



First Baptist Church Selmer

JESUS IS BETTER • JESUS, OUR PERFECT SAVIOR • HEBREWS 5:1-14 • 6/4/2023

MAIN POINT

We can live in a state of confidence because Jesus has secured our salvation before God but now, it is time to share that saving faith with others.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever been in a leadership position? What type?

Was it an experience that you enjoyed or dreaded? Why?

Would you say you did a good or bad job?

All of us have experience with some form of leadership. Even if we have never led others in any formal capacity, we have likely sat under the leadership of others. Some, we would emulate as a future leader, and others, not so much. The late American author, John Erskine once stated, "In the simplest terms, a leader is one who knows where he wants to go, and gets up and goes."

The author of Hebrews continues with the explanation of how Jesus has fulfilled more elements of the Old Testament law. We will see that Jesus was the Perfect Savior that was "*the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.*" Then comes the harder truth. If you have a relationship with Jesus Christ and have experienced this salvation, it is time for you now to lead others to faith as well.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREW 5:1-4.

1 "For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. 3 Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. 4 And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was." (ESV)

What was the job of a priest?

How was a priest able to relate to the people?

Why was the priesthood system still not a perfect way of offering sacrifices for the sins of the people?

The readers of Hebrews came from a Jewish background, in which the high priest was the head of the Sanhedrin, or supreme court. The Jewish people relied on the high priest to make sacrifices to God on their behalf—to keep them in a right relationship with God.

The high priest was human just like the rest of the people therefore he was able to relate to them and understand their weaknesses. But because he was human he too was a sinner in need of offering sacrifice for his own sins. A priest was required to fulfill the role of offering sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins but until a perfect High Priest was in place, the system of offering would never be perfected.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREW 5:5-10.

5 "So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you', 6 as he says also in another place, 'You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.' 7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek." (ESV)

How does Jesus compare to human priests?

Why did the writer of Hebrews choose to make this comparison?

Jesus was and is a different kind of priest. He was sinless, so He did not need to offer a sacrifice for His sins. Aaron, on the other hand, was a human high priest. He was a sinner, so he had to make a sin offering for himself as well as the people.

The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 110:4, a reference to Melchizedek. Melchizedek was both a king and a priest (Gen. 14:18). Jesus also was a King and a Priest, but He took the titles to a new level by being the sinless Son of God. Jesus was the perfect High Priest appointed by God. He became human to sympathize with those He represents while providing the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Why does this passage state Jesus' prayers and supplications were heard?

In today's world, how do people attempt to connect with God in ways other than Jesus?

Some people place their trust in human religious leaders. Others focus on actions, such as public service, church attendance, giving of their time, and contributing financially to good causes. All of these are based on human efforts that are ineffective. They attempt to do what Christ has already done. He makes it possible for us to approach God with confidence.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 5:11-14

11 "About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." (ESV)

In what way does the writer of Hebrews state that our knowledge of spiritual things can be stunted?

Who does he compare the lack of spiritual growth to?

Every believer is either growing or they are not. What must a believer do in order to grow spiritually?

As the writer of Hebrews explains the fulfillment of Scripture by Jesus Himself, he takes a moment to stop and challenge the listeners. One of the reasons the author cannot continue is because the listeners *"have become dull of hearing."*

In what ways do we become "*dull of hearing*"?

It is vital in the life of a believer to pay attention to the things of God as it compares to the things of this world. We should remain attentive and hunger for the solid food of God's Word daily so that we may become mature in the faith.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How has this study changed your understanding of Jesus' sacrifice?

What are some ways the way you approach God's Word needs to change in light of this truth?

How can you keep attentive the God's Word as you live out the rest of your life?

PRAYER

As you pray, thank God that Jesus is your High Priest. Pray confidently before God and thank Him for the privilege of doing so. Pray that your group would embrace the confidence they have because of Jesus as they relate to God this week.

COMMENTARY

| HEBREWS 5

5:1. The work of Christ in 4:14–16 involved providing grace and mercy to struggling sinners. This was the work of a high priest. This verse explains how a high priest

functioned.

First, the high priest represented people before God. This job required a man who could understand and feel the pain and guilt of sinners.

Second, the high priest was selected. God made the choice.

Third, the high priest served in matters related to God. He was a mediator who represented God to men and men to God.

Fourth, he offered gifts and sacrifices for sins. The terms gifts and sacrifices refer to the full range of offerings that the high priest presented to God. This included both meal offerings and blood sacrifices. The high priest officiated in relation to human sins. He dealt with any hindrance which separated human beings from God. The special time in which he did this was annually on the Day of Atonement.

