

## Hebrews 5 (2014)

- As we begin Chapter 5 of Hebrews today, we begin a new proof of Jesus' superiority
  - The topic is the priesthood and Jesus as High Priest
    - Last week, as we ended Chapter 4, the writer made a transition to this topic by introducing Jesus as our new and better High Priest
    - One Who could sympathize with our weaknesses
    - And could intercede for us in a much better way, since He was perpetually close to the Father
  - At this point, the writer is preparing to launch into an extended discussion on Jesus as our High Priest
    - That discussion goes all the way through Chapter 7
    - But perhaps at this point, you're thinking this topic holds little interest for you and your relationship with Christ
    - Perhaps you're saying to yourself, I don't really need to understand how Jesus is a better High Priest, since I never held any regard for the high priests of Israel
    - I'm not a Jew and I never experienced life under the Law or the sacrificial system, so of what use is this analysis?
  - If you're thinking that way, it's certainly understandable, but it's very wrong
    - The writer is going to work his way into some very challenging and eye-opening concepts about Jesus' Priesthood
    - Things that will change our understanding of events as far back as Genesis Chapter 3 and beyond
    - In fact, this writer's own audience was itself unprepared for the depth of his arguments and the magnitude of his revelation to them
    - Which is why this discourse on the priesthood requires three chapters

- At the end of this chapter, the writer will suspend his discussion of the priesthood to issue the third warning
  - The warning is the entirety of Chapter 6, and it chastises the audience of this letter for not being able to see these truths on their own
  - They had overlooked some important aspects of God's plan going back to Creation
  - And as a result, the writer is laboring harder than he ought to in explaining Jesus' role as our High Priest
- So today we examine Chapter 5, where the writer begins to examine Jesus' qualifications as High Priest, and he ends with his introduction to the third warning

**Heb. 5:1** 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. 5:2** he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness;

**Heb. 5:3** and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.

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

- The writer begins with the phrase "for every high priest..."
  - In other words, he's giving the general qualifications in Israel for a man to be appointed as the high priest
    - Before we look at the specific qualifications, let's understand a little background on the role of the high priest, or of priests in general
    - In Hebrew, the word "priest" is *kohen*
    - It can also be translated "chief minister", as in "chief servant of God"
    - Many Jews descended from the tribe of Levi have the last name Kohen today, reflecting their priestly family origins
  - The general purpose of a priest is to be a representative of God to men and of men before God
    - They intercede before God on behalf of needful man

- And they represent God's holiness to sinful men
- Within Israel, there were many priests who took turns serving in the tabernacle
- And among them, one man was set apart as the high priest
- His primary duty was to officiate over a one-time atonement each year
- Regarding the high priest, he was considered the chief representative of God before men
  - All priests are representatives of the Covenant that granted them their office
  - And the high priest is the chief representative of God under that same Covenant
  - For example, the high priest of Israel was the chief representative under the Covenant of Law given through Moses
- And so, our writer begins by reminding us that these covenants stipulated certain requirements for the high priest
  - A high priest must be taken from among men, if he is to be a representative before God on behalf of men
    - Simply put, to represent a group, you must be a part of that group
    - Those who wish to represent America at the Olympics must be American
    - State representatives to Congress must be citizens of that state
    - Those wishing to represent their school at a spelling bee must attend that school, etc.
  - So it is with priests before the living God
    - A priest - by definition - represents men before God
    - And therefore, a priest must be a human being, a man like those he represents
    - A priest cannot be an angel or a spirit, since such an entity cannot represent human beings

- Secondly, the high priest must offer sacrifices and gifts before God
  - Under the Law, Israel could not worship God, except in the way He prescribed in the Law
  - He prescribed that their worship must come through the means of priests
    - A priest had to perform the sacrifice
    - A priest had to take the blood into the tabernacle
    - The high priest had to take it into the Holy of Holies
    - You were not able to worship God without that priest – he was your means to God under the Law
  - These acts of worship are acceptable to God only because God Himself has recognized the office and function of the high priest
    - What the writer is saying is that the high priest was essential to the worship process because God was only willing to accept worship through his intercession
    - Representatives have power and authority only if those they approach acknowledge that power
    - God sets the rules for how men may approach Him – and when we follow His rules, He receives our worship
    - When we don't follow His rules, He doesn't receive our worship
  - Again, an example will help us understand what the writer is saying
    - When you hire an attorney to represent you in a court of law, that attorney has authority to conduct your affairs only because the judge acknowledges your attorney's right to represent you
    - If your representative was not a licensed attorney, or hadn't been accepted to the Bar Association, then he won't be acknowledged by the court as a lawful representative
    - Or if you send a person to Washington D.C. to represent you in Congress, but that person was not duly elected according to the rules of Congress, then your representative won't be accepted
    - And if your representative isn't accepted, then you have no representation in the end

