

# A Priest Forever

Hebrews 5:1-10

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Good morning. My name is P.D. Mayfield, and I am one of the pastors here at Columbia Presbyterian Church. And if you have your Bibles, you can turn to Hebrews 5. Today we'll be looking at verses 1 through 10. The passage we will be looking at this morning follows right along from where we were last week with 4:14-16. And from those passages, if we need an advocate who is able and who can sympathize with our weaknesses and show compassion, then today's passage further highlights the credibility of Jesus in fulfilling that role. So follow along with me in your own Bible, your own personal device, or the monitors. Let's read God's Word today.

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. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

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”;

as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,  
after the order of Melchizedek.”

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. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. [ESV]

This is the Word of God. Pray with me.

Lord, we do ask that you would add to the blessing of your Word. From the Scriptures that were read earlier today, to the Scriptures that undergird the songs we sing to you, to the very passage that was just read, may your Word speak truth to our lives. May your Word bring comfort to our pains and struggles. And may we be ministered by you through your Word. We ask this in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our current times are really not that uncommon from ancient times. Humans have always had a strong disposition toward the spiritual. And we have in various ways and methods—we've attempted to understand what that spirituality might look like or what practices to incorporate into the lives of our own lives or practices in the life of a people, to actually bring forth that spirituality, that spiritual life. One

common way attempts to separate a spiritual life from any particular religious life. You may have heard it described this way: “I’m spiritual, but I’m not religious.” Or, “Well, I try to have a good life. I seek to be transformed from within my inner spirit, and I recognize that there may be a higher power that’s involved with that. But ultimately I’m the one that’s responsible for becoming a better, more freer version of myself.” One writer says it this way: “Spirituality has nothing to do with the practice of religion, and it contains no ingredients of the theology of sin, salvation, and blood-sacrifice.” He writes this in a book entitled *Spirituality without Sin and Salvation: Psychology and the New Paradigm for Religion*.

Well, the Bible communicates a very different narrative. And today’s passage that we just read highlights the various—the very ingredients that the author is saying doesn’t exist, whereas Christianity proclaims that are very integral to the very essence of Christianity—that a spiritual life exists in the context of a religious life. Both narratives tell a story about the world as it ought to be, explaining why it fails to function so. And both also offer solutions to correct the trajectory toward fulfilling what can be. However, if you get down into the weeds of both stories, it might have similar language, might even have a similar feel and rhythm. But at the end of the day, each story is vastly different from each other.

Today’s passage assumes that God is the source of all things and intends to be in close intimacy with his creation from the very beginning. However, the Bible also speaks about how that close intimacy has experienced alienation and separation due to sin. But the God who is the source of all things renews all things and makes a way for that close intimacy to be restored. And as we look at the verses today, we’re going to unpack how God ordains religion that requires priestly intercession to experience this closeness instead of distance, in order to experience forgiveness instead of condemnation.

So you see, fundamental to this passage in the scope of what the Bible is communicating about who God is and who we are in relationship to this holy God—you and I need a priest to make atonement for our sins. The Bible assumes you and I need a priest to make atonement for our sins. And the Bible then also says Jesus is uniquely qualified to be the very priest we need. So we’re going to unpack and divide these verses into two sections. First, 1 through 4 looking at how Jesus is a priest like Aaron. And then 5 through 10 looking at how Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek.

So first, looking at how the author of Hebrews is making those assumptions and showing about how Jesus is like Aaron but even more so. Remember the flow of Hebrews. He’s been unpacking how now God is communicating no longer through the prophets but through the Son, that the Son is the radiance of the glory of God, and he is better than the angels, he is like Moses and better than Moses. And now we are in this period of the Scripture where the author is transitioning to say how Jesus is like Aaron, but he is better than Aaron. It’s not the first time we’ve seen Jesus be called the high priest. We saw it first in 2:7, 3:1, and then last week 4:14.

So in these verses today, verses 1 through 4, we learn several general qualifications that any high priest must fulfill. So for Christ to be our priest that we need, we first have to recognize how he is a priest like Aaron. So first, the high priest was chosen from among people, verse 1. Simply put, a high priest must be a human being to serve in this mediating role between people and God. In some ways, that kind of goes without saying, right? But God could have certainly inserted any other mediator. Angels could have been doing this. But rather, God chose a different path. He chose humans to serve as priests between the people and God. Aaron and his successors stemming from the tribe of Levi were also participating members in the covenant that was made between God and the people of Israel. So as they were to serve, they also were members of.

