

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

FEBRUARY 15TH-16TH, 2025 // HEBREWS

JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST (HEBREWS 5:1-6)

One of the defining marks of 1st century Judaism was that Israel could trace a succession of high priests all the way back to Aaron, the brother of Moses.

- The high priest wasn't elected to the position by some democratic process: God appointed Aaron and his descendants (the tribe of Levi) for this vital office to handle matters pertaining to God for the people (v. 1a).

The role of the high priest in Israel was to offer both "gifts and sacrifices for sins" (v. 1b).

- The primary job of the high priest was to officiate (either directly or indirectly through lower-ranking priests) sacrifices to the Lord.
- The most important sacrifices were the atoning blood sacrifices for sin, but many other ritual sacrifices were made as simple gifts to God, expressing thanks and desiring fellowship.

The high priest represented the people of Israel as he ministered in the most holy place before God. Ideally, the high priest was to be understanding, gentle, and sympathetic.

- Since the high priest was human and "clothed with weakness," he was to be understanding toward those in Israel who were ignorant (who didn't know the law) and those who were going astray (drifting from the law).

As holy and sacred of an office as this was, the high priest was not sinless.

- V. 3 states that just as the people of Israel were beset with sin, so also was the high priest.
- Because of this, he had to offer up sacrifices for his own sin before he could offer up sacrifices for the sins of the people.
- No matter how religiously pure we may think we are, before God we are all still sinners.

This great honor of entering God's presence to offer atonement for His people was a privilege that God bestowed on Aaron and his sons (v. 4).

- God chose and called the men who were to be the high priests of Israel—they couldn't just exalt themselves into this role!
- Just a side bar—God has a pattern of always humbling those who exalt themselves.

The office of high priest in Israel was to be a sacred, noble, and honorable appointment.

- However, by the 1st century, the priesthood of Israel had been contaminated by greed and political corruption.
- Throughout Israel's history, high priests were chosen by lot from among the Levites.
- King Herod the Great (72-4 B.C.) often felt threatened by the power of the priesthood.

Herod ignored biblical law and appointed the high priest himself.

- In Jesus' day, the office of high priest was bought with bribes from wealthy families, who agreed to keep peace with Rome in exchange for wealth from tithes and the sale of animals.
- The office of high priest, like any human institution, was subject to corruption and perversion.
- Was there anything better for the people of God?

JESUS IS OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST.

The point is this: Jesus is perfectly qualified to be our high priest.

- Unlike the best high priests of Israel (who were still sinful human beings), Jesus is sinless.
- Jesus is BETTER than any high priest! He is THE preeminent, perfect High Priest of God's people!
- All human leaders and institutions are imperfect, which is why we trust in Jesus as Messiah.

JESUS WAS APPOINTED BY GOD (VS. 5-6)

The quotation from Psalm 2:7 highlights the fact that Jesus didn't exalt Himself to be high priest or seek his own glory in any way.

- The Father sovereignly appointed the Son, and the Son obediently accepted the role.
- Psalm 110 is also quoted to show that God's Messiah would be an appointed priest (after the order of Melchizedek, more on that later).

JESUS IS GENTLE, COMPASSIONATE, AND EMPATHETIC (V. 2)

The best high priests were able to deal gently with human weakness because they understood it well.

- Jesus is gentle with us when we are ignorant—He was a patient teacher to His disciples.
- Jesus is gentle with us when we go astray—consider how He restored Simon Peter.

JESUS ETERNALLY STANDS BEFORE GOD ON OUR BEHALF IN SINLESS PERFECTION (VS. 3, 6B)

Even the best high priests were mortal and had to pass on their position to a successor (who might be corrupt or wicked). But Jesus is a sinless, perfect, and faithful priest for us forever.

- We must approach God through His appointed priest, Jesus. We don't have to use a human priest; we have a better one: Jesus.

THE SOURCE OF SALVATION (HEBREWS 5:7-10)

"DURING HIS EARTHLY LIFE..." (V. 7A)

- Let's turn our attention to Jesus' life on Earth.
- Jesus got tired (Jn. 4:6; Lk. 8:23).
- Jesus got thirsty (Jn. 19:28) and hungry (Mt. 21:18).
- Jesus experienced pain and suffering (Mt. 16:21).
- Jesus wept and experienced human grief (Jn. 11:35).
- Even though Jesus was totally without sin, this did not make Him exempt from the frailty and pains of human experience.
- In His humanity, Jesus fully experienced the suffering that is often accompanied with surrender to God's will and obedience.
- Verse 7 recalls Jesus' experience in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36-39; Lk. 22:44) proved He suffered through the difficulty of obedience, yet He obeyed the Father perfectly.

- Jesus offered up His prayers to the Father ("the one who was able to save Him from death") in spite of His heartache and agony, and God heard Him (v. 7). But how did God hear Him if Jesus still had to go to the cross?

