

“Our Great High Priest”
Hebrews 5:1-6
(Preached at Trinity, January 28, 2024)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 4** the author continued to maintain the preeminence of Christ. He exalts the person and work of Christ. Jesus is superior to all – to the prophets, to the angels, to Moses, to Joshua, to the Old Covenant priesthood. Jesus knows all, He sees all. All will stand before Him.
Hebrews 4:13 NAU - "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."
2. With such a great High Priest we must press on with boldness.
Hebrews 4:14 NAU - "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."
3. We must press on because of the infinite greatness of Christ. We are encouraged because even though He is infinite in His being, glorious in His majesty, He is not distant. He is not uncaring. He is not unaware of our condition. He entered into our condition so He could experience and sympathize with all of our weaknesses.
Hebrews 4:15-16 NAU - "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. ¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."
4. Now as we enter **Chapter 5** the author reminds us of the qualifications for the Old Covenant priesthood. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is one of the high themes of the Book of Hebrews. The Greek word for “high priest” is used 122 times in the NT, most often in the Gospels where it is usually translated “chief priests.” After the Gospels we find it often in the Book of Acts. In the NT it is almost always used in reference to the human priesthood. The only other NT book where we find the word is here in Hebrews where we find it 17 times. As we begin **Chapter 5** attention is turned to the distinction of the priesthood of Christ. This high theme will continue to hold our attention as we make our way through the Book of Hebrews.

- I. The Old Covenant priesthood was established by Divine appointment and served a particular function.
- A. No one was allowed to appoint himself as a priest.
1. As the priesthood was developed only Aaron and his sons were permitted to serve. It was exclusive to the Tribe of Levi.
Exodus. 28:1 NAU - "Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me-- Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons."
 2. By the time we get to the New Testament we find the priesthood was still limited to members of the priestly family, each serving for a limited time.
Acts 4:6 NAU - "Annas the high priest *was there*, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent."
John 18:12-13 NAU - "So the *Roman* cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, ¹³ and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year."
 3. The high priest was appointed by God. It was a divine calling. The same is true for the New Testament pastor. He must be called and set apart. It is not a volunteer office or an office of self-appointment. There are safeguards to help protect the office.
1 Timothy 3 and **Titus 1** describe the particular qualifications. These qualifications must be evaluated by other elders.
1 Timothy 4:14 NAU - "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."
- B. The chief duty of the priesthood was to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people.
Hebrews 5:1 NAU - "in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;"
1. Because of our sin, human beings cannot approach God without a mediator. The earthly priests were men appointed from among men to offer sacrifices on behalf of the sins of men.
 - a. Over and over the humanity of Jesus Christ is stressed. He had to become like us so that He could die for us.
Hebrews 2:17 NAU - "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."
 - b. The importance of representation cannot be overstressed. The Old Covenant priest was a mediator. He had to be human in order to represent humans.

- c. Jesus is our Federal Head, our representative, just like Adam represented us in the Covenant of Works.
Romans 5:17-19 NAU - "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.
¹⁸ So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. ¹⁹ For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous."
2. The whole work of the priest was to deal with the problem of human sin. Since they too were sinful men they also had to offer up sacrifices for their own sins. **Verses 2-3** tell us they had to deal gently with sinners because they too were sinners.
 This should be important to all of us. Too often we soon forget the humility we had at conversion, where we humbly threw ourselves upon God's mercy. But later we become proud and arrogant, criticizing and condemning our fellow Christians when they don't agree with us or measure up to our standards. We expect perfection of them while we excuse ourselves. Are we not all weak and frail in need of a Savior?
3. As Christians our chief desire must be the honor of God.
 Notice sin is placed in the context of "ignorance" and being "misguided."
Hebrews 5:2 NAU - "he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness"
 The Old Testament makes a distinction between sin in ignorance and high-handed open rebellion.
Numbers 15:22 NAU - "But when you unwittingly fail and do not observe all these commandments, which the LORD has spoken to Moses,"
Numbers 15:25 NAU - "Then the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and they will be forgiven; for it was an error"
Numbers 15:27 NAU - "Also if one person sins unintentionally"
Numbers 15:30 NAU - "But the person who does *anything* defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people."
 Samuel Bolton writes in his great work *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* – "Instead of universal actual obedience, God is pleased to accept of universal habitual obedience. In the Gospel God accepts affections for actions, endeavours for performance, desire for ability. A Christian is made up of desires, of mournings, of thirstings and bewailings: O that my ways were directed! O miserable man that I am! God has mercy for can-nots, but none for will-nots. God can distinguish between weakness and wickedness."¹