Secondly, a general qualification is that the high priest acted on behalf of the people before God. They shared the many duties of all the other members of the priesthood, which the Book of Leviticus certainly outlines in greater detail. But the high priest had specific duties in the life of Israel, which predominantly centered upon here this offering of gifts and sacrifices for sins. That phrase “gifts and sacrifices” doesn’t necessarily have to be separated as separate things, though we can look at Leviticus

and kind of see the different outworkings of what the priestly functions were supposed to be doing in the life of the body of—the life of the people of God in Israel. But that phrase “for sins,” this phrase is suggesting the particular duty that the high priest functioned by entering into the holy of holies once a year on the day of atonement to make atonement for the sins of the people.

Third, we learn about a general qualification in the next verses, verses 2 through 3, which are the implications of this solidarity between the priest and being from among the people. The high priest demonstrate compassion, verse 2. He can deal gently with the ignorant and the wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. To deal gently means moderating one’s feelings toward the people with patience, with compassion, instead of having an attitude of hardened indifference or heightened severity. The priest is motivated to deal with the people in such ways because he remembers that he shares in the condition of human frailty. He shares in the need for forgiveness. Such compassion for others is motivated by a humility of the self.

And who is he dealing gently with as part of the people of God? Well, here it talks about the ignorant and the wayward. And in the original language, this is two words being used to talk about the same thing. It’s another way of saying that the people have gone astray unknowingly. They have gone astray in their ignorance. They’re unintentionally sinning against the law. But even the unintentional sins in the life of the people of Israel must be dealt with before a holy and just God. But even then in Leviticus, likewise, as we’re interacting with the Book of Hebrews, the grace of God was given in providing a way for the sins to be removed—for sins to be forgiven—for sins to be washed and cleansed. And though the high priest was in a position to deal gently with the people, it certainly presents a challenge for the function of his office. How does he enter into the presence of a holy God on behalf of the people when he himself needs to be forgiven?

Well, that leads us into the other implication. The high priest demonstrates the limitation of his own authority, verse 3. You see, he’s obligated to sacrifice for his own sins. This is straight out of Leviticus 16, the prescriptions for the day of atonement. Before making atonement for the people, the high priest would make atonement for his sins and the sins of his household. And he would then make sacrifice for the sins of the people. He’s obligated, because he’s under the same moral conundrum of being unholy before a holy God. He shares the same condition as the people he represents.

The last thing that we at least can glean from this passage in verse 4—we see that the high priest is appointed by God. This qualification stems from the origin of the priesthood itself. It begins way back in the book of Exodus. It begins when the nation of Israel has been redeemed out of Egypt. Out of bondage they have been delivered. And they have been brought to a place in the wilderness, the base of a mountain. And we see God revealing himself, showing himself to be gracious, showing himself to be kind, showing himself to be merciful, and inviting them and calling a people to himself in this covenant relationship. And we see there at Sinai, in Exodus 20 where the people get the law, we see in Exodus 28 where God calls Aaron and his sons from among the people to serve as priests.

God in his mercy has always given his people a way to relate to him, to experience real forgiveness of their sins and close intimacy with him. And so we need a priest like Aaron. But there’s something insufficient. We need something better than a priest like Aaron. Like Aaron, Jesus was divinely appointed to act on behalf of humanity in relation to God. And likewise, he can deal gently with us because—why? Because he has taken on flesh. He has gone from his rightful place as the second person of the Trinity and all of the mystery and all of the glory that that is, and has become man, taken on human frailty. Though he was without sin, he still endured the challenges, the temptations, the testing, the experiences of hardship that come with this life. And he can deal gently with us.

But Jesus is also unlike Aaron in two very important ways. Though he embodied with flesh and blood, though he experienced these limitations of being kind of encultured in space and time, beset with the weaknesses of human frailty—Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi. How can

Jesus be a better priest than Aaron if he's not in the same line as Aaron himself? We'll get to that in one second. Another important way Jesus is unlike Aaron is that though he offers sacrifice for sins for the people, Jesus does not offer sacrifice for his own sins. That is an incredibly important point. And so Jesus is like Aaron, and Jesus is unlike Aaron.