5:2. This verse moves from a general discussion of the qualifications of the high priest to a focus on the personal dimension. The high priest needed an ability to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray. The verb deal gently (*metriopathein*) describes one who found a middle course between indifference to need and anger at sin. A true high priest was not harsh toward sinners or calloused toward moral lapses.

The high priests in the line of Aaron had a feeling for sinners because they were subject to weakness. The high priest was clothed with the weaknesses of his people. Although Jesus was a human being, he was not surrounded by weakness. Jesus himself was never ignorant or going astray, but he understood those who were.

The special objects of the high priest's concern were those who were nuisances in most societies. Most societies make no provision to care for those who stray through their ignorance. These straying people were very conscious of their needs. The high priest had a special ministry with them.

5:3. A high priest with a weakness like Aaron had to present a sin offering first for himself and then for the people to whom he ministered. Leviticus 16:6 prescribed Aaron's offering of a bull for his own sins before he proceeded to the rituals for the people.

Christ stood in contrast with the high priests in that his physical weakness did not produce sin. Since he had no sin, he did not need to offer a sacrifice for himself. When he did make an offering, he did not offer an animal, but he gave himself. He was able to focus entirely on dealing with the sins of the people.

5:4. Another important qualification for the office of high priest is the call of God to the office. No human being could assume the office of high priest. The Bible records disasters in those instances when human beings assumed the right to perform priestly duties (see Saul in 1 Sam. 13:8–15; Uzziah in 2 Chr. 26:16–21).

Aaron had received a call to the office of high priest (Exod. 28:1–4). His successors received a divine appointment to the office (Num. 20:22–29). God called Christ to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek (v. 10).

Jews who read these words would have known that for centuries the office of high priest in Judaism had been filled by the whim of human rulers. The will of God and descent from Aaron were no longer concerns to the kings who made these appointments. The writer of Hebrews did not mention this issue, but he focused on the ideal role of the high priest. Many a Jew reading these words could agree that the succession of greedy, immoral high priests they knew had brought the nation to spiritual ruin. They could long for the kind of high priest which the writer of Hebrews described.

5:5. This is the first of six verses explaining the relationship between Christ and the order of Aaron and introducing the priesthood of Melchizedek.

The use of the name Christ instead of Jesus may emphasize that as Messiah, Jesus did not take the glory of the high priesthood on himself but received a divine call to the office (John 8:54). Psalm 2:7 is quoted to confirm Christ's appointment to the office of high priest. This psalm has already appeared in Hebrews 1:5 to present Christ's coronation. Paul used this same verse in Acts 13:33 to support the resurrection of Christ.

The psalm presents an exalted view of Christ. It narrates the coronation of a Jewish king. The psalm affirms that God had appointed Christ as a king. The act of the resurrection showed that God had orchestrated this event.

Christ had made it clear on earth that he regarded his work as a divine appointment (John 17:4). He had not sought out the job of high priest, nor had he refused it when God called him to this task. His assumption of the function came from a divine appointment. We can say, "Christ was performing the will of God."

5:6. This verse contains a quotation from Psalm 110:4, to establish the priestly role of Christ. Three features of this quotation are significant.

First, it contains a general formula. In another place refers generally to Scripture and shows that God spoke the words and uttered the appointment to office. Jesus found the

authority for his words in Scripture.

Second, the priesthood of Christ differed from that of Aaron in that it was forever. Nothing about Christ's priesthood required improvement or change. It would last always.

Third, the priesthood of Christ was according to the order of Melchizedek. The significance of this order is explained in Chapter 7.

Melchizedek was a mysterious Old Testament figure who appears only in Genesis 14:18–20. Abraham accepted the priestly ministry of this unusual leader. Melchizedek possessed a certain aura which seemed fitting for the exalted role which he represented. He was both a king and a priest (Gen. 14:18). Since Jesus was both king and priest, he had a likeness to Melchizedek. Although Jesus' role as Son was eternal, his function as high priest could not begin until his incarnation. Christ's priesthood served to reconcile sinners to a holy God.

Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi from which priests descended (Heb. 7:14). If Jesus were to serve as high priest, it became necessary for him to serve as a representative of a different order from that of Aaron. We will later learn more about the significance of the role of Melchizedek.

