

Hebrew 5:1-10

Christ's Priesthood Superior to Aaron

Our great High Priest Jesus Christ is able to sympathize with our weaknesses.

The author of Hebrews had introduced the Priesthood of Jesus Christ in 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15. Now he begins his development of the central theme of Jesus' High Priesthood in detail. Jesus is superior to Aaron and Levitical priesthood. Jesus has a better priesthood, a better covenant, a better sanctuary, better sacrifice and better promises. Yes, Jesus is the "great High Priest." No other book in the New Testament stresses the ministry of Jesus as High Priest.

In the passage before us we will discover that Jesus was appointed by God with an oath to be the High Priest. He was sinless and has an unchangeable priesthood. His offering for the sins of the people is perfect and final, never to be repeated. His intercession is all-prevailing, the perfect mediator between God and man. He has a perfect understanding of man and a perfect acceptance with God the Father. By offering the perfect sacrifice for our sins He obtained eternal redemption for His people, and established a new covenant, cleansing for sin, forgiveness, sanctification and a free access into the presence of God.

Why would you ever want to exchange so great a salvation for something inferior?

Jesus is a faithful, merciful High Priest in the service of God.

Jesus experienced temptation in every area of His life, but never yielded to sin. His temptation did not come from a sinful nature. However, He experienced temptations more powerfully and thoroughly than we have ever experienced because He was sinless. Our human depravity affects every area of our personality and therefore could never comprehend the manner in which He was tempted as the Son of God. Jesus overcame every temptation successfully. He knew no sin. He never experienced personal sin. Therefore, He could become our representative for sin and die in our place and pay our sin debt.

Because He was human He could sympathize with our weaknesses. He is a High Priest who understands us.

The Priesthood of Aaron (Heb. 5:1-4)

The Levitical priesthood of Aaron is in view in the opening verses in chapter five. It is obvious he is speaking of "Every high priest in the Jewish religious system."

The High Priest in the Jewish religion stood between a holy God and a sinful people. He represented God before the people and the people before God.

"For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb. 5:1).

The Jewish high priest was a man and therefore able to feel for men in their weaknesses. In the Old Testament the priest needed a priest (Lev. 16:6-20). Everyone of the Jewish High Priests sinned just like those whom they represented. They had to bring an offering for themselves and then for the people. Just as every Jewish high priest was human and could relate to the people, Jesus is human and can relate to us. Jesus is magnified because He is the perfect man.

However, our High Priest is like us in every way except one, He is "without sin" (Heb. 4:15). His office and priestly work is infinitely higher than the Levites. Aaron and his descendents were only types and shadows of Jesus the antitype.

The purpose clause in verse one is "in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins."

The bloody sacrifices foreshadowed the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God (John 1:29). In Hebrews the Day of Atonement is in the foreground (cf. Heb. 7:27).

Moreover, "he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness" (Heb. 5:2). Later he will write, "For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer" (Heb. 8:3). But the sacrifices under the old covenant "cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience" (Heb. 9:9). Only in the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ can the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 be fulfilled. Only His sacrifice can remove our sins.

The author will point out that Jesus' humanity is not a limitation for His being the great High Priest, but an asset that enables Him to empathize with humanity. By means of His incarnation Jesus was able to endure the deepest suffering and dependence on God. This lowliness of Jesus is a High-priestly qualification that enables Him to have compassion for us in our weakness.

The emphasis is on how the high priest removes our sins.

A human high priest can deal with sinners "gently" (*metriopatheo*) or compassionately. He was not indifferent to the moral lapses of the people because he was a sinner. The author will emphasize that Jesus' compassion is superior to the Levitical High Priests.

"Because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself" (Heb. 5:3).

Of course Jesus did not have to offer a sacrifice for Himself. He had no sins to atone for. The link between the priests and Jesus is that Jesus shares our weakness as man. It typified His sympathy with our weaknesses. The Jewish high priest was weak and sinful in the need of atonement, where as Jesus is wholly "without sin." As a man Jesus felt compassion for us. He bids us come to His throne of grace because He is full of compassion for our weakness. He is ready to help in our time of need.

Divine appointment

"And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was" (Hebrews 5:4).

