

JESUS IS BETTER

Hebrews 5 || *Our High Priest & Our Huge Problem*

North Center || March 12, 2023

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Intro

- Did any of you ever make a bad decision when you were growing up...and then think to yourself...
“*Oh, my dad is going to kill me when he finds out*”?
 - Like putting a *hole in the basement wall* by practicing your skateboarding tricks in the basement? Or by *breaking the neighbor's window* while playing baseball? Or *losing the expensive tool* that your dad let you borrow? Or *getting a speeding ticket* while you are still on your parents' insurance? Or having a campfire in the woods behind the church building and *starting a forest fire*? 😊
- **On the other hand**...did any of you ever make a bad decision and then think to yourself...
“*Oh, this is bad. I should call my dad*”?
 - When I was a sophomore in college, my parents let me borrow their car for the semester. It was the middle of winter, and I was driving a little too fast for the road conditions when I lost control of the car and had a head on collision with the college school bus (*known as the bullet*). The bus ended up getting an imperceptible dent in the front bumper, but my parents' car was totaled. In that moment, you know what my thought was?
“*Oh, this is bad. I should call my dad.*”

Hebrews chapter 4 ends by saying that we should come boldly to our Father because Jesus has made it a place where there is only mercy, grace, and help for the children of God. When we struggle or make mistakes or give into temptation, our disposition should be: *oh, this is bad. I should go to my Father*. Why? Because the Son of God is our High Priest. By the grace of God, this is what we are going to see this morning as we look through **Hebrews 5** together. But we are going to start by reading **Hebrews 4:14–16**.¹

Seeing then that we have a **great High Priest** who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus the Son of God,
Let us hold fast our confessions.
For we do not have a **High Priest** who cannot sympathize with *our weaknesses*,
But was in all points *tempted as we are*, yet **without sin**.
Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace,
That we may obtain *mercy* and find *grace* to *help* in time of need.
~ **Hebrews 4:14–16**

If you wanted to try **MEMORIZING** a little bit of **Hebrews** this year, there are a couple passages that I would recommend, and I think this would be the first one.

1. First, it reminds us of who we are: *on our own, we are weak, tempted, given to sin, and therefore prone to wander*. This is really important, because it's **not** the way our culture talks.

¹ **NOTE** regarding chapter and verse divisions: as you study your Bible, one of the things that's important to keep in mind is that the chapter and verse numbers aren't original to the text. Hebrews was written as a homiletical **letter** to the early Jewish Christians without any chapter divisions or verse separations. The chapter and verse markers were **added in the mid 1500's** as a way of helping us study the Bible together in community.

This is important in a book like Hebrews because, if you glance at **the first word** of every chapter (except the first chapter and the last chapter), you'll notice that it's a connecting word of some kind: *therefore, for, now, then*. This means that each chapter is somehow **connected** to what was written before it and to what was written after it – which means that, if you just open your Bible and start reading at Hebrews 5, you're going to have a hard time understanding what it's talking about.

The **egocentric vernacular** of our **postmodern, self-referential, progressive, feministic, egalitarian, woke culture** wants you to see yourself as **strong, good, beautiful, independent, and self-sufficient**.

They want you to look in the mirror and say,

“You are strong. You are independent. You are beautiful. You are a good person. You are enough.”

And while that may sound affirming & feel encouraging, it’s not the way the Bible talks about people. **Ever...** Listen to how the Bible describes people who look to the mirror for meaning & identity & affirmation instead of looking to God...

The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.

~ *Genesis 8:21*

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

~ *Jeremiah 17:9*

All nations before Him are as nothing,

And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.

~ *Isaiah 40:17*

Without Me you can do nothing.

~ *John 15:5*

There is none righteous, no, not one.

There is none who understands;

There is none who seeks after God.

~ *Romans 3:10–11*

O wretched man that I am!

Who will deliver me from this body of death?

~ *Romans 7:24*

They always go astray in their heart.