- So it is with a high priest
  - God has declared that He will accept our worship and acknowledge our requests for forgiveness only through the work of a high priest
  - That representative must be one approved by God, according to the rules of a covenant given by God
  - If you want God to receive your worship and hear your petitions and grant you forgiveness for your sins, then you must approach Him on His terms
    - Which means you must come to Him through a high priest who is qualified to offer those sacrifices and gifts
- In vs.2-3, the writer explains the wisdom of God in stipulating these requirements for a high priest, using the Aaronic priesthood, established in the Law of Moses
  - The writer says that because a high priest is himself a man, he has a valuable perspective when representing the needs of sinful people before God
    - The high priest of Israel could deal gently with the ignorant and misguided men and women of Israel
    - The words “ignorant” and “misguided” are not intended to be insults, but rather, they are literal descriptions of the people
    - Many within the people of God are ignorant, or in Greek, it means “without knowledge”, as lacking knowledge of God
    - The high priest was schooled in the ways of God through the Word of God and by his experiences in serving God
    - And that knowledge distinguished him from the people who lacked that knowledge
  - Furthermore, the people could be misguided
    - The Greek word for “misguided” means “to wander”, as in “to wander from the truth and into deception”
    - The people of God can be deceived by the world and by the enemy

- So the high priest acted as a shepherd to bring those who wandered back into the fold through discipline, feeding and encouragement
- And best of all, the high priest of Israel was well-equipped to serve, because he was a man who was himself beset by similar weaknesses
  - His personal experience in dealing with his own sin gave him the capacity for compassion and sympathy for others who sinned
    - He could put himself in other people's shoes
    - He was to be neither indifferent to sin, nor harsh with those who fell
  - In fact, his own sin required that he act as his own representative first, even before he could represent the people
    - Under the Law, the high priest had to sacrifice an animal for the sake of his own sins before he could approach before the Lord and offer sacrifices for their sins
    - This requirement served to remind the high priest and the people that sin was a common experience for all of them
    - It kept the high priest humble, for he was forced to acknowledge he was no more worthy than those he represented before God
- We don't meet God through an earthly priest any longer, but we still have those who minister to us in one way or another
  - "Priest", in a biblical context, implies that we meet God through that person
  - And that we appeal to God through that intercession
  - That is not how we approach God under the New Covenant
  - And yet, in keeping with the proper biblical definition, priests do still exist in the world today – the Church is the priesthood of this world today
    - Believers, those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, are the priesthood of this world today, according to Scripture
    - We represent the truth about God to the unbelieving world
    - We bring God to the people, just as priests did under the Law

- Those who are seeking God go to the Body of Christ, the believers, to find Him
- But we are not individually helping those within the Body to reach God – we are all accessing Him through the High Priest, Jesus Christ, serving us in Heaven
- As to the issue of pastoral leadership in the Church, it's common for us to conflate priests and pastors
  - Certainly, the Catholic Church has done that
  - But even in the Protestant tradition, we can view pastors as a substitute for priests – and that's not true
  - Any leader in the Church has a particular role and function in the Body, called-out in Scripture
  - But none of those things makes a leader a priest, or your representative to God – they are not your conduit to God
  - And yet, leaders should share some of the qualities that priests had in Israel
- For example, without stretching the comparison beyond what's reasonable, I think we learn something useful in the priesthood of Israel when considering the kind of leaders we want in the Church
  - Effective service in ministry requires compassion for the weakness and ignorance of others, knowing that we share the same weaknesses
  - Leaders should exhibit humility, acknowledging their own weaknesses, without exhibiting a sense of entitlement or power
  - But a leader can't give comfort to the enemy, and our chief enemy is sin – they can't excuse sin *because* they want to be compassionate
- So we want leaders who serve our interests in truth
  - They encourage us to become better followers of Christ
  - They have sympathy for ignorance, and compassion on the lost or wandering
  - And they make sacrifices on our behalf

- Now that the writer has explained the basic qualifications of a high priest, he moves to explaining how Jesus was a superior High Priest to any that came under the Law

[Heb. 5:5](#) 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”;

[Heb. 5:6](#) just as He says also in another passage,

“YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER  
ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”

[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.