5:7. This and the following three verses show that Christ developed his ability to sympathize as he passed through testing and suffering. This happened during his days on earth and guaranteed that our Savior could identify with the weaknesses and problems of human beings. Christ himself was no stranger to hardship and affliction.

Some facts in this verse go beyond the statements of the rest of Scripture such as the reference to loud cries and tears. This was probably a description of Jesus' experience in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–46).

The two words used to describe prayer demonstrate Jesus' identification with his people. Prayers (*deeseis*) is the most general New Testament term for prayer. Petitions (*iketerias*) appear only here in the New Testament. It shows a strong element of entreating God. Still, we should be careful not to find too much difference in meaning between the two terms.

The fact that Jesus was heard because of his reverent submission may suggest that the Father heard Jesus' prayers because of his devotion to God's will. Because Jesus submitted himself to God's will, his prayer was heard in a far greater way than we would ever have imagined. God raised him from the dead in the glorious event of the resurrection and established him as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

The fact that Jesus experienced the cup of death qualified him to sympathize with human beings all the better. In the wilderness temptations (Matt. 4:1–11), Jesus refused to appeal to angelic forces to rescue him. He saw the road of the Father’s will and followed it without flinching. This caused him great suffering. It also enabled him to identify with the suffering of human beings. We have a merciful, sympathetic Savior.

5:8. It would not be unusual for a son to learn obedience by suffering, but Jesus was no ordinary son. He was a perfect Son, and we could wonder why he needed to learn obedience. Certainly, he did not need to learn obedience in the sense that he learned the unpleasant consequences of disobedience. Jesus never disobeyed.

The connection of Jesus as the subject of a verb involving learning raises a theological issue we must explore. Jesus shared in God’s omniscience, that is, the ability to know everything. Why would the Omniscient One need to learn anything?

We should probably recognize that a divine mystery is involved in Jesus’ learning obedience in Hebrews 5:8. It is difficult to understand why the divine Son would need to learn. Understandably, one who was the God-man might grow in wisdom, understanding, and a grasp of the importance of obedience. In a sense that we cannot fully comprehend, the incarnate son of God acquired knowledge through suffering that allowed him to learn the value of obedience.

Jesus always possessed the attitude of obedience, but by practicing obedience he learned the value and importance of obeying. By making a response of obedience to his testing, he acquired the experimental knowledge of obedience. He learned what was involved in following obedience. Learning this trait equipped him to understand better the struggles and weaknesses of human beings. It added to Jesus’ skills in showing sympathy for wandering sinners.

This is the sole New Testament verse in which Jesus is the subject of the verb learn. Jesus came with a commitment to obey, but in obeying he learned a new level of experience in obedience. His example and experience encouraged both the readers of Hebrews and today’s readers to persevere. We cannot experience a hardship in which he fails to identify with us.

5:9. The fact that Jesus learned obedience perfected him. Jesus was perfect in that he possessed every qualification to be our High Priest. He also was perfect in that God glorified him with exaltation to his right hand.

Made perfect (*teleiotheis*) describes perfection in the sense of completeness or fulfillment. Jesus was obedient to God's will in that he endured suffering and death. In doing this Jesus brought God's redemptive purposes to their fulfillment or completion. By enduring suffering Jesus attained the goal the Father had for him. This enabled him to become a perfectly equipped high priest.

To say that Jesus was perfect does not suggest that he was imperfect before he suffered. During his human life, Jesus' perfection endured severe testing. None of this testing blackened a single feature of his perfection. Jesus' perfection was the completion of someone who had faced trials, endured them, and learned to trust God through them. Jesus' perfection developed in an atmosphere in which he had his obedience tested and strengthened by the trials he faced.

After passing victoriously through suffering, Jesus became the source of eternal salvation. This phrase carries a meaning similar to author of their salvation in 2:10. Jesus' salvation is eternal because Christ accomplished salvation through a sacrifice which was thorough, effective, permanently valid, and never to be repeated or superseded.

Jesus' salvation applies only to those who obey him. The practice of obedience does not mean that only the morally perfect receive salvation. We obey the Lord when we accept his provisions for our salvation. Obedience is our acceptance of God's will. This response to salvation allows the privilege to be available to rich and poor, important and unimportant, Jews and Gentiles, and learned and uneducated. God's gift of salvation is open to all. The one who learned to obey made salvation available to all who obey.

5:10. This section closes with the announcement that God had designated Jesus to be a high priest in a new order, the order of Melchizedek. This statement added additional confirmation to the emphasis that Jesus served in this position through a divine appointment.

