

Jesus, Our Eternal High Priest

The Jewish priesthood began after the Israelites left Egypt and were en route to the land of Palestine. You might recall that the nation of Israel was encamped at Mt. Sinai when Moses ascended on the mountain to talk with God. He went up to do more than just bring down the laws which we call the Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue. While he was up there, we find that Moses was directed to establish a priesthood. In Exodus 28:1, he was told to appoint Aaron as high priest and his sons as priests. His sons' names were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. They were the initial priests. Aaron, though, was a special individual. Just imagine, of all of the Israelites, God selected Aaron to be the high priest.

Among the Jewish priests, only one is called the high priest. He was special and was supposed to be the holiest of them all. He was the priest of priests. He was to be the mediator for man to God. It was his responsibility to offer sacrifices in the Mosaic system of worship. He had the responsibility to teach the scriptures and be compassionate for the people. He was their representative to God. That is who Aaron was. Our study is about two high priests: Aaron and Jesus Christ.

BACKGROUND. In our study of the book of Hebrews, we have discovered that Jesus is our merciful and faithful high priest. In our last study we were told that He is our great high priest. He is compassion-

ate, understanding, and He is one who helps us when we have needs. We said last week that Jesus does not bail us out of our problem. Instead He comes alongside of us and gives us grace and mercy to help us through our trial, but He only offers the grace and the mercy at the right time, at the specific time when it is best for us. All too often we want instantaneous relief. We want relief now. We saw in the last study that it does not happen immediately. God does not give us instantaneous relief. Instead He gives us grace and mercy to help us through the problem. He helps us to go through the trial because the trial is what shapes us, molds us and makes us more like Jesus.



Now if I was a Jew at the time of Christ, under the old Mosaic system, and someone announced that Jesus is our high priest, I would be asking the question, "Who made Him the high priest? How do we know that He is the high priest? Did He appoint Himself? He is not part of the Mosaic system! He is not one of the Levites! Why is He the high priest?" The answers to these questions will be given in this study, but the major question is, "Is Jesus really a high priest?"

HIGH PRIESTS WERE CHOSEN FROM AMONG MEN. Hebrews 5:1 is an introduction to the first ten verses of this chapter. Verse 1 is not about the common Levitical priests but about the

high priest.

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 . . . Hebrews 5:1 (NASB)

In verse 1 we are told three things about the high priest. First, every high priest is appointed from among men. The author could have just said that every high priest was appointed from men but he did not. When God appointed Aaron, he was a man. He was taken from among men. Aaron, however, did not live forever. Aaron eventually died, and his son, Eleazar, was the second high priest. The high priest kept his office until he died. After Eleazar, there was another high priest, and then another repeatedly over countless centuries, all the way down to Jesus Christ.

It has been estimated that at the time of Jesus Christ, there were probably about 18,000 priests, but only one high priest. The high priest typically served for a lifetime. Imagine for a minute that you know the high priest, the priest of priests, and you are attached to that high priest. Imagine what this godly, holy, caring individual would be like. You and other people become attached to the high priest and then eventually that high priest dies.

All of us have been in a church when at some point the pastor moved on. Some people were extremely disappointed that he moved on. Some people might have been devastated that he moved on, that he died, or that something tragic happened in the ministry and he could no longer continue. When people love a high priest and he moves on, that is really a difficult situation. There were many high priests and all of them, "every high priest," was appointed from among men.

HIGH PRIESTS WERE APPOINTED BY GOD. Verse 1 gives another point about high priests. It says,

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God . . . Hebrews 5:1a (NASB)

Notice the high priest is appointed by God. He is appointed for the purpose of representing God to men. In Jesus' day, unfortunately, the high priest was not appointed because he

was holy. The high priests were not appointed because of their outstanding character quality. They were appointed for political reasons. The office of high priest was a political appointment. What a tragedy for the priesthood! Imagine discovering that your high priest was not picked because of his relationship with God, but he was picked for political reasons. What a real disappointment that would have been. It should not have been that way. But Aaron was appointed by God. The successors were Aaron's sons and they were also appointed by God.

HIGH PRIESTS OFFERED GIFTS AND SACRIFICES. Then the third thing we are told about high priests in verse 1 is that the high priest offers gifts and sacrifices for sins.

. . . offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins . . . Hebrews 5:1b (NASB)

If we went to Leviticus 2 or Numbers 18, we would find that the gifts people brought to the tabernacle or temple were offered to God. The gifts were the meal or grain offering. It was a voluntary offering. The sacrifices were the other offerings: the burnt, peace, sin, and guilt offerings (Leviticus 1-6:7). Therefore, all that the Holy Spirit says that the priest was responsible for offering the gifts as well as sacrifices for sins. That was his major ministry. It was spiritual and not organizational. In our churches today the most time consuming function of most church leaders and pastors is organizational - maintaining the organization.

So the three major points of verse one are that the high priest is taken from men, he is appointed by God, and he offers gifts and sacrifices for sins. Now, all three points are going to be repeated and further explained in verses 2 through 10. Verse one was the summary.

BENEFITS OF THE HIGH PRIEST BEING A MAN. The first point from verse one is that a high priest is taken from among men. Verse 2 is talking about the high priest and expands on the benefits of the high priest being a man.

. . . he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness . . . Hebrews 5:2 (NASB)

We are told right up front that every high priest who is taken from among men is beset with weaknesses. I knew a man years ago who used to pray for his besetting weaknesses, the sins that beset him. I always thought to myself, what does he mean by “besetting sins” or “the sins that beset me,” or “my besetting weaknesses”? He may have remembered this verse and that is why he prayed that way, I do not know.

The Greek word for “beset” has the idea of wrapping something around something. The idea is that he is consumed with this particular weakness. I know of some people whom we might call worry warts. Do you know anyone who is a worry wart? They worry about everything. Such a person is beset by worry. Their weakness is worry, and they are beset by it. They worry about money. They are worried about cleanliness. They are worried something does not look right. That is their besetting weakness.

Every high priest taken from among men is beset with some weaknesses. Now you say, “Why is that important?” It is important because then he can understand us. A high priest who has weaknesses can understand other people. Why? Because other people are like him but not necessarily exactly like him, but they have weaknesses too! The high priest has weaknesses and his people have weaknesses. He can understand other people.

HIGH PRIEST CAN HELP OTHERS. Now notice what verse 2 says:

... he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness . . . Hebrews 5:2 (NASB)

The fact that the high priest has his own struggles and problems enables him to deal gently with the ignorant as well as the misguided. The word “ignorant” conveys exactly what the Greek word means. It means uninformed. “Misguided” has the idea of wandering off the path. Do you know anyone who is uninformed about certain things in life? Do you know anyone who has wandered off the path, but they think they know everything? They think that they are on the right path? I had an opportunity recently to talk with someone, and it was rather apparent they did not know something was true; nevertheless they thought they knew everything. They

thought they were the expert. There are people like that. They are wandering off the path, and they do not know it. They do not understand that.

It reminds me of Proverbs 18:2.

*A fool does not delight in understanding,
But only in revealing his own mind. Proverbs 18:2 (NASB)*

Notice that the fool delights in what he or she thinks. Do you know someone like that? They do not want to listen to what you have to say. They just want to tell you everything. The high priest, because of the fact that he has struggles himself, should be able to be gentle in dealing with the uninformed and those who are wandering off the path. It reminded me of what elders and pastors in a church are to be like. In 2 Timothy 2:24-26 we read,

The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (NASB)

What are elders and pastors supposed to be like? They are supposed to deal gently with those who are in opposition. This means that a high priest or an elder or a pastor should not deal with somebody impatiently. There should not be any yelling. They should not call others names. They should not get angry. They should respond with gentleness, be emotionally controlled, and try to help someone in need, those who are uninformed or someone who is off the path. How should the people respond? Look at 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14.

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 1 Thessalonians

5:12-14 (NASB)

This is an admonition as to how we are to relate to other people, but also how we are to relate to those who are in leadership roles.

So what does Hebrews 5:2 tell us? The answer is that a high priest is taken from among men and as a result, since he is beset with weaknesses, should be able to gently deal with other people, including the uninformed and those who are misguided.

HIGH PRIEST CAN OFFER SACRIFICES FOR ALL. Verse 3 reveals his obligation. Since others have needs, he must offer sacrifices for their sins and his own sins.