[Heb. 5:8](#) Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

[Heb. 5:9](#) And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

[Heb. 5:10](#) being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

- The writer begins the comparison with Christ’s appointment as a priest
  - As with the priest under the Law, God the Father appointed and approved Jesus as a High Priest
    - Think back for a moment to the way a man became a priest, or even the high priest, in Israel
    - The priests were appointed by God to be of the Tribe of Levi, descended from Aaron
      - That’s why we call those priests the Aaronic priesthood
    - And the high priest was likewise always to be a descendent of Aaron, usually the eldest son
    - God set these qualifications, and only by these qualifications would a man be acceptable to God
  - Likewise, the Son had to meet the qualifications set by the Father if He was to be accepted as a representative of men
    - First, He had to be appointed by the Father
    - Just as God appointed Aaron, so did the Father appoint His Son



- The writer returns to the Psalms to prove his argument, using Psalm 2

**Psa. 2:7** “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:

He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.

- How does this passage prove the writer’s point?
  - The answer comes in understanding the ancient meaning of the term “begotten”
  - The word in Hebrew means “come forth”, but it carried another meaning in ancient Israel
  - This is the word used throughout Genesis to reflect the genealogical qualification of a son to continue the family name
  - We see the word over and over again in the genealogy chapters of Genesis
    - There, it’s translated “became the father of..”
- The writer is highlighting the term in Psalm 2 to demonstrate both aspects of Christ’s qualifications as High Priest
  - First, it reflects Christ’s taking on human flesh and being born as a man
  - Truly, God became the Father of Christ, calling Him Son, because the Son was born as a man
    - And of course, He had to be a man to serve as a suitable representative
    - Only a man can represent men before God
  - But this word also reflects that Christ was born into the proper family, descended from the proper line
  - Just as the sons of Aaron were the only ones qualified to be priests, Christ had to be a Son of the proper family
  - And that family has an order of succession, just as the sons of Aaron had a proper order of succession

- In v.6, the writer gives us the order of Christ's succession: the order of Melchizedek
  - The word "order" in Hebrew means "succession"
    - It doesn't mean a certain group, like an order of monks
    - It means a succession of people in an ancestral line
    - The Aaronic priesthood is an example of an order
    - New high priests only came from among the sons of previous high priests
    - And since a high priest served for life, a new high priest inherited his office by succession upon the prior high priest's death
  - So the writer of Hebrews is explaining that Jesus did not assume for Himself the title of High Priest, but He received it in the way the Father required
    - He received it because He was born into the correct family line
    - And He inherited His priesthood through a succession of priests
    - That succession of priests is called the order of Melchizedek
    - But Christ, never dying again, never gives up His Priesthood
- Then the writer compares the work of Christ as High Priest to the work of the high priests of the Aaronic priesthood
  - In the days of Jesus' flesh (that is, when He lived as a man on earth prior to His ascension) Jesus offered up both prayers and supplications
    - The writer is referring specifically to Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John 17, in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His petitions while on the cross
    - These were key moments in His ministry, when He interceded in weakness on behalf of ignorant and misguided humanity
    - He was serving as our High Priest in those moments
  - He approached the Father, the One Who was able to save Him from death
    - Obviously, the Son died on the cross

- So when the writer says the Father was able to save Him from death, he means the Father's ability to resurrect Jesus
  - And Jesus' petitions were heard by the Father because of Jesus' piety
  - The word "piety" in Greek means "caution" or "reverence"
  - Jesus' reverence was in doing all that God required to be a suitable representative, even to the point of showing sympathy for those who persecuted Him
  - And we see God's acceptance of Jesus as High Priest in the fact that He resurrected Him from death, leaving Him in the role of High Priest forever
- Finally, in vs.8-10, the writer emphasizes the value of Jesus' sufferings as High Priest
    - Though He was sinless and was divine, He still gained from the experience of suffering as a man
      - That experiential knowledge served to teach Jesus obedience
      - We might recoil at the notion that God could be taught anything, but in this case, it makes sense
    - Before Jesus became incarnate, He was always One with the Father and therefore, perfectly obedient
      - But then again, we must presume Jesus had never been in a situation where disobedience to the Father was a viable option
      - But in the form of man, facing a horrible death, Jesus was certainly tempted to run away and avoid the pain that He knew was coming
      - The suffering of Christ was in knowing what was coming and facing it voluntarily
      - That experience taught Him obedience in a way He never could have known before He experienced it as a man
      - Like I've said when teaching on submission to authority, it's never truly submission until we're asked to do something we don't want to do