Several features of this order differed from the order of Aaron. First, the order of Melchizedek had no hereditary succession. This feature stood in contrast to the Aaronic order, which saw wave after wave of priests succeeding one another.

Second, it was a unique order because only Christ belonged to it. It was an order which was fit for Christ because it placed him in an entirely different order from that of Aaron.

We might expect the writer of Hebrews to plunge immediately into a discussion of the theme of Melchizedek, but instead, he paused to consider some problems among his

readers. Their spiritual immaturity was a serious concern to him, and he spent the final four verses of this chapter and most of the following chapter warning them of the dangers of their present attitude. When he finished this warning, he returned to explain more about the significance of Melchizedek in chapter 7.

5:11 This verse explains the subject of Melchizedek's relationship to Christ as an issue which is hard to explain. This was not because it was an unfamiliar subject. It was because they were slow to learn. This phrase highlights their slackness and dullness.

The fact they were slow learners was their own fault. They were no longer capable of receiving solid instruction. They had closed their ears to God's message. Jeremiah's descriptions applied to them: *"The word of the Lord is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it"* (Jer. 6:10).

5:12. The writer of Hebrews had spoken strong words against his readers. He now justified his weighty challenges.

First, he said, "You've been Christians long enough to be teachers, but you still need instruction in the ABCs." They should have been able to pass on their basic understanding of the Christian message to others. Instead, they needed a good review of the elementary matters themselves. Not only had they failed to move forward in their understanding; they had lost their grasp of the elementary truths of God's word. "If the dark things do not become plain then the plain things will become dark" (Thomas Hewitt).

Second, these believers were in need of milk, not solid food! The term milk represents a beginning level of instruction for Christians. The term solid food describes advanced instruction. Both the milk phase and the solid food phase were essential. However, someone who never reached the solid food stage was seriously defective.

The writer of Hebrews was concerned that his readers should be showing signs of Christian maturity. They were still caught up in issues only "baby" Christians found to be important.

5:13. This verse explains the meaning of the "milk" metaphor in verse 12. Three important features are mentioned.

First, those who lived on milk are called infants. The child should appear before the man, but grown men should not meet their nutritional needs on a diet of milk. No one should remain a child forever. Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 13:11 that *"when I became a man, I put childish ways behind me."* These believers needed to move out of spiritual infancy.

Second, those who lived on milk were described as not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. The phrase “not acquainted” (*apeiros*) describes someone who lacked experience. They lacked this experience because they had failed to develop the skills which their conversion made available to them. The readers themselves were to blame for this stunted growth.

Third, commentators differ in their understanding of the teaching about righteousness. The term may be a general reference to the gospel. It may also take righteousness in the sense of that standing with God which faith in Christ brings (Rom. 3:21–26). The term may also refer to a lifestyle of upright behavior. A teaching which produces righteous behavior may have been intended. It may be best to combine all of these understandings and suggest that the intention was to describe a teaching about Jesus which produced right standing with God and caused upright living in daily behavior.

The hearts of these people were dull and disinterested. Their intellects were preoccupied and uninformed. “The intellect is not over-ready to entertain an idea that the heart finds unpalatable” (F. F. Bruce).

5:14. Babies must have milk. Their stomachs have not yet adjusted to the digestion required of solid food. Mature adults need the varied nutrition which solid food gives.

The readers of Hebrews were compared to babies who needed to learn again the elementary truths of God’s Word. These truths involved the basic teachings of the gospel, particularly as seen in the Old Testament. The readers did not know and understand these truths because they had not applied themselves to them. The solution to this dilemma lay in developing their spiritual senses through practice.

The training they needed involved a steady application of spiritual discipline. Spiritual maturity would not develop primarily from a sudden burst of insight. It would come from dogged usage of spiritual resources.

God has given believers the faculties to make spiritual judgments and develop understanding. God gives Christians training in understanding (Heb. 12:11) so that it can produce a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it (Heb. 12:11).

Christians are able to distinguish between good and evil. The terms good and evil may have both a moral sense and a theological sense. Christians are those who can spot moral evil and avoid it. They can see moral good and attach themselves to it. Christians

also can distinguish between true and false doctrine. They will turn aside from the false and faithfully follow the truth. Living the Christian life demands the spiritual skills of stamina seen physically in a long-distance runner. Unswerving, relentless applications of Christian truth and practice will equip us for a lifetime of usefulness which will continue into eternity.

Thomas D. Lea, Hebrews, James, vol. 10, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 88–97.