Jesus' prayer in the garden was ultimately a submission to the Father's will—no matter how painful it might have been (Lk. 22:42).

- Jesus' prayer to be saved from death was a prayer that God answered by raising Him from the dead.

- Sometimes God answers our prayers differently than we might expect—but are we still willing to submit to His perfect plan and will for our lives?

"... HE LEARNED OBEDIENCE ..." (V. 8)

Jesus didn't learn how to obey: He learned what all is involved in the act of obedience.

- Jesus "learned" the experience of obedience, and part of that learning was enduring suffering.
- Enthroned in the heavens, God obeys no one—all obey Him. When he became human and humbled Himself to the Father's will, Jesus fully experienced obedience.

Jesus' experience of obedience and suffering as a human being made Him perfectly qualified as the source of eternal salvation for us (v. 9).

- Jesus is the perfect mediator between God and humanity.
- Jesus is the source of eternal salvation for "all who obey Him." Those who truly believe on Jesus will be those who obey Him (Lk. 6:46).

GOD DECLARED JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK (V. 10)

There's more to come in Chapter 7 about this mysterious O.T. figure, "Melchizedek."

- The writer's point is this: the assurance of our faith is in the fact that Jesus is our eternal, sinless High Priest who was appointed by God.
- Jesus was also fully human—so he deals with us gently and graciously.

COSTLY OBEDIENCE

Obedience and surrender to God is a spiritual necessity for the life of the Believer.

- Obedience and surrender are not easy!
- The experience of obeying God often involves us suffering the loss of what we want.
- The reward for obedience to the Father is far greater than anything we might give up. Jesus set the perfect example for us!

QUALIFIED ("PERFECTED") THROUGH SUFFERING

Jesus' experience of suffering as a human being made Him perfectly qualified as the source of eternal salvation for us (v. 9).

- When we are suffering, often our greatest desire is for God to remove the pain and change our circumstances.
- God uses our suffering to qualify us for His purposes.

THE PROBLEM OF IMMATURITY (HEBREWS 5:11-14)

THERE IS MORE TO SAY ABOUT THIS...

We are in the deep end of the theological pool with all this talk of the high priest, Melchizedek, and Jesus' "learning" obedience and being "perfected."

- The writer of Hebrews has more to say about these difficult to explain topics, but there is a concern that the reader will not be able to understand. Why? Because of laziness.

"... TOO LAZY TO UNDERSTAND." (V. 11)

According to Jesus, our love for God (Mark 12; Matt. 22) should involve a commitment of our mental faculties to understanding God, His Word, and His truth.

- It is possible to grow "too lazy" to understand some of God's truth: it is not that these aspects of God are beyond our understanding; it is that we are too lazy, distracted, and immature.

ARRESTED ADOLESCENCE (V. 12)

We all start our new life in Jesus as spiritual babies: but something has gone terribly wrong if we still act like babies when we should be acting like adults.

- By this point in their spiritual lives, these Believers should have been teaching and discipling others, but they weren't. They should have been eating meat, but they still needed milk.

"WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING. FOR IT IS GOD WHO IS WORKING IN YOU" (PHIL. 2:12-13).

God works to grow us, but we have responsibility for our maturation as well.

- We can either speed up or slow down our maturation process through decisions to either surrender to God and cooperate with the Spirit's work in our lives or to quench the Spirit and try to stay in control in disobedience.

HOW DO WE GROW?

1. You need to eat (spend time in God's Word and in prayer daily).
2. You need a family (spend time in the Body of Christ being disciplined).
3. You need to let the Lord correct you (confess and repent).
4. You need to learn it is not all about you (giving and serving will grow you up).

If you're refusing to eat good spiritual food, get involved in a spiritual family, let the Lord correct you, and learn to contribute to the family of God...you are just living on milk (v. 13).

- If you are just living on milk, you will remain "inexperienced with the message about righteousness."
- You will hit a ceiling in your understanding of the things of God because of laziness.

GROWING UP (V. 14)

Solid food is for the mature. It is the spiritual meat of God's truth that requires the hard work of chewing, digesting, and thinking.

- Only by faithfully and diligently eating spiritual meat can we rightly train and exercise our spiritual powers of discernment.
- Moral discernment: to know what's good or bad.
- Theological discernment: what's true or false.

DO YOU LOVE ME?

- Real love involves the willingness to get to know the object of our love, passion, and affection by entering into their world.
- Jesus expressed His radical love for us in that He was willing to place Himself in our humanity and "learn" what we go through as humans.
- In response to His love, Jesus invites us to love Him in return with the totality of our being.

TOO LAZY TO LEARN?

- Laziness and distraction prevent us from loving God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind.
- Laziness and distraction are symptoms of spiritual immaturity.
- Spiritual maturity only happens through training. Training doesn't happen accidentally.
- Will you respond to Jesus' love for you by loving Him with all your mind and strength?