And so next, we're going to turn to the next set of verses in verses 5 through 10 to see how Jesus is a priest of a different kind. To show that Jesus is uniquely qualified to be the very priest we need, he must next be a priest like Melchizedek. Now, who is Melchizedek? How do you say Melchizedek? These might be questions that are in your mind right now. Certainly, maybe they're questions you've asked in your lifetime. It is something that has captivated my attention as a young believer. And isn't that the way it generally is, right? Where the Bible is silent on something, we're like, "Woah, what's going on there? Let's go find some interesting explanations for what that is."

You see, Melchizedek is only mentioned ten times in the whole Bible. Eight times, it's in the Book of Hebrews. He's first mentioned in Genesis 14:18, and we learn that he is king of Salem, which is basically the precursor to what became Jerusalem. He was the king of Salem. And the text in Genesis also tells us he was a priest of God the most high. Now, we'll get to more of Melchizedek in chapter 6 and chapter 7 where the preacher of Hebrews goes into greater detail of the importance of Melchizedek. But this is where he's first introducing him in the narrative of Hebrews.

The important thing that we take from that is to see why he's introducing him. Verse 5 demonstrates Jesus's humility. So it's kind of flowing from verse 4, as Aaron is not claiming the honor of high priest by himself, but rather it's being appointed to him. Likewise, Jesus is exhibiting the same humility. He did not seek to exalt himself. He did not take upon him the role of high priest. And especially since—remember what I said earlier?—he wasn't even from the tribe of Levi. No, he humbly accepts that which God appoints.

And here in 5 and 6, the author of Hebrews quotes to passages from the Old Testament. First, he uses Psalm 2:7. And he's used this before. But again, he's drawing our attention to a messianic psalm which is describing the anointed Messiah as the Son, the begotten God. A declaration of God himself, saying that Jesus is appointed. Then he couples that with another psalm, Psalm 110:4, which is another messianic psalm talking about the son of David. Talk about it being a messianic psalm is to talk about how it is explaining, it's giving information about, it's shaping our expectation and hope around the Messiah, the King, the Anointed One of the Most High, to be reigning and ruling with justice and righteousness over the people on behalf of God.

So when the author of Hebrews is putting these two psalms together, he's doing something incredibly important. He is saying the source of eternal salvation, which he mentions in a few verses—he's saying the source of eternal salvation is found in the one man, Jesus, who is both the son of David and a high priest. Never in the life of Israel were those two things the same person. There was no expectation that really the Messiah would be that, really. There was even a strand of Judaism that would say that there was going to be a messiah king in the line of David and a messiah priest in the line of Aaron.

So the author of Hebrews is doing something incredibly important of showing us something about who Jesus is in his person and who he is and what he accomplishes, what he is doing. Even as we commemorate today his entrance into Jerusalem, even as we remember his last and final week together with his disciples, even as we meditate on what is happening in every word that is exchanged, every action that is demonstrated, we're being confronted with the reality that the very priest we need is also our king.

One of my professors who has written a commentary on Leviticus—if you've ever tried to read Leviticus, and maybe "tried" is the word that you can't get past, I recommend this commentary. It's very accessible. And he is a man who will—he will make you fall in love with Leviticus and make you fall in love with your Savior. He says this: "Jesus's sacrifice is the ultimate expression of the Lord's grace, for

now it is no longer guilty sinners presenting a sacrifice on behalf of themselves, but the offended king who is presenting the atoning sacrifice for the guilty sinner.” This is the good news of the Gospel. This is the inversion of all expectations of what religion is supposed to be, spirituality of what it means to be in relationship to whatever the universe has to offer. Is it impersonal? Is it a force? Is it personal and intimate? Knowable?

The important aspect, the ultimate expression of the Lord’s grace, Jay Sklar says, it’s the offended king who is presenting the atoning sacrifice for the guilty sinner. In his appointment as high priest, we need to look at how Jesus fulfills this priestly work. So we’re going to run through a couple of these quickly, but look at verse 7. “In the days of his flesh.” Now, this is a way of just talking about his whole life. Again, speaking to the fact that Jesus became incarnate, that he became flesh and dwelt among us. And then it says he “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.”

There is a summary of his life here. The author of Hebrews does not have a specific instance in mind. But our imagination can pick out a few places. Maybe it’s happening even now, as you hear that verse—how it fits perfectly in even thinking about this coming Thursday when we remember how Jesus on the night he was betrayed was struggling, was tempted, was agonizing over what was ahead of him. And for him to be offering up prayers and supplications, it’s a way, again—two words saying the same thing—of expressing deep emotion, deep sorrow, deep compassion for what he is doing. And surely, he could reach out to the one who is able to save him from death. But listen to this: “he was heard because of his reverence.”

