26:26-29; John 13:1-17).

Question 5:

What does Peter mean by saying that Jesus is the "stone"? (1 Peter 2:4-8)

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:

From Hebrews 4:14-5:6, what do we learn about Jesus as our High Priest? What verse in this, or what aspect of Jesus' role, is most helpful to you? Why?