~ *Hebrews 3:10*

[You] do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

~ *Revelation 3:17*

Do you know why we sing, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a **wretch** like me”?
Because, apart from Jesus Christ, you are **a wretch**. I am **a wretch**.

Do you know why we sing, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love”?
Because, apart from Jesus Christ, that’s what every single one of us is prone to do: **to leave God**.

You cannot go looking to your mirror for encouragement regarding your true identity, but you can go looking for encouragement here (*Hebrews 4:14–16*).

2. Not only does this passage (**4:14–16**) remind us who we are, it also reminds us who Jesus is.
 - He is the Son of God (14).
 - He knows what it’s like to walk in your shoes – your *weaknesses*, your *temptations* (15).
 - And He never once sinned (15).
 - He ascended into Heaven (14).
 - He is our Great High Priest who stands on our behalf in the presence of our Father (14).

And that brings us into **chapter 5** where this book starts to really focus in on the OT priesthood and what it means for us that Jesus is our Great High Priest.

OUR HIGH PRIEST

We have already seen several references in Hebrews of Jesus as our High Priest:

Therefore, in all things, He had to be made like His brethren,
That He might be a merciful and faithful **High Priest** in things pertaining to God,
To make propitiation for the sins of the people.

~ *Hebrews 2:17*

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling,
Consider the Apostle and **High Priest** of our confession, Christ Jesus...

~ *Hebrews 3:1*

Seeing then that we have a great **High Priest** who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus the Son of God...

~ *Hebrews 4:14–15*

But now, in **Hebrews 5**, this idea of Jesus as our High Priest becomes the theme of the rest of the book.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRIESTHOOD | *Hebrews 5:1–4*

1. (5:1) They were men who were **set apart** for the service of God.²
2. (5:1) They were **mediators** between God and His people. They were the ones who conducted the sacrifices that made it possible for a sinful people to have a *mediated* relationship with Him.³
3. (5:2) They could relate to the people because they were **just like them**. Sometimes, people look at spiritual leaders (*like OT priests or NT elders*) as being super-spiritual Christians, but there is no such thing as super-spiritual Christians. Every single one of us is “*subject to weakness*” – including every OT priest & every NT pastor.
4. (5:3) This means that, not only would the priest make sacrifices for the whole congregation, but he would also offer make **sacrifices for himself**.⁴
5. (5:4) **God chose** the priests.⁵ You didn’t grab a job application and apply for the priesthood. This wasn’t a career path that you decided to pursue for yourself.⁶ Of all the vocations that a man might be able to choose for himself, this wasn’t one of them. **God** chose.
6. (5:4) And in **Exodus 28–29**, we read that God chose **Aaron** to be the first High Priest of Israel, and all the future priests in Israel would come from the Levitical family line of Aaron (“*according to the order of Aaron*”).⁷
7. The **most important duty** of the high priest took place on the **Day of Atonement**⁸ when he would enter the Most Holy Place behind the veil to stand before God. After making a sacrifice for the people and for himself, he would bring the blood into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle it on the mercy seat.⁹ And this sacrificial blood would serve as a **temporary covering** for their sin.¹⁰

² Lev 21:6.

³ Lev 16:1–28; Exod 29:36. They were worship facilitators. **Mediator**: somebody who stands between two people in a conflict (**think**: a translator between people who speak 2 different languages; a bridge between 2 hostile cultures; a hostage negotiator).

⁴ Lev 4:3–21.

⁵ Exod 28:1; Num 18:7.

⁶ This reminds me of the time one of my children asked me how somebody becomes the president of the United States. “*Do they just sign up?*” 😊

⁷ Heb 7:11; Exod 4:14.

⁸ Kaphar (Heb. כָּפַר): *wash away; rub off*; hence it carries the idea of the *obliteration* of sin (BDB).

⁹ Lev 16:14–15; 23:27–28.

¹⁰ Heb 10:4, “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.”

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST = BETTER THAN AARON

Then the author moves to show us (1) how Jesus is **like** Aaron as our High Priest and (2) how Jesus is infinitely **better than** Aaron.