The high priesthood was by divine appointment only. God must call him because He alone can decide if the priest is acceptable to Him. How tragic to have a priest who is not acceptable to a holy God offering a sacrifice to appease the wrath of God. All would be in vain and the sinner would still be in his sins! He was chosen by God to intercede between God and man. They were Aaron and his descendents in the family of Levi (Exod. 28; Lev. 8; Num. 16:40; 18:1-7). After the Babylonian captivity the high priesthood was filled with political intrigue and was attained by political appointments. The focus of our author, however was on Israel as a sovereign nation. Anytime unauthorized men assumed the duties of the high priest the judgment of God fell on them. King Uzziah is a good example (2 Chron. 26:16-21). The office of king and high priest was sharply separated in Israel. This is why the author develops the Melchizedek priesthood in Hebrews. Jesus is both priest and king, which was forbidden in the Levitical covenant.

The Priesthood of Christ (Heb. 5:5-10)

"So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You'; just as He says also in another passage, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.' In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:5-10).

God appointed Jesus a High Priest (Heb. 5:5-6).

Keep in mind Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, and could not serve as a priest in the order of Levi. Jesus served under the order of Melchizedek, however the Levitical system provided the symbols and types of the offering and sacrifice Jesus fulfilled in His work as the High Priest.

Moreover, Jesus did not exalt Himself; He was appointed by God as the Christ, the anointed one, as well as the High Priest. The author of Hebrews stresses both the Messiah's reign (Psalm 2:7-9; 110:1) and His priesthood (Psa. 110:4). Jesus, the Son of God, is both King Messiah and the High Priest. King David was a type of the reign of Jesus as King Messiah. In deed, as King He is "glorified." The office of the Messiah is prophetic, has royal functions, and is high-priestly. Here the emphasis is on His high-priestly function. The Messianic King was also a priest. The Messiah's priesthood was not by self-appointment, but by divine appointment.

Hebrews bases much of its argument on the first priest mentioned in the Old Testament, Melchizedek. Jesus' priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood because it is of the order of Melchizedek. It is important to point out that Melchizedek had no succession of priests like the Levitical order. However, Jesus is was a priest like Melchizedek. His priesthood is forever.

The key text is Psalm 110:4 as quoted in Hebrews 5:5. "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." This is the appointment of God (cf. Heb. 7:17, 21, 24-28). Jesus did not appoint Himself. The Father chose Him for the assignment.

"So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You'; just as He says also in another passage, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek'" (Hebrews 5:5-6).

We need to keep in mind Melchizedek was both king and priest, but Aaron was only a priest. Aaron could not picture both offices of Jesus. Through out the history of Israel the high priesthood and kingship were never combined in one person. No priest could serve as a king, and no king could ever officiate as a priest. No king ever entered into the Holy of Holies and offered a sacrifice for the atonement of sin. Only the priest could do that. Only one person in the Old Testament appears as both king and priest, and he is Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. He was legitimate because Abraham recognized him and paid a tithe to him. This Melchizedek is a type of the priesthood-kingship of Jesus. King David was a type of a royal king, but he was not a priest.

When Melchizedek appears on the scene he is alone. His mother and father are not recorded, nor are there any children. He has no succession as Aaron and his descendents had. He is a type of Christ, whose priesthood is forever. Therefore, the atonement provided by Christ stands finished forever. Aaron and his sons typified some of the priestly functions of Christ as High

Priest, while Melchizedek others. It took both orders to present the work of Christ as both the high priest and the sacrifice for our sins. Melchizedek demonstrates there is One who is greater than Aaron and his priestly order. It does not diminish the function of the sacrifices.

This is the author's answer to the question his readers were asking about how Jesus could be greater than Aaron and be a king-priest. "According to the order of Melchizedek" is used in reference to both priest and king.

Jesus humanity qualifies Him (Heb. 5:7)

"In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety" (Hebrews 5:7).

Jesus did not become a priest after His ascension. The whole ministry of Jesus is before us. Jesus is able to sympathize with us. He has compassion for the sinner. The intense prayers are probably in the Garden of Gethsemane and the seven saying from the cross. He was the priest on the cross.

"Days of His flesh" refers to the state of humiliation here on earth. "Flesh" here refers to the physical rather than ethical sense. Jesus became man in order to take on our flesh and die as our substitute on the cross. "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

The "prayers," "supplications with loud crying and tears" point to the suffering of Christ while here on the earth. It is a picture of the agony of Christ in its full intensity. "Strong crying" are the loud cries of a deeply disturbed person and "tears" of grief. It is beyond words to describe. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13). It is the awful cry, "Why have You forsaken Me?" As Luther so exclaimed, "God forsaken of God, who can understand that?" It is beyond a depraved man's grasp to comprehend. "He [God] made Him [Jesus Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus' profound attitude through out it all this suffering is, "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (John 10:18). He was always in control of His life and death. Death yielded itself to His divine will. We cannot fathom the depth of Jesus' pain suffering when he experienced eternal death in our place. He experienced hell for us.

