

## Jesus Our Superior Priest

Hebrews 5:1-10

Last week we learned that Jesus is Lord over all the Earth and today we learn about the fact that Jesus is our superior high priest, greater than any man who has served in that office before and able to save us eternally.

The writer of Hebrews presents three essential qualifications of the priest in any age and in any generation.

First, a priest is appointed on men's behalf to deal with the things concerning God. A. J. Gossip used to tell his students that when he was ordained to the ministry he felt as if the people were saying to him: "We are for ever involved in the dust and the heat of the day; we have to spend our time getting and spending; we have to serve at the counter, to toil at the desk, to make the wheels of industry go round. We want you to be set apart so that you can go in to the secret place of God and come back every Sunday with a word from him to us." The priest is the link between God and humanity.

In Israel the priest had one special function, and that was to offer sacrifice for the sins of the people. Sin disturbs the relationship which should exist between us and God and puts up a barrier between us. The sacrifice is meant to restore that relationship and remove that barrier.

The Jews had been taught that the sins for which sacrifice could atone were sins of ignorance. The deliberate sin did not find its atonement in sacrifice. The writer to the Hebrews himself says: "For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:26). This is a conviction that emerges again and again in the sacrificial laws of the Old Testament. Again and again they begin: "If any one sins unwittingly in any

of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done ... “ (Leviticus 4:2, 13). But: “that person who does anything with a high hand ... reviles the Lord ... shall be utterly cut off: his iniquity shall be upon him.” Deuteronomy 17:12 says: “The man who acts presumptuously ... that one shall die.”

The sin of ignorance is pardonable; the sin of presumption is not. However when the Jew spoke of the sin of ignorance the Jews meant more than simply lack of knowledge. They included the sins committed when a man was swept away in a moment of impulse or anger or passion or mastered by some overmastering temptation and the sins are followed by repentance. By the sin of presumption they meant the cold, calculated sin for which a person was not in the least bit sorry, and was in open-eyed disobedience of God.

So the priest existed to open the way for the sinner back to God if they wanted to come back.

Secondly, the priest must be one with mankind. He must have gone through human experiences and have sympathy with them. Because of his humanity the earthly priest had to offer sacrifices for his own sin before he offered it for the sins of others. The priest must be bound up with others in the bundle of life. This gives the ability to bear with people without getting irritated; it means the ability not to lose one's temper with people when they are foolish and will not learn and do the same thing over and over again. It describes the attitude to others which does not issue in anger at their fault and which does not condone it, but which to the end of the day spends itself in a gentle yet powerful sympathy which by its very patience directs a person back to the right way. No one can ever deal with others unless they have this strong and patient, God-given ability.

The third essential of a priest is that no one appoints himself to the priesthood; the appointment is of God. King Saul invaded the priesthood and lost his kingdom

(1 Sam. 13). Korah and his fellow rebels tried to make themselves priests, and God judged them (Num. 16). When King Uzziah tried to enter the temple and burn incense, God infected him with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16–21).

The priesthood is not an office which one takes; it is a privilege and a glory to which one is called. The ministry of God among humanity is neither a job nor a career but a calling. One ought to be able to look back and say, not, “I chose this work,” but rather, “God chose me and gave me this work to do.”

The writer to the Hebrews goes on to show how Jesus Christ fulfils the great conditions of the priesthood.

(i) Jesus did not choose his task; God chose him for it. At the Baptism there came to Jesus the voice which said: “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” (Psalm 2:7).

(ii) Jesus has gone through the bitterest experiences of humanity and understands personhood in all its strength and weakness. The writer to the Hebrews has four great thoughts about him.

(a) He remembers Jesus’ prayers and entreaties, his tears and his cry. The word he uses for cry (*kraugē*) is a cry which a person does not choose to utter but is wrung from the stress of some tremendous tension or searing pain. So the writer to the Hebrews says that there is no agony of the human spirit through which Jesus has not come. The rabbis had a saying: “There are three kinds of prayers: prayer, crying and tears. Prayer is made in silence; crying with raised voice; but tears overcome all things.” Jesus knew even the desperate prayer of tears.

(b) Jesus learned from all his experiences because he met them all with reverence and “He learned from what he suffered.” For the Greek thinkers “learning comes from suffering.” God speaks to us in many experiences of life, and especially in those which try our hearts and souls. But we can hear God’s

voice only when we accept in reverence what comes to us. If we accept it with resentment, the rebellious cries of our own heart make us deaf to the voice of God.

(c) The writer to the Hebrews tells us that all the experiences of suffering through which Jesus passed perfectly fitted him to become the Savior of humanity.

(d) The salvation which Jesus brought is an *eternal salvation*. It is something which keeps a person safe both in time and in eternity. With Christ a person is safe for ever. There are no circumstances that can pluck us from Christ's hand.<sup>1</sup>

The very existence of a priesthood and a system of sacrifices gave evidence that humanity is estranged from God. It was an act of grace on God's part that God instituted the whole levitical system. Today, that system is fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He is both the sacrifice and the High Priest who ministers to God's people on the basis of His once-for-all offering on the cross.

God the Father not only said, "Thou art My Son" in Psalm 2:7; He also said, "Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:6, quoted from Ps. 110:4). When Aaron, the first high priest, was ordained, God did not speak directly to him and declare his priesthood. But the Father did make this special declaration concerning His Son, making Christ's priesthood unique. God made him a High Priest forever. No Old Testament priest ministered forever because each priest died and relinquished the office to his successor. Since Christ is a Priest forever, He gives His people salvation forever (Heb. 7:23–28). Christ's ordination is also unique because He belongs to a different order from the Old Testament priests. They belonged to the order of Aaron; He belongs to the order of Melchizedek, who was both a priest and a king! Jesus Christ is a High Priest on a throne!

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letter to the Hebrews*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 44

No matter what trials we meet, Jesus Christ is able to understand our needs and help us. We need never doubt His ability to sympathize and strengthen. So when we go through difficulties Christ is with us, but also sometimes God allows us to go through difficulties so that we might better understand the needs of others, and become able to encourage them (see 2 Cor. 1:8ff).

When Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a young preacher in London, his successful ministry aroused the envy of some of the clergy; and they attacked him with various kinds of slander and gossip. His sermons were called “trashy,” and he was called “an actor” and “a pulpit buffoon.” Even after his ministry was established, Spurgeon was lied about in the press (including the religious press); and this was bound to discourage him.

After one particularly insulting report in the press, Spurgeon fell before the Lord and prayed, “O Lord Jesus, Thou didst make Thyself of no reputation for me. I willingly lay my reputation down for Thy sake.” From that time on, Spurgeon had peace in his heart. He knew that his Great High Priest understood his need and would give him the grace that he needed for each hour.<sup>2 3</sup>

That same high priest is working on our behalf giving us what we need to live our lives for God. Thank God for his great love for us!

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<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Heb 5:1

<sup>3</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:791