1. (5:5) Jesus is like Aaron in that **God called Him** to be our High Priest. Jesus wasn't seeking glory for Himself in the same way that so many of the Jewish religious leaders were seeking glory from their position.¹¹ "*Christ did not glorify Himself*"; the Father glorified Him.

So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest,

But it was He who said to Him:

"*You are My Son,*

Today I have begotten You."¹²

~ *Hebrews 5:4*

Jesus didn't maneuver His ministry or leverage His credentials or manipulate His connections in order to build Himself up. Rather, everything that Jesus did (from His incarnation to His crucifixion) was about laying Himself down.¹³ His glory as our High Priest is because God the Father exalted Him to this position.

In this way, He is similar to Aaron, but this is about where the similarities end! Now the author moves to compare Jesus to **another OT** character named **Melchizedek** as a way of showing just how superior Jesus is to every other High Priest in history.

As He also says in another place:

"*You are a priest forever*

According to the order of Melchizedek."¹⁴

~ *Hebrews 5:6*

...called by God as High Priest

"*according to the order of Melchizedek*".

~ *Hebrews 5:10*

You might remember that we were briefly introduced to this **Melchizedek** character last week in **Genesis 14:18** when we were looking at what the Bible teaches us about bread. He's only mentioned twice in the entire OT (*Gen 14:18; Psalm 110:4*), but he suddenly becomes a major character here in **Hebrews 5–7**.

We'll spend more time talking about Melchizedek when we get into **chapter 7**, but there are just two things that we should remember about him right now:

1. Melchizedek shows up as the **first High Priest** in the Bible. He shows up as a High Priest of God approximately **400 years before God ordained Aaron** to be the first High Priest in Israel.
2. And he seems to **come out of nowhere** and then just **disappears from the scene**. There's no record of his birth and no record of his death. That's not true of Aaron (*or of any of the Levitical priests*). We have a record of his birth, and we have a record of his death. Aaron **died**. His sons **died**. Their sons **died**. But Melchizedek's story doesn't read that way in the Bible.

¹¹ E.g., Luke 18:11.

¹² Heb 1:5; 5:5; Psalm 2:7. This phrase, "*Today I have begotten You*" isn't talking about a day when Jesus was born. We know (from many other places in the Bible) that Jesus is the everlasting God, without beginning and without end (John 1:1–3; 8:58; Rev 1:8). First, the word "**begotten**" doesn't born; it means "**unique; one of a kind**." Secondly, this phrase is used elsewhere in the Bible as part of the ceremony when those who were ordained by God for a sacred ministry officially began their work (e.g., Psalm 2:7). It appears to be a way of God saying, "*You are uniquely Mine. I have chosen you, and (therefore) there is none like you.*"

¹³ See: Phil 2:5–8.

¹⁴ This is a direct quote from Psalm 110:4

And the author of Hebrews (*who clearly knows the Word of God*) sees a connection between the *story* of Melchizedek and the *reality* of Jesus. He points to Melchizedek and says, ***that's a picture of Jesus!***

He isn't a priest according to the order of Aaron – who had a beginning and an end. He's a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Just like Melchizedek appears to have no beginning and no end, Jesus is a High Priest with no beginning and no end.

Every other priesthood eventually ended in the death of the High Priest, but **Jesus is alive forevermore!**¹⁵

We can come boldly into the presence of the Father because Jesus is better than Aaron. He is better than Aaron because...

1. His priesthood **lasts longer** than Aaron. Jesus is our **priest forever** (5:6).
2. He **understands our struggles better** than Aaron ever could...*because He never sinned* (5:7). This means that He experienced every level of temptation and suffering imaginable – because He never experienced a release from the temptation by giving in to it (**balloon illustration**).¹⁶
3. He is **the very Son of God** (5:8). Our mediator is not a Levitical priest who has the same sin condition as us. The One who stands between us & the Father is the Father's beloved Son.¹⁷
4. He knows how to **obey** the Father even in the midst of profound suffering (5:8).¹⁸
5. *"He became the **author of eternal salvation** to all who obey Him"* (5:9).¹⁹

It's not a temporary salvation that lasts as long as you are good (which is essentially what every other religion teaches). It's a salvation that is complete. Final. Eternal. Forever. Because it's not based on what you do or how well you live; it's based on how well Jesus lived and what He did on the cross for you.

