

Lesson 16
Christ Qualifies to Be the High Priest
Hebrews 5:1-10

Why is the Book of Hebrews important? There are many reasons but one of the main ones is to teach Christians about Jesus Christ, their High Priest.

“For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens” (Heb. 7:26).

“Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1).

We Christians have “such a High Priest.” He is wonderful and marvelous and we are to become more acquainted with our High Priest and His work. If this study in the Book of Hebrews does not cause you to say “such a High Priest” then I have failed in my responsibility as a teacher.

Let us recall again that those to whom the author of the Book of Hebrews was writing were professing Hebrew-Christians who were doubting their faith in Christ and seriously considering leaving Christianity and going back into Judaism. Apparently, these Hebrew-Christians were not clear on the idea of Messiah being the High Priest. After all Christ had not descended from Aaron nor was he a member of the Tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe. Christ, while on the earth, did not have access to the Jerusalem temple so far as officiating as a priest was concerned. He performed no priestly duties and He contradicted the whole Jewish concept of the priesthood. This caused these professing Hebrew-Christians to question Christ’s qualifications for a high priest.

THE PREREQUISITES FOR A PRIEST - Hebrews 5:1-4

In verses 1-4, the author sets forth the regulations, qualifications and prerequisites to be a priest in Israel. The writer has no reference to Christ at all but only to the requisites for a human high priest.

“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God” -- A priest must first be a man from the human race. A priest represents men before God and he must be a man to fill this office. Christ fulfilled this requirement in that He laid aside His glory as one who was coequal with God and entered into the human race as a babe in Bethlehem. ***“Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men”*** (Phil. 2:6,7).

“In order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.” -- A priest had to be a man in order to offer the meal offering and bloody sacrifices for sins committed by the people. A priest dealt with the problem of sin and guilt. Guilt was a problem that the Jews faced and it is a universal problem

of all men because they are sinners. No man who has ever lived has been able to escape guilt because of sin, and guilt plagues and haunts men and brings them into spiritual bondage. The biblical answer to guilt is a life sacrificed and there can be no sacrifice without a priest.

The Lord Jesus fulfilled this requirement because He was not only a priest but He was the sacrifice victim. He was both priest and sacrifice. He offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sin and guilt of men.

“He can deal gently (compassionately) with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness.” -- A high priest had to be encircled with the same weaknesses as those he represents. He had a sin nature and could understand moral weakness that makes men capable of sinning. There are sins of ignorance that believers do everyday which lead a person astray from God. Yet, a high priest, if he is to represent man before God, must sympathize with and have compassion on men in their frailties. Notice carefully that the high priest is not sympathetic with willful rebellion.

While the Lord Jesus had no sin nature, He is able to sympathize with us because He has been tested to the maximum with the highest intensity of testing and never sinned. Christ can give unlimited sympathy as the sinless Son of God as men are tested and tempted in their human weakness. Aaron, as a high priest, could understand weakness to sin because he was sinful but this same sinful nature might also give him a defective and distorted sympathy and understanding. Aaron would undoubtedly be more severe and less patient than the Lord Jesus in his dealings with men. Aaron’s compassion was limited but Christ’s compassion is unlimited.

The devil still may tempt us at this point and say, “How could Christ who had no sin nature really understand how we feel when we sin?” The answer is that Christ does not sympathize with our willful rebellion but He does sympathize with us in our testings and temptations due to our weaknesses. Christ was tempted and tested as no other human being on earth and yet never sinned.

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

“For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever” (Heb. 7:28).

“And because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.” -- The high priest had to sacrifice for himself because he was a sinner as are all men.

Jesus Christ is a perfect High Priest who can give unlimited sympathy to His people.

“And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.” -- The last qualification for a high priest is that he had to be appointed by God to this office.

THE PERFECTIONS OF THE SON - Hebrews 5:5-6

The author has said that a high priest in Israel had to be human and appointed by God, so now he will reverse that order and show that Christ was appointed by God and how He was human and suffered as no human ever could.

“So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, ‘THOU ART MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE’” -- Christ did not seek to advance Himself by personal ambition to the exalted office of high priest, but He was appointed to this office by God. This is a quote from Psa. 2:7 to show that Christ received this office by divine appointment. ***“I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee.’”*** He is not only a high priest, He is God’s Son and His priestly office is infinitely superior to Aaron’s office.

When did Christ become a High Priest? Scholars have disagreed over this for years. I personally, feel He was a High Priest from the eternal counsels. Christ apparently began His official priestly ministry at age thirty. As a priest, He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins at the cross, but the resurrection and ascension of Christ gave Him the triumphant enthronement as the great High Priest forever.

Christ was called of God to His priesthood. He alone could be called to a perfect and eternal priesthood, for He only is perfect and eternal, very God of very God, and very man of very man.

“Just as He says also in another passage, ‘THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.’” -- This is a quote from Psalm 110:4 to show that Christ’s priesthood did not have its beginning with Aaron and the Levitical priesthood which were temporary but with the order of Melchizedek. Christ belongs to a different order of priesthood than that of Aaron. Melchizedek was a king and a priest. He was a royal priest. His priesthood was recognized long before Aaron’s priesthood was ever established. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Melchizedekian order in that He is the King-Priest who ever rules over and lives to make intercession for His people.

THE POWERFUL SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST - Hebrews 5:7-10

Now the writer is going to show how Christ suffered more than any man and how He can genuinely be understanding and compassionate with His people.

“In the days of His flesh, when He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to Him who was able to save Him from (out of) death ...” -- The author now takes us to an incident in Christ’s life where He offered up strong prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears. This must have reference to the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matt. 26:36-45).

