



Hebrews 5:1-11
Jesus is Better than the High Priest

Summary: Jesus was sent by God to be our compassionate High Priest but we're in danger of becoming dull to the miracle.

Today is the first Sunday of December, but the second Sunday of Advent – the season when Christians remember the fact that God became flesh and dwelt among us. We light candles in the advent wreath and put lights on our homes and trees to remind ourselves that the light of God came into the darkness of the world. As John explains in the opening words of his gospel:

John 1:5 *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

Most people know and understand that Christmas has something to do with Christ. They have heard of a baby born in a manger under miraculous circumstances, maybe something about a star and some wisemen, perhaps they know about angels appearing to shepherds. But they're not sure, *why? Why* did Jesus come?

We'll answer the question this morning in our study from the book of Hebrews – but the short answer is: He came to be our High Priest, to make a sacrifice for us. You could say it like this: Jesus came at Christmas to make Easter possible.

The overarching theme of the book is: Jesus is better – the prophets told about a Savior to come but Jesus is better, because He is that Savior.

Moses led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt but Jesus is better because He leads people from all nations out of slavery in sin.

Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised Land, but Jesus is better because He leads us into the presence of God for eternity.

The High Priest made sacrifices for the people so they could draw near to God, but Jesus is better because He didn't just offer a sacrifice, He *became* a sacrifice for us. He was both the High Priest and the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

This morning we're going to cover a section of Scripture that could be a little hard to follow, but I want you to notice three things – Jesus was called to be our High Priest, He is a compassionate and gentle in His role, and yet we are in danger of growing dull spiritually and missing out on all He offers.

Read with me as we notice what it means to be a priest:

Hebrews 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. 3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer *sacrifices* for sins. 4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

Those of you who know your Bible or know Jewish culture and history know that there were twelve tribes of Israel and due to some events in their history God called one tribe in particular to be priests for all the rest – the tribe of Levi, so if you're wearing Levis, you're wearing priestly pants. Not really, but it might help you remember your Biblical history.

Moses was a Levite. And so was his brother Aaron, whom God appointed the very first High Priest of Israel. 4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

After leaving Egypt, the Jews worshipped at the tabernacle, a large tent that they could break down and take with them as they moved around waiting to enter the Promised Land. It was the responsibility of the priests to set-up, tear-down, and relocate the tent as well as take care of all the things necessary for worship.

Some of you have been part of a church that met in a school or another rented location and you did something similar, you setup and tore down each week in order to make worship possible for people. You functioned as Levites, as priests.

Of course, the priests did more than that, they also had to help the people offer sacrifices to God. They were butchers and grill masters for God. And there was a reason for that – the animals that were sacrificed remind us of the high cost of sin.

God says that when you sin, that is when you do something morally wrong, it isn't just wiped away. There is no statute of limitations, it doesn't just fade over time or biodegrade. It's more like a you got a stain on a nice white shirt. It's not going away on its own, you've got to do something about it. The problem is you can't because your hands are dirty and you can't get them clean either.

So, He said, you need to make a sacrifice. Take an animal that you own, and bring it to the priest, and put it death – let the blood of that animal remind you that what you have done is wrong, that it leads to your own death and the death of others

You were meant to be shocked by the violence and loss associated with your sacrifice, to be angered by it, to be grieved by it – something you owned was going to die because there are consequences to your sin, to your moral failures, to your spiritual rebellion and your selfishness. You were meant to feel the heaviness of what you had done.

And the role of the priest was to help with the process. You brought your offering or your sacrifice to the tabernacle, and later the temple, where it was slaughtered and offered to

God to remind you and everyone else of the consequences of sin; everyone, including the priests.

You see, the priests had to make sacrifices for their own sins: [3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins.](#)

It's a lesson reinforced every time you fly commercially – if the cabin loses pressure and the masks drop from the ceiling, put your own mask on first before helping others.

The priests, even the high priests, were still flawed human beings. They were sinners too. They couldn't take care of themselves until they had addressed their own faults.

So, eventually, the Father commissioned Jesus to be both priest and sacrifice. Read with me

[5 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.”*

[6 As He also says in another place:](#)

*“You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek”;*

I need you to notice something very important here: Jesus was called to be our High Priest, just like Aaron had been, but who was He called by? The Father. That's important because sometimes people have the idea that God the Father is some grumpy old man who wants all those obnoxious neighborhood sinners to stay off His lawn.

People think that God in the Old Testament is angry, judgmental, harsh and then Jesus comes along and it's like God 2.0 with a softer, gentler, modern remix – trying it all again from a different angle. Plenty of people walk around with this idea in their head. God the Father is angry and upset, but Jesus is soft and gentle, trying to talk Dad down from a rage.

But look with me at verse 4 – who called Jesus to be our High Priest? The Father. Who [so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life \(John 3:16\)](#)? The Father.

Remember, the course of human history is the actually the story of God trying to do good things for us, offer good things to us, while we turn Him down thinking we have a better idea, or we've figured out a better way.