Now, there’s a lot of discussion about what’s happening here that could really kind of get us in the weeds, and it would be very important to look at in a Bible study, for instance. But just in summary, it’s amazing to see the parallel in verse 7 to what the high priest is doing in verses 1 through 4. Just as the high priest, Jesus is offering up something. He’s offering up something, and it is being accepted by God. Now, we can see examples in Scripture where, just because the high priest offers sacrifice to make atonement doesn’t mean it always was accepted. And so it is incredibly important and powerful that it says “and he was heard.” Jesus didn’t have to make atonement for himself. He was heard, because of his godly submission and persevering trust in his Heavenly Father. He was qualified to fulfill that which was appointed for him to accomplish.

Verse 8, “Although he was a son,” that again speaks to his kingship, the son of David, the son of God, being the Messiah. Even though that is his rightful place of honor, he learned obedience through what he suffered. Now, in the original language, those two words rhyme. And it’s kind of like when we say “no pain, no gain.” It’s saying something, but the words are rhyming. It’s really interesting. It has a long history in Greek writings to use that phrase. So how is the author using it here? Did he really learn obedience as if he wasn’t obedient? No. It’s just saying that he was coming to the fuller fulfillment of that obedience. He was taken to the inth degree of what was at stake, what was going to be the cost of such obedience, taking him to—what’s it say here—through what he suffered. A way of talking about his passion. Talking about being taken to his death. The sufferings as part of his atonement.

In verse 9, this being made perfect—again, it’s a way that the English might get tripped up in our head. You know, does it imply that Jesus wasn’t perfect and he became perfect and that’s what made him qualified? No. It doesn’t mean that he wasn’t already perfect. But it’s talking about a finishing, an accomplishment, that once he learned obedience through what he suffered, though when he died and was buried in the tomb and then when he was resurrected on the third day. When we celebrate next week the high point of the Christian calendar, celebrating our Lord’s resurrection, it is recognizing that he was qualified. He was qualified to make accomplishment through his death and resurrection to give you life. His life for yours.

You see, in Leviticus 16 with the day of atonement, there was a bull sacrifice for the atonement of his own sins and his household. There were two goats involved in the process, too. One that would be sacrificed as a sin offering. But the other goat, which would have—the priest would lay his hands on the goat, and he would send the goat away into the wilderness. The scapegoat. Maybe you've heard that word before. Having the sins of the people transferred upon the head of the goat and sent away, symbolizing the sins of the people being forgiven and taken away, removed.

So if Jesus as king and high priest, as is what's happening here in this text—if he is both of those things, then we have no need of any other. And if Jesus is king and high priest, then we must not have any other. This is the focal point of the Book of Hebrews. When you're facing temptations to return to something that is past, something that is old, something that is a shadow, in order to just experience a little reprieve of what's happening in your community—embarrassment, challenges, persecution—the author of Hebrews is encouraging us to hold fast to our belief that our Savior is our king. And our king who has every right to hold us accountable takes that penalty upon himself and makes ransom for us.

How do you need a priest? Now, we're protestants, and so it's not always in our lexicon. I'm not a priest. Randy, John—we're not priests. We don't function in that way. How do you need a priest? Hebrews is assuming that you do. And if Jesus is the final high priest, then what priests do you seek out? Are you seeking him out? What functional priests are in your life? What do you turn to, to remove your sin? Who do you rely upon to offer themselves as an acceptable sacrifice? Now, I pray that there is a true confession in your life that you really recognize Jesus in that role. But we still in our lives—we still take it upon ourselves, whether we self-medicate, whether we retreat into ourselves, we seek to escape, whether we cut ourselves, the way we punish ourselves—we feel guilty, because we are guilty. And because we're guilty, that shame continues to condemn us. But the gospel, the gospel where Jesus is a high priest who can deal gently with us, is saying, "Come. Come here. Come here. Draw near to me. You can be confident." It's what we looked at least week. You can draw near in confidence to the throne of grace, because Jesus is your priest.

In Jesus's role, his uniqueness as high priest shows how he is effective and how he is trustworthy to be in such a role in your life. There's encouragement to draw near to him. We have access to the holy of holies, because he has entered into that place and made atonement. We have access, because of the priestly work of the King of kings. And this impacts our prayer. Our inner lives transform that we are abiding in Christ in ways that we can go to those places of our temptations, we can go to those places of our discouragement, because we know that Jesus has gone before us. We know that he has gone to the depths. We know that he has gone to the inth degree of his obedience, to the point of his own death, that we might have life. His life for ours. And we can be with him that place, the holy of holies. That space of prayer is communing with our priest who is advocating for us, who is making intercession for us, who is patient and giving us mercy and help when we are in need.