How did the Son of God "learn obedience"?

"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8).

As the Son of God He was perfect.

What did Jesus gain through His suffering?

It was through human suffering and human experience that He gained knowledge from experience of what it is like being a human being.

This is how He could identify with us and have compassion for us.

Jesus learned to obey His Father's will as a human.

Matthew 26:36 and following describes Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples. He withdraws from them and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass

from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (v. 39). He found His disciples sleeping and returned and prayed again, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done." He found the disciples sleeping and returned to pray, and afterwards said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners" (v. 45). His prayer is to do the will of God. He is not praying for an escape. A little while earlier at the last supper He told His disciples, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins" (v. 28). In obedience to the will of His Father, Jesus leaves the Garden to fulfill that will. Jesus asked only for what was possible within the Father's will. Jesus did not try to alter God's will.

For six months Jesus had been repeatedly telling His disciples, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and he will be raised again on the third day" (Matt. 17:22). "Not My will; Thy will be done!" was His cry. The obedience was learned in Gethsemane and fulfilled at the cross. His whole life was lived in perfect obedience to the Father's will. As a perfect man His prayer was in perfect harmony with the will of God.

I think shallow superficial readers will see it as Jesus praying not to die and God failed Him. However, it is very clear God heard His pleadings and Jesus obeyed Him fully. His prayer was only "if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it (Matt. 26:42). His prayer was, "Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" (Mark. 14:36). "Thy will be done" was His steadfast prayer. The cup for Him was to be made sin. He drank it in obedience to the Father's will. The priest after the order of Melchizedek offered Himself as a bloody sacrifice. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" (Heb. 9:22). And the blood of animals does not take away sin. It cannot deal with our guilt problem. Only Jesus can.

Jesus had to suffer even though He was the Son of God. Who would ever have thought that the Son of God would suffer in such a way? He endured it and learned obedience. Jesus learned obedience; He did not learn to obey. He had obeyed His Father's will all of His life. The obedience before us in this passage is the obedience to the cross and a vicarious, penal substitutionary sacrifice for sinners. God laid all of our sins upon Him and He died. Christ chose to obey and suffered in order to secure our redemption.

"Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). Christ learned obedience by what He suffered.

The God of very God knew the meaning of obedience, now experienced obedience as incarnate man in the flesh. As God He owed obedience to no one. There was no one greater than He to render obedience. However, in His incarnation, God the Son became obedient to God the Father. He experienced it for Himself and died for our sins.

Leon Morris observed, "He who learned to obey brought salvation to those who obey."

Jesus is the source of our eternal life (Heb. 5:9-10).

"And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:9-10).

No where in the Bible are we told that God made Jesus morally complete. He did not undergo moral development so that one day He would be morally perfect. A lot of strange things gets read into these passages in Hebrews. Be careful what religious fad you listen to.

"Made complete" refers to the finished task of suffering for our sins. The moment He cried out from the cross, "It is finished!" our redemption was accomplished. Finished! Done! Complete! Perfect! God's eternal plan of redemption was finished in Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross.

The blood of animals cannot deal with our sins. Only the blood of Jesus can expiate sin. Because Christ has dealt with our sin through expiation God the Father has propitiated the sinner and His holy wrath is turned away.

Read it again. "And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:9-10). The author tells us what "having been made perfect" means. "He came to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." He is the great High Priest who offered up Himself as the perfect all-sufficient atoning sacrifice for our sins. He was obedient to the point of death--not just any death, but the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In obedience, He shed the blood of the all-sufficient atonement.

"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

There is no other source for eternal life. It is found only in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our great High Priest is the cause of eternal salvation.

Based upon what God has said in His Word and the all-sufficient atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross what is your personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

As the High Priest Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice to cover our sins. Our sins debt is paid in full. God now offers us pardon, peace, reconciliation, cleansing, forgiveness, a right relationship with God in Christ.

Jesus Christ is presently our High Priest in heaven. He is interceding for us right now.

When Jesus Christ returns He will reign as King of kings.

Will you trust in Him right now for eternal salvation? What must you do. The Bible says, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. . . . for 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Romans 10:9, 10, 13).

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

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