God the Father called the Son to be our High Priest. God has always, from the very beginning been the one to initiate reconciliation with us, to call us back to Himself, to call us

in closer, and He has always been the one who makes it all possible...even when it cost Him dearly...

Speaking of which, next look with me at this description of Jesus' life and ministry:

7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

One of the core doctrines of the Christian faith is that Jesus was both fully God and fully man at the same time. He took on human weakness, experienced human suffering, endured human temptation and yet did not sin but remained completely submitted to the will of the Father.

That experience has made Him able to sympathize with us in all our weaknesses as we saw last week. And that is important for us to know – that we can **come boldly to the throne** of God because Jesus, our High Priest, is sympathetic to us, has compassion on us, is gracious, and merciful. He understands our weaknesses.

He learned obedience by the things he suffered. Now, that does not mean that Jesus is like a puppy that just graduated from obedience school – that once He did not know how to obey and now He does. Instead, it means that He learned how difficult it can be to trust God and follow Him when something inside of you is actively searching for another way to go.

In John's gospel we find mention of His internal struggle building during His final trip to Jerusalem. He told His disciples

John 12:27 "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name."

Jesus says there's something in Me troubling Me. Following the Father's will isn't easy. You see here the same attitude you see in the Garden of Gethsemane a few days later. On the night He was arrested you find Jesus praying, **Father, if there is any other way, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Your will be done.**

Jesus knew what was happening and He wasn't looking forward it. Choosing to suffer, to take on the guilt of our sin, doing what the Father sent Him to do wasn't easy or automatic.

Friends, that's honesty. That's real life. That's something I can relate to, and so can you. You know what you should be doing, you know the position you should take, the action you should take, by faith, but it's hard. You're troubled. You wonder if there's another way, an easier way, a faster way, a way that usually won't work or usually you shouldn't do, but maybe it's OK for you this one time?

Jesus felt that. He suffered that. 7 [In] the days of His flesh ... He ... offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death. And He learned the high price of obedience in the process. Yet each time He prayed, Father, this is what I'm feeling, but have Your way anyway. *Glorify Your name. Not My will, but Thy will be done.*

Jesus knows how hard it is to trust, to walk by faith. To do the hard, but right thing. To die to your preferences and say yes to God. But He set the example and shows us the way.

In the process, He also shows us something important about prayer – that the purpose of prayer is not getting God to do what we want, but getting our hearts and minds in harmony with His. Someone came here this morning just to know that - the purpose of prayer is not to get God to do what we want; the purpose of prayer is to get us in harmony with what He wants, even if we suffer in the moment and struggle to learn obedience to our Heavenly Father.

Remember, He cares about you. He sent His Son to be a priest for you. He wants to rescue you, redeem you, He wants to see you through this. But He's also asking you to trust. To walk by faith. To depend on Him. To ask for help. To come to Him as our High Priest and receive the salvation He offers – look at what we see next:

9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, 10 called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," 11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

Now, I need to pull two things together here. On the one hand, you see that Jesus is *the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.*

I tell you all the time the essence of sin is choosing to do what you want to do when you know what God has clearly said. That's rebellion and it's a simple repetition of the very first sin. God told Adam and Eve - eat from any tree you want except that one. And they said, 'Hmmm, it looks pretty good to me, doesn't look like there's anything wrong with it. I know what God said, but I'm going to just go ahead and trust myself on this.'

I preach this *all the time.*

But there's another side of the gospel too. Remember from verse 2 that the role of priest, especially the high priest, includes *hav[ing] compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray.*

You may have heard sin explained as missing the mark, not measuring up, not being perfect. In bowling a perfect game is one in which you roll nothing but strikes. That's the goal, but how often do you reach it?

Well, you need to know - the gospel is not just for times when you are weak morally – when you fail miserably, when you roll around in the muck and mud of sin; when you know what God says and you choose something different. It is for that, but it's for more than that too. The gospel is also for all the times and all the ways that you don't measure up.

The gospel is also for those times when you're not good enough physically. When either illness or injury, or exhaustion, or just the effects of growing up and growing old keep you from being who and what you want to be.

The gospel is for those times when you feel stupid mentally, you just don't get it, you keep making mistakes, even though other people seem to have it figured out.

The gospel is for those times when you're fragile emotionally, angry or depressed, when you lose control or can't get control of yourself, when you let others affect you.

The gospel is for all those times when you don't measure up, not just for the times when you defiantly rebel. And church, I don't tell you that enough, I'm sorry.

I'm so concerned with telling us all to do the right thing, to submit to God's authority and resist the desires of our flesh and the pull of our culture, that I don't spend enough time encouraging people who are honestly trying, coming up short, and feel like failures. Forgive me.

Because here's what I see about Jesus – He is sympathetic, compassionate, gentle and in a room this size, there's bound to be some people here who need to know that.