This garden experience gives us an understanding of the tremendous suffering the Lord Jesus passed through as a man as He received a glimpse or preview of what He was to suffer upon the

cross. It was His custom to go to the Garden to pray. He went on this particular night with His disciples and separated Peter, James and John to go into the deeper shadows of the Garden. He became “distressed (astonished) and troubled.” In His humanity, He was beginning to experience something new, and He “was grieved to the point of death.” He became baffled, puzzled with deep unrest of heart and distress of soul. He was getting the first premonitions of what it would be like to suffer for sin. Then Christ did something unique. For the first time in His ministry He appealed to His disciples for help. He said, ***“Watch with me and pray with me.”*** He asked for their companionship and help as He began to sense the awfulness of His sinless sacrifice for sin. Christ then went further into the shadows and fell on His knees and then on His face and began to cry out in groanings and sobbings to the Father. He sensed that His physical death was for spiritual death. He cried out, ***“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”***

May I suggest that Christ was sensing the sting of sin in His humanity. Sin produces shame, guilt and despair. Perhaps here He began to sense the shame of sin. What is shame? It is awareness of our defilement; it is self-contempt and a loathing of self. It is a complete abhorrence of self. Perhaps at this moment the Lord Jesus was getting a premonition of what it was like to feel ashamed. All the naked filth of humanity was before Him. No wonder He sought to flee this death in His humanity. But He did not because He said, ***“Not what I will, but what Thou wilt.”***

Christ then came back to His disciples and found them asleep and our Lord awakes them and gently rebukes them because they could not pray with Him for even an hour. Christ went back to pray again in the shadows. Again He is in agony and now He begins to experience the premonition of guilt. What is guilt? Guilt is a sense of injury done to someone else. Guilt results from having broken God’s moral laws with an annoying sense of remorse and shame. Christ in the Garden senses the sinner’s awful guilt. He felt Himself a culprit and a child of wrath. He writhed in torment among the trees in the Garden. Christ cried out a second time, ***“My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it. Thy will be done.”***

You perhaps have seen the picture of Christ quietly kneeling at a bench in the Garden, praying serenely and quietly. That artist never read His Bible because Christ was flat on His face, writhing in agony as He prayed with sobbing and tears.

Once again Christ returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. He did not awaken them but let them sleep. He went back into the shadows to pray and the third experience of agony was worse than them all. Before He began, God sent an angel to strengthen Christ. He began again to pray, cry out, and give forth involuntary utterings. Perhaps at this point Christ began to have a premonition of despair. He sensed hopelessness, helplessness, discouragement and utter defeat. So great was His agony that He actually sweat blood. And yet He prayed, ***“Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will but Thine be done.”***

In His premonitions, there is a mysterious sense in which Christ experienced our weakness and infirmity and did it without sin. There is nothing we can experience that Christ did not experience in the way of testing and temptation but He did not sin.

Through all this suffering, Christ prayed to be delivered “from death.” Christ was not praying for deliverance from physical death for He was committed to the Father’s will. He prayed to be delivered “out of death”; that is, through physical death where He experienced the sting, the curse, the guilt, the shame, the despair and the judgment of spiritual death. He prayed that He would be resurrected and triumphant over physical death and spiritual death.

“And who was heard because of His piety.” -- Because of His “fear” or “reverential awe” God heard Christ’s prayer. He had humble submission to God’s will when He said, ***“Not My will but Thine!”***

“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.” -- Through suffering, Christ learned the meaning and cost of obedience. Christ did not have to learn to obey for He always did the Father’s will. ***“...for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him”*** (John 8:29). While Christ did not have to learn to obey, He did practice obedience. He was always willing but He had to experience suffering in order to practice obedience. It took the greatest amount of obedience for Christ to submit to be the Sinbearer. Even He who was the eternal Son had to experience and practice obedience and He did the Father’s will even unto death. ***“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death on a cross”*** (Phil. 2:8).

He learned what it meant to obey God when every cell in His body wanted to disobey. No wonder He cried out to flee from this experience.

“And having been made perfect ...” -- Somehow the death of Christ completed Christ. The word “perfect” means “to bring to completion or a fixed end.” The things Christ suffered, especially in His death, fit Him for the office of high priest. The end was reached in His substitutionary death for sin as a sacrificial victim.

“He became to all those who obey Him the source (cause) of eternal salvation, ...” -- The King James Version says “author of salvation” and the New American Standard says “source of salvation” but these concepts are too weak. The word actually means “cause of eternal salvation.” We get the English word etiology from this root, which is the science of causes in medicine. Christ is the first cause of salvation and has secured the salvation of all God’s people. ***“Being justified as a gift (without a cause) by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus”*** (Rom. 3:24). The cause of salvation is Christ’s death; the means of appropriating this death is belief in Christ. When we trust in Christ by an act of the will, we are obeying Christ’s command to believe in Him.

Faith is a form of divine obedience and some of the cheap sentimental and superficial representations of faith in decision-hungry evangelistic preaching in our day is unknown to the New Testament.

Christ offers an eternal salvation and an eternal salvation cannot be lost by any who truly obey Christ and trust Him as Savior and Lord.

“Being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.” -- Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, He has been publicly saluted and proclaimed the Son of God and the Great High Priest.

CONCLUSION

Christ causes eternal salvation to all who obey Him. All who genuinely obey the command to believe on Christ shall be saved (Acts 16:31). Have you obeyed Christ?

All who obey shall be saved. None who do not obey Him shall ever be saved. There is no salvation to men living and dying in unbelief, impenitence and disobedience. But there is eternal salvation to all who obey Christ.