This is the most glorious news in the universe! The One who is your advocate, your mediator, your salvation, **your High Priest...is:**

1. God's beloved Son,
2. Who understands your struggles better than you do,
3. Who is actually able to help you obey God even in the midst of suffering,
4. And who gives a salvation that never ends to those who put their faith in Him because He is our High Priest forever.

The question is: are you listening? Or has this breathtaking Gospel become "dull" in your heart?

¹⁵ Rev 19:16; Psalm 110:2; 2 Sam 7:13.

¹⁶ **Illustration**: the more air you put into a **balloon**, the more pressure is put on the rubber. For as long as the air remains in the balloon, it will experience pressure, and it will continue to experience increasing pressure as more and more air is blown into it. All that needs to happen for this balloon to be freed from the pressure is to let the air out. Similarly, the way people experience freedom from the pressure of sin is to give into it. But Jesus never did, and so that pressure never went away – which is what makes **Hebrews 5:7–9** so powerful.

¹⁷ Matt 3:17; 12:18; 2 Pet 1:17.

¹⁸ If you are fighting to be free from **pornography**, you don't want somebody helping you who only knows what it feels like to struggle with pornography but doesn't know what it feels like to have victory over the struggle. You don't want somebody who can only say, "Yeah, I know how you feel." No, you want somebody who knows the temptation of pornography, and who has also experienced victory over it. The Son has always perfectly obeyed the will of the Father, but when Jesus became human, He experienced – as a human – what it feels like to obey God in the midst of suffering. This is what it means that Jesus "learned obedience" (**Heb 5:8**).

¹⁹ He doesn't offer a temporary salvation through daily or yearly sacrifices through the blood of animals. Having lived **a perfect life** (in His suffering, in His weakness, in His wrestling with God, in His sacrificial death, and in His victorious resurrection), He became the One who writes the story (author) of a salvation that never ends for those who put their faith in Him.

OUR HUGE PROBLEM

Our huge problem is that, in the midst of this incredible news, the readers had pretty much tuned out.

...we have much to say,
but *it's* hard to explain,
since you have become dull of hearing.
~ *Hebrews 5:11*

He says, you have been studying the truths of God's Word long enough that you should now be teaching it to others; **but, instead** of teaching others the glorious truths of Jesus, you still need other people to teach you the very basics (**5:12**). For as long as you have been hearing the truth, your soul should be feasting on the glories of God's Word (*like a child who is finally able to enjoy solid food – like a double bacon cheeseburger or jollof rice & fried plantains*). **But instead**, you're still having trouble receiving the most basic truths (*like a grownup who is still needing to be fed milk*).

The glories of God's Word are on the table in front of you, but you can't handle it because your heart has grown "*dull of hearing*" (5:11), and so your appetite for the Word of God is never "*exercised*" (5:14) through study, meditation, prayer, conversation.

This **spiritual immaturity** becomes a dominant theme in **chapter 6**.

CONCLUSION

We are going to close by lifting up our highest praise and our deepest request to God in prayer:

1. What is our praise: that we have the everlasting God as our High Priest and an eternal salvation as our confidence in life and in death.
2. What is our prayer: that God would give us ears to hear and eyes to see the glorious truths in His Word, and that our appetite for the truth of God's Word would grow and grow – so that we might be a people who know the joy of feasting.²⁰

PRAY

²⁰ May we be a people who know the joy of *feasting* on solid food and not just *sucking* on milk.

CHRIST: Appointed as *Everlasting Priest* & Author of *Eternal Salvation*

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for one