And in that same way, our prayer empowers us. It emboldens us. It moves us out into our outer lives being empowered to obedience. And in that, it certainly does involve a persistence, that we are experiencing the sweet intimacy of resisting your sin. Have you ever thought about it that way? We want to flee temptation. We want to get away from what is uncomfortable about ourselves. But the beauty of this passage is it's advocating a sweet intimacy of the resistance. Because we're not doing it alone. We're not doing it in our own strength. But we're doing it in the power and the accomplishment of our king and our priest.

See, we may know of Jesus as the one to forgive us when we sin on the back-end of when we sin. And that is good, to run to Jesus. John talks about this. The goal is not to sin, but if we do, we have an advocate with the Father who is faithful to forgive us. But think about how this could

apply to your life before you sin or even during your sin. There's a children's musician by the name of Randall Goodgame. And he puts out different CDs singing the Bible or "Slugs and Bugs." Some of you may have heard of some of his music. I recommend it for your kids, for your family. I confess, Kelly and I listened to it before we ever had children. But there's a great song on one of his albums. It's called "Tell it to Jesus." And no, I'm not going to sing it. But I will read it, maybe with a little rhythm, I don't know. We'll see what comes out. He says this in the song "Tell it to Jesus."

I'm very, very capable of anger.  
Just try and take my candy bar away.  
I'm very, very capable of selfishness,  
When I only play what I want to play.  
Usually I'm very sorry later,  
But eventually it happens again.  
If this sounds like you and you're so confused,  
I've got good news, my friend.  
Just tell it to Jesus, he already knows.  
Tell it to Jesus, before it grows.  
We all mess up, it's sad but true.  
But that's what human beings do.  
So tell it to Jesus, cause he loves you.

The second verse says:

Well, God wants me to be holy,  
But I ain't very holy on my own.  
That's why he sent Jesus  
To make my heart his home.  
Sometimes I still forget him,  
And I make a great big mess.  
What do I do then?  
Well, I tell you friends, but I get you can guess.  
Just tell it to Jesus, he already knows.  
Tell it to Jesus, before it grows.  
We all mess up, it's sad but true.  
But that's what human beings do.  
So tell it to Jesus, cause he loves you.

It's a beautiful picture not only of simplifying that for our little ones to understand God's love and his priestly work, but in fresh ways it allows us to be reminded of how we engage and have communion with our Savior. We don't go to him in our shame after the fact that we sin, though we do that—but we have access to him before we sin. This is the encouragement of even this week as you meditate: that Jesus is embarking on the last leg of his time here. Everything is pressing in on him, and he's experiencing the full weight of what is about to happen. And he takes it. He takes the cup, and he drinks it to the very end.

And this is what's beautiful about what the author of Hebrews is saying. Jesus is not some human that perfectly demonstrated human capacity within ourselves to be spiritually cleansed and transformed in this spiritual way that's just abstracted from religion. No, Jesus became human so he could live a perfect life, which then perfectly qualifies him to make atonement for our sins. Jesus is not distant. He is not unapproachable. We do not work our way through the crowds of people or the struggles of this life to get close enough to him just to be inspired. Christianity is a very different story of spirituality. God who is spirit takes on flesh and dwells among us and offers himself for us. And we learn from this passage, and God hears him. That is effective. That is

trustworthy. We can go to him. His prayers are heard. His life is qualified and perfect for that atonement. His sacrifice is acceptable, because he perfectly trusted the will of God. And Jesus is like a priest, like Aaron, but he is more. And he can be a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, because he is appointed to be such. Will you trust him to be a priest? When your confidence is upon him, you will find him to be perfectly qualified to take away your sin and give you grace, and for you to experience peace. Because he is a priest forever. Let's pray.

God, help us to understand these things. Help us to just be immersed in the beauty of what is happening and the implications of what it means to have access to you, to be forgiven of our sins, to be cleansed from all condemnation. And then, to take on that which you give us: your life for ours, your death so we shall not die. We rejoice in that you are the source of eternal salvation. Help us to understand it. Help us to grab hold of it. Help us to believe it. Help us to walk in it every day, every moment of our lives, as we rely upon the grace of Jesus. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.