Jesus strikes just the right balance – He's not angry and frustrated with you for failing but He's not saying it's no big deal either. He's not over looking your faults, nor is He obsessing about them. He doesn't call a gutter ball a strike. But He cares about you – He wants to see you grow. He wants to help you. In fact, His hand is constantly extended to you. The Bible tells us that He is kind to us, good to us, that [while we yet sinners](#) – while we were still rebels and failures, while we were still coming up short, even with all of our best efforts – [Christ died for us](#) (Romans 5:8).

He is good, church. He is good.

And maybe, as you grow in the gospel, you can become increasingly good too. You can show others the compassion, the gentleness, the mercy and patience that God shows you.

Parents, here's a quick test: if your kids mess up, would you be the first person they would tell, or the last person to know?

Or, what about those of you who sit in positions of approval or coordination – you make decisions about how things are handled. Can you show mercy, kindness, gentleness and compassion to others who don't measure up or didn't make the cut-off? I'm not saying don't hold them accountable. Do that. But instead of just making things a hard no, can you help

them find a way to get to yes, if? What kind of difference could your attitude make in the lives of others if you show them what you're already receiving in Jesus?

In order for that to happen though, you've got to stay sharp, you've got to stay focused, you've got to stay engaged spiritually.

One of the major lessons you learn by reading the book of Hebrews is that Christianity is an active faith. We're not even half way through the book yet and we've already been told to "give more earnest heed" (2:1), and not "neglect so great a salvation." We've been told to hold fast to our hope (3:6) warned about the dangers of drifting, and encouraged to guard against a heart of unbelief (3:12). We've been told to hold fast to our confession of faith (4:14) and come boldly to the throne of grace (4:16).

But it doesn't happen automatically. Remember, Jesus was sent by God to be our compassionate High Priest but we're in danger of becoming dull to the miracle

9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, 10 called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," 11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

I need you to notice, this is addressed to the church. This is written for Christians. People who knew the gospel. People who had gone to worship. People who prayed. People who were familiar with Scripture. They knew who Melchizedek was – we'll talk more about him in a few weeks. But look at this – they had **become dull of hearing**.

That wasn't how they started off, *that's where they ended up*. They drifted here over time. It was an acquired condition.

This book is one continual call to action sprinkled with multiple warnings of spiritual atrophy. It's not a problem with our ears, it's a problem with our hearts – they can grow cold, even if they once pounded with a love of the gospel. Take any athlete in peak condition, if they take off from training, they start to lose performance. You do the same thing spiritually. You have to choose to press into Jesus as He reaches out to you. He will initiate, but you have to respond.

Notice what the Scripture says – **11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing**. In other words, there's more to tell you, but you're not ready for it. Friends, there's more on table because that's our generous God – remember, the story of human history is the story of God constantly trying to do us good and human beings, men and women, families and communities choosing to pull back instead.

There is a sense in which you're as mature spiritually as you really want to be, you're as close to God as you really want to be. He's not hiding from you, He's offering Himself to you.

You can read and study Scripture, you can fast and pray. You can serve and give. You can receive and use spiritual gifts. You are invited in. But how far will you choose to go?

We're going to prepare to receive communion now, and it's a great time for you to take a moment and reflect on these things. Reflect on the love that God has for you. Reflect on all He does for you – including calling His own Son to come as your High Priest. Reflect on His attitude toward you, that He is sympathetic, compassionate, gentle and good whether you flagrantly rebel or simply don't measure up. Remember that the purpose of prayer is not to get Him to give you what you want, but to help you see things His way. And, if you have become dull of hearing lately, ask Him to open your ears to hear what He wants to say. Return to your first love.

Let's pray.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Rom 15:13



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Hebrews 5:1-11

Jesus is Better than the High Priest

Summary: Jesus was sent by God to be our compassionate High Priest but we're in danger of becoming dull to the miracle.

- Jesus was called by God to be High Priest. Consider the following cases where men who were not called to leadership tried to take it upon themselves.
 - Korah and 250 of his followers were swallowed up in a divine earthquake because they burned unauthorized incense and challenged the existing priests (Numbers 16:16-40).
 - King Saul was rejected from his place as king over Israel because he grew impatient waiting for Samuel to arrive and offered his own sacrifice (1 Samuel 13:11-14).
 - King Uzziah was struck with leprosy for trying to burn his own incense in the temple (2 Chronicles 26:16).
 - Seven Sons of Sceva attempted to cast out demons in the name of Jesus and Paul and were mercilessly beaten by the demons (Acts 19:11-20)
 - What do we learn from these examples about the importance of allowing God to establish leadership and ministry His way?
- How do you think of God the Father? Is He harsh and distant while Jesus is gentle and approachable? Why do you think that? What would you tell someone to help correct their misunderstanding?
- Do you tend to think of the gospel in terms of obedience and submission or missing the mark?
- Are you seen as compassionate and gentle (vs 2)? If someone around you messed up, would you be the first person they would tell, or the last?
 - Where, and how, could you demonstrate compassion on people in your daily life?
- The author of Hebrews had more to say, but these early Christians had grown dull. Where are you right now on the sharp vs dull spectrum? What practices or events keep you sharp? What dulls you?