... and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. Hebrews 5:3 (NASB)

Since he is beset with weaknesses, and the people are beset with weaknesses, he can offer sacrifices for their sins as well as for his sins. Now that is an interesting statement, “for himself.” That reveals the high priest is a sinner too!

In Numbers 28:4 we are told that burnt sacrifices were offered in the morning as well as at twilight. They were offered two times a day. I was thinking about the fact that sacrifices were offered in the morning and then at twilight. If I was a Jew and I knew that offerings were occurring every day for sin, it would be a constant reminder that I was a sinner, and that I had weaknesses or needs.

What an interesting picture. But when we come to Jesus Christ, we have already been told in chapter 4, verse 15, that Christ was without sin! Jesus was not like a human high priest. Jesus was without sin. Jesus did not have our frailties. He was not beset with our weaknesses. Jesus did not need to have sacrifices offered for Himself. Jesus is the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He was and is perfect! Do you know what that means? Jesus is greater than any high priest. Jesus is greater than all of the high priests, including Aaron the high priest. Jesus is unique.

Therefore, the first point the Holy Spirit makes in these two verses is that every human high priest is taken from among men, and he is to help people and offer sacrifices for

sins, both theirs and his.

HIGH PRIESTS ARE APPOINTED BY GOD. Verse 4 is about the second characteristic of the high priest. He did not appoint himself. God appointed him.

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

Here we are reminded that Aaron was appointed by God. This is a reminder that men who are elders and pastors need to be appointed by God. In Acts 20:28 the apostle Paul was speaking to the elders at Ephesus under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when he said this,

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers . . . Acts 20:28 (NASB)

Notice that we are told, “the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” The men did not make themselves overseers. They did not decide to become overseers on their own. Instead God appointed them to be overseers, and that is the way it should be today. True elders and true pastors are men who have been appointed by God.

Now you say, “How do we know if an elder or a pastor has been appointed by God?” Here are a few quick points. First point - they will meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. There we are given a list of requirements that an elder needs to satisfy. I believe the Holy Spirit works in a man’s life to make him qualified, to bring him to a point of spiritual maturity so that he meets the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1. If the Holy Spirit does not do that, the man will never be qualified. The Holy Spirit also gives a man the spiritual gifts he needs for teaching and administration. The Holy Spirit selects a man and works in the man’s life to bring him to the point where he qualifies for the office of elder or pastor. The second point is that God will put a desire and a burden in a man’s heart to be an elder or pastor. The desire and burden will be a compelling passion to preach and to teach God’s word. The third point is that the people need to affirm that he is called by God.

Many years ago I had an opportunity to work with men

who were planning and preparing for the ministry. One of my responsibilities was to help evaluate their life, to help them through the ordination process, help prepare them for their ordination council, and on some occasions accompany them when they candidated churches. Once in a while we discovered that a man had a passion for the ministry, felt qualified, but a team of elders did not believe that his life measured up. As a result, we had a difficult time agreeing with him that he was qualified to be an elder or a pastor. It was doubtful that God had appointed him to be a pastor.

All three parts are needed. The man needs to have a burden from God that he is called. He needs to meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and people need to affirm, to attest that this is true. When a man truly is called by God, God is going to bring a consensus and people will listen, follow, learn, and grow as a result of that.

Now notice that verse 4 says when God calls a high priest it is a position of honor.

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

Aaron was called, and God is still in the process of selecting men to be his ministers. Jesus Christ tells us in John 8:54 that God gave Him the honor. In John 5:37 we are told that the Father testified about Jesus. The Father testified through miracles, signs, and wonders. It is interesting to note that in John 5 Jesus lists different people who affirmed who He was. Jesus did not chose Himself. It was the Father who chose Him and gave Him the honor. It was the Father who identified Him as being the Savior, as being the Messiah. And we are going to see in verses 5 and 6 that the Father also identifies Him as being a high priest. Who chose Jesus to be a high priest? How do we know that Jesus is a high priest? The answer is the Father appointed Him.

JESUS IS A HIGH PRIEST ALSO. Verses 5 and 6 now address a problem with which Jewish readers would struggle. How could Jesus be a high priest since He was a descendant from the tribe of Judah and not Levi? We will discover that the Holy Spirit masterfully addresses this issue.