- By His willingness to submit to the Father's will, Jesus was made perfect, the writer says
  - That word "perfect" can confuse us a little, since it implies Jesus was less than perfect in some earlier moment
    - But that's the not the correct sense at all
    - The word in Greek is *teleioo*, which means "to bring to a perfect conclusion"
    - So the writer says that as Jesus suffered, His mission as High Priest was brought to its perfect conclusion
      - He could finally understand what the weaknesses of men were, what the challenges were
      - He could overcome those challenges
      - He could then be counted worthy by the Father to be our eternal High Priest
      - He succeeded in all that He was given and was resurrected as evidence of God's approval
      - And in that, the plan of God was completed
  - We see this truth reflected at multiple points in the Gospels, where the same Greek word is used

[John 4:34](#) Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to **accomplish** His work.

[John 19:30](#) Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is **finished!**" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

[Luke 13:32](#) And He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My **goal.**'"

- Jesus' suffering on the cross was the accomplishment of a goal, and so that suffering made for a perfect end to that work
- And of course, it accomplished salvation for those who obey Christ
  - Obedience to Christ is a New Testament term for confessing Him as Christ, for believing the Gospel

- Just as those in Israel could only gain the benefit of the high priest's sacrifice by accepting it on their behalf, so it is with Christ
- We won't receive credit for His sacrifice unless we acknowledge it as a sacrifice on our behalf
- So Christ is the High Priest Who can make a sacrifice on our behalf, which the Father will regard as salvation for our sake
  - He came in the manner prescribed by the Father, as a begotten Son
    - He met all the qualifications as a man
    - Including demonstrating obedience to God and compassion for His fellow man
  - And He came in the succession, or order, of Melchizedek
    - This final detail is the most significant, in that it qualifies Christ as the promised Messiah
    - It tells us that God's promise of a Redeemer and King is now fulfilled in One Man, Christ
    - The order, or succession, of Melchizedek is an entirely different priestly order than the one given to Moses under the Law
    - And it unites the Kings and Priests of Israel into a single order
- Perhaps you're not very familiar with the significance of the order Melchizedek
  - Perhaps you haven't even heard of the order before, though most of you probably remember it from our study of Genesis
    - Still, the whole conversation is probably not very familiar to us
    - Which is understandable to some extent, since we're Gentiles
    - Still, it's an important topic, one the writer expects us to understand and follow
    - Otherwise, how will he explain the significance of Christ's role as a better High Priest?
  - And sure enough, the writer decides he needs to pause in his teaching on Christ as High Priest to chastise the church a little for being unprepared for such a difficult conversation

- Notice in v.11, the writer pivots into what will become his third warning to the Church

**Heb. 5:11** Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

- Concerning Melchizedek, the writer says, “we have much to say”
  - We’re not sure who the “we” is here, but it could reference a group of apostles working together
    - Or it could refer to the writer in union with the Holy Spirit
    - Either way, the writer has a message intended for this church, but he’s inhibited from delivering it because of two challenges
  - First, the truth of the matter of Melchizedek is hard to explain
    - The Greek word for “hard to explain” literally means “to misjudge an interpretation”
    - In other words, the truth concerning Melchizedek is easy to misunderstand or misinterpret
    - The writer isn’t saying it’s hard for him to explain this truth
      - The writer understands it easily enough
      - And he’s prepared to explain it well enough
    - But the nature of this complex truth makes it susceptible to misunderstanding and misinterpretation on the part of the audience
  - The second problem is with the audience, for this audience is apparently ripe for misunderstanding the writer’s analysis
    - He uses an interesting term to describe their shortcoming
    - He says they are dull of hearing
    - The word for “dull” is *nothros* in Greek, which means “lazy” or “sluggish”
  - These Christians were lazy in hearing and appreciating the truth of the Word

- The writer isn't saying they are slow to learn or mentally incapable of understanding what he's talking about
- Rather, they aren't interested in paying close attention and expending the mental effort required to work through the issues raised by a discussion of Melchizedek
- It reminds us that learning God's Word is not a passive activity
  - It requires effort, and it's worth it, because it yields a powerful reward
  - But if we don't focus ourselves on that work, we will naturally fall backward into a lazy Christian walk, one that regresses over time
  - This concern forms the substance of the writer's warning, which proceeds from here into Chapter 6
  - We'll take a closer look at the audience's problem and the writer's warning in the coming weeks