¹ Bolton, Samuel, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001 – pages 42-43.

4. This is the nature of the apostasy described in **Chapter 10**.
Apostasy involves a willful turning from God.
Hebrews 10:26-27 NAU - "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries."
5. The true believer presses hard after righteousness, but when we fail we find a gracious Savior who takes pity upon our weakness and forgives those who cry out to Him.
1 John 1:9 NAU - "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
1 John 2:1 NAU - "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;"

II. Jesus is our Advocate. He is our great High Priest.

A. He was appointed by God.

- Hebrews 5:4 NAU** - "And no one takes the honor to himself, but *receives it* when he is called by God"
1. He was sent by God to redeem His people.
Matthew 1:21 NAU - "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
John 4:34 NAU - "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."
 2. **Verses 4-5** affirm the Divine appointment of Christ
Hebrews 5:4-5 NAU - "And no one takes the honor to himself, but *receives it* when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. ⁵ 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"
 3. The author declares the Divine appointment of Christ as High Priest by comparing Him to Melchizedek. This is the first of eight times we'll read of Melchizedek in Hebrews. We'll look at this mysterious character with greater detail in a future sermon, as we read in **Verse 11**, "concerning him, we have much to say."
Enough is said here to affirm the Divine appointment of Jesus as High Priest and that it is a permanent appointment.
 4. The work of Christ points to God's eternal purpose. Jesus was appointed and sent as the High Priest and Redeemer of His people.
1689 Confession, Chapter 8:1 –
"It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man; the prophet, priest, and king, Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world; unto whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, and glorified."

B. Jesus is our Mediator.

1. He was a man sent to redeem man. The main reason Jesus had to become fully man was to qualify Him for His priestly ministry. It was His divine nature that made His blood infinitely valuable and able to satisfy God's infinite holiness and infinite justice. But it was the human Jesus that offered His blood for us.
2. He did not have to offer a sacrifice for Himself because He had no sin.
 - a. Although Jesus did not have personal sin He did possess all the weakness of our humanity. He treats sinners with gentleness.
 - b. Although Jesus did not have personal sin He himself bore our sin.
2 Corinthians 5:21 NAU - "He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."
Isaiah 53:3-4 KJV - "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."
3. Jesus forever makes intercession for us.
Hebrews 7:25 NAU - "Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."
 - a. In **Chapter 1** we saw Jesus enthroned.
Hebrews 1:3 NAU - "And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high"
 - b. Jesus is enthroned as our Great High Priest. He intercedes for us, He sympathizes with us. He prays for us.
John 17:24 NAU - "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."

Conclusion:

1. **Chapter 5** opens as a continuation of the previous chapter. **Chapter 4** ended:
Hebrews 4:16 NAU - "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."
2. What is the basis of our confidence? How do we know our salvation is sure? How do we know we will persevere until the end? How do we know we have access to the throne of God? The answer to these questions rests with our High Priest. His priesthood is everlasting and He forever pleads on our behalf. He is forever our High Priest. He shed His own blood to purchase our salvation and satisfy God's Divine Justice.
3. The Book of Hebrews describes individuals who were doubting if they could endure much longer. The easy path would be to return to their Jewish roots. But there would be no comfort there, no salvation there.
Acts 4:12 NAU - "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."
4. What about you? Do you see Jesus as all sufficient? Are you continuing to draw near to Him with confidence?