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 (NASB)**

Verse 5 is a quote from Psalm 2:7. The quote in verse 6 is from Psalm 110:4. Note that God the Father is speaking and we are told that Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, is appointed a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Now you may ask, “Well, who is Melchizedek?” In Genesis 14 there are two armies, and they are in a battle. We will not walk through all the details, but one army eventually wins, and takes Lot, his family, and his possessions captive. Abram is pursuing the armies in order to rescue his nephew. Verses 17-18 says,

Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. Genesis 14:17-18 (NASB)

Verses 17-18 inform us that Abram returns. He brings back Lot, Lot's family and all their possessions. Then we are introduced to the King of Salem, also known as the King of Peace, or Melchizedek. He comes out to meet them and offers bread and wine. Verses 19 and 20 describe a blessing that Melchizedek gave to Abram.

He blessed him and said,

**“Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
And blessed be God Most High,
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”
He gave him a tenth of all. Genesis 14:19-20 (NASB)**

When the last part of verse 20 says, "He gave him a tenth

of all" it refers to Abram giving a tenth to Melchizedek. This is the first tithe in the Old Testament. What happened? Who is Melchizedek? He was a king, but he was also a high priest. He left Salem (also known as Jerusalem) and blessed Abram. This is the first time that Melchizedek appears in the Scriptures. He appears again in Psalm 110:4. The third time he appears in the scriptures is in Hebrews chapter 5. He appears again in chapter 6 and the last time is in chapter 7. Chapter 7 will be a major discussion about Melchizedek. Melchizedek leaps onto the pages of Scripture in Genesis, and leaps off the pages of scripture in Hebrews. He has no genealogy. There is no trace of his family in Scripture since his death is never recorded. He apparently has no beginning and no end in the sense that Scripture never mentions his birth or death. Therefore, one would draw the conclusion that Melchizedek was a high priest and is still a high priest. He continues being a high priest. It would appear that Melchizedek's priesthood never—watch this—ended. That is the way it appears because Scripture does not talk about his death or his birth. It looks like Melchizedek is an eternal high priest (Hebrews 7:3).

The message of Hebrews 5:5-6 is that Jesus is a high priest just like Melchizedek. You may ask, "Who said that Jesus was a high priest?" God the Father did! God the Father said He is a high priest just like Melchizedek.

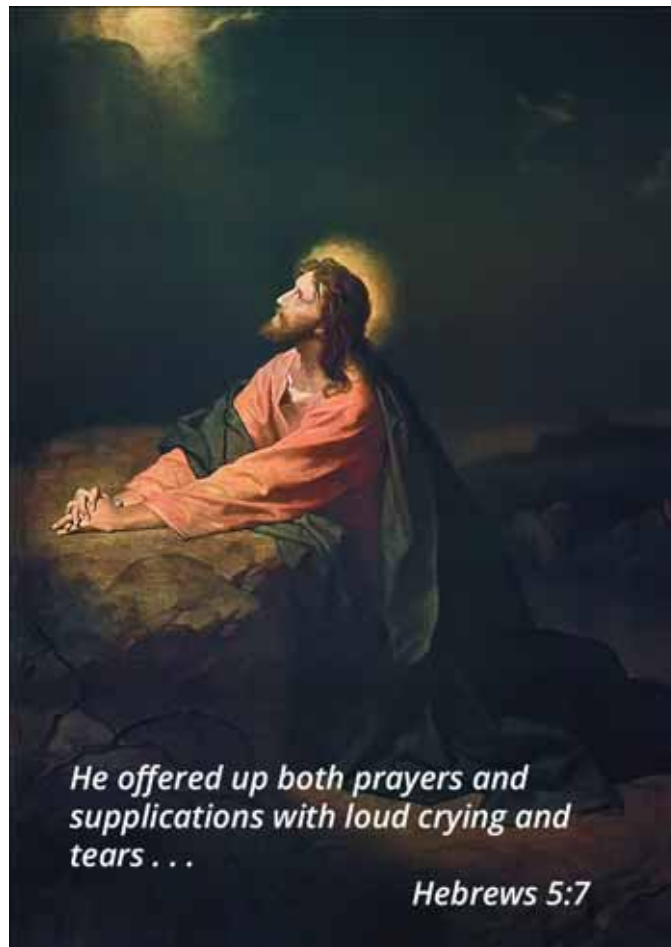
CHRIST STRUGGLED AT THE POINT OF DEATH. In verse 7 the Holy Spirit introduces us to the third point that a high priest needs to offer gifts and sacrifices. The answer

we are given is,

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 (NASB)

You may say, "Wait a minute, it says that He wanted to be saved from death. Is that right? Did Jesus really not want to die? Wasn't the purpose of His coming to die on a cross to take away our sins? Isn't that the reason He came?" The answer is that is absolutely true. In the Garden of Gethsemane we are told that Jesus cried out to the Father. Hebrews 5:7 reveals to us facts we are not told in the gospels. This verse tells us that there was loud crying and tears. Jesus was in anguish. He was asking for God the Father to save Him from death, and someone will say, "This doesn't make sense!" The explanation is given in the first part of the verse.

It says, "in the days of His flesh." Jesus responded that way because He was in the flesh. Think about this for a second. How would you respond if you knew you were going to die on a cross? Would you struggle if you knew you were going to be nailed to the cross, beaten, whipped, stabbed with a spear and die an excruciating death? Crucifixion was a horrible death. Think about it now. In His humanness He was struggling with what was going to happen. Yet, He obeyed the Father. In His humanness He struggled and submitted and God the Father helped Him.



CHRIST IS THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL LIFE. Verse 8 continues describing the sufferings of Christ.

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect . . . Hebrews 5:8-9a (NASB)

We need to ask, "What does it mean that Jesus became perfect?" In Hebrews 4:15 we have already been told that Jesus was without sin. That means Jesus was perfect. Then how is it that Jesus learned obedience from the things He suffered? The answer is fairly clear. He was holy in His character and demonstrated it by His obedience. He was already holy in His character as God. He demonstrated that He was holy by His obedience. He learned what it was like to be obedient in a way that He would never have understood before He took on human form. In that sense He was made perfect. The rest of verse 9 says,

. . . He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation . . . Hebrews 5:9b (NASB)

Do you know what Jesus was and is? He is the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the source of eternal salvation. He is the source because He was the perfect sacrifice. The human high priest offered sacrifices for himself. Jesus did not have to offer a sacrifice for Himself, but He did offer a sacrifice. Jesus offered gifts and sacrifices. The sacrifice was Himself and the gift is eternal salvation for you and for me. We can have eternal life, and it is a gift that Jesus offers.

CHRIST IS OUR ETERNAL HIGH PRIEST. Verse 10 is the final verse for this study.

. . . being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 5:10 (NASB)

Why is it important that Christ was designated a high priest after the order of Melchizedek? You might think this is not very important. This may seem to be a boring piece of theology. But that is not true. The fabulous message is that a high priest is the epitome of compassion, comfort, and spiritual

maturity. A high priest is one who is a mediator between God and men, and that describes Jesus perfectly. Also Christ is an eternal high priest.

What would it be like if Jesus ceased to exist tomorrow? What would it be like if He ceased to exist tomorrow? How would you feel? Remember we talked about a high priest establishing a relationship with other people. What would it be like if you were in a church and all of a sudden the pastor disappeared? How would you feel? Hopeless? Deserted? Despondent? Alone? Imagine what it would be like if our great, merciful, faithful high priest who died for us, who is our intercessor, who defends us, who helps us, who is gentle, who helps us in our ignorance, who helps us when we are off the course—what would it be like if He died tomorrow? This passage gives us comfort because it assures us that Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us. He is our eternal high priest.

I'd like to close with a part of a hymn. The title of it is "Moment By Moment."

Never a trial that He is not there.

Talking about Jesus Christ.

Never a burden that He does not bear.
Never a sorrow that He does not share.
Moment by moment I'm under His care.

Moment by moment I'm kept in His love.
Moment by moment I've life from above.
Looking to Jesus till glory does shine.
Moment by moment, O Lord, I am thine.

Never a weakness that He does not feel.
Never a sickness that He does not heal.
Moment by moment, in woe or in weal.
Jesus, my Savior, abides with me still.

Moment by moment I'm kept in his love.
Moment by moment I've light from above.
Looking to Jesus, the glory does shine.

Moment by moment, O Lord, I am thine.

- Daniel W. Whittle - 1893

Great hymn, great words. He is our merciful, faithful,
caring high priest who is with us forever.