

# Turning Up the Heat

*The Book of Hebrews*

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**Bible Text:** Hebrews 5:1-14, Exodus 28:1-4  
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Tonight's sermon, Hebrews 5, is called this "Turning Up the Heat." Turning up the heat. As we see at the end of that passage, the writer actually has some very strong and very stern things to say. We'll come to those in a moment but just to backtrack a little and just rehearse where we have been, this book very much is a journey, isn't it, and it takes us into periods of encouragement and then warning. We've just had the encouragement about our Lord's intercession, compassionate high priest. Then comes the hard talk as he develops the theme of our high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, in Hebrews 5 and gets us ready for Hebrews 6. Well, there is a passage indeed and, God willing, we look at that or at least part of it next Lord's day. That is a passage which has troubled many and we enter into some very very interesting subject matter when we come to that, but more of that next week. But if we can say this by way of introduction, that when we come to this we realize that we're dealing with some very, well, if I use the word technical, would that be the right word?

Well, let me use it anyway but very technical matters, and coming to the place of Melchizedek, for instance. Well, indeed, where is this? How come that this is what we have before us here? And the writer is beginning to develop that theme and will develop it a little this evening but furthermore in a few weeks' time because we are as Christians meant to think, we are to be thinkers. Indeed, we're to out-think the world, how about that? We can often think that the Christian faith is so simple a child can believe it, sure it is and those are the elementary things, those are the things that are of the milk, but there are other things as we see that belong to those who are full age and the requirement is of us to move to full age, not to be satisfied with what we know or think we know at the moment but always be pressing on. It is a thinking religion in a way that Islam is not, the way that Buddhism certainly is not which tells you to empty your mind which is a non-thinking religion and kind of makes great play upon that very fact, as though to think is actually the beginning of all our trouble. Well, it can be unless it's sanctified thinking, spiritual thinking, thought that is comparing Scripture with Scripture. That is the best of thinking and there if we want to be able to discern between good and evil, well, then, we must be a thinking and a discerning people.

Huge mistake, huge mistake for people to be taught, don't think. Don't think, that the Christian faith is, don't think. Thinking gets you into trouble. Too much thinking and you

get nowhere with it, and to sort of short-circuit it and so you need a zap of the Holy Spirit. You need to stop analyzing and start experiencing. Well, I've heard all that and seen it, seen the outcome of it and it's a pretty sad and sorry spectacle and the foolishness and the superficiality, what is done supposedly in the name of God, in the name of the Spirit is quite extraordinary, the people have switched off their minds and that is fatal. And so we are under instruction here to be thinkers. We can't use lack of education, whatever we might consider education to consist of as an excuse. We can't excuse ourselves on grounds of age, we're too young, too old, too somewhere in the middle, and though what joy it was at the cinema yesterday for the woman at the till to ask me if whether I'm 60ish and get my concessionary ticket. Well, I had to let her down gently on that one, though only a few months to go before I will be getting my concessionary ticket and that and other things. But anyway, we're not excused by virtue of age from thinking. Indeed, as old age approaches and maybe say as death approaches, then we need to be at our best in our thinking, clearest in our thinking, and these are things therefore this passage really encourages us to do. We are thinking people.

Well, my first heading: an important contrast. An important contrast and it's the subject of the high priesthood. Well, that subject is one that the writer, because this is an inspired book, isn't it, you find themes that are kind of telegraphed earlier on and are going to be picked up again and then picked up again and further amplified and brought together with other themes and that is inspiration. That's what inspiration does. And in chapter 2 there in verse 17, that is the first sort of proper mention of the office of high priest. "Therefore, in all things He," that's our Lord Jesus, "had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God." That term "pertaining" is supplied by translators but "in things pertaining to God," you'll have noticed that in chapter 5, verse 1, that a theme was trailed earlier on and now it's been picked up. And furthermore, chapter 3, and there in verse 1, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus." And the contrast there is between Moses and our Lord Jesus Christ. But here the contrast is between Aaron and our Lord Jesus Christ, although, in fact, what happens is this, that as the writer warms to his theme, he begins to introduce the character of Melchizedek, he breaks off. He breaks off and brings this warning and digresses, if you will, and then takes us into Hebrews 6 and the very stern things that that has to say before really picking up his theme again at chapter 6, verse 20, and then really warming to his theme in chapter 7 where he really does begin to develop this whole theme of Melchizedek which is introduced here but is really going to develop later because having introduced Melchizedek, he's not actually confident that they'll understand what he's talking about. He's not actually confident that they'll be able to follow his train of reasoning, that they'll be out of the depth with it, and so he gives them this wake-up call. He turns up the heat.

But here's the contrast that he's beginning now to develop and to show because remember this, that what the people have been doing, at least some of them, was beginning to go backwards. They were going backwards and some of them hadn't even started within the Jewish faith but now they were coming into the Jewish faith and beginning to uphold the ministry, the practices and the rituals and the observances of the old priesthood, the priesthood of Aaron, and the writer is saying that's disastrous, absolutely disastrous

because that is to take away from the glory and the sufficiency and the effectiveness and the power of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and substitute it with something inferior which was only temporary anyway, which was not meant to be enduring. And so the writer really does remonstrate with them and come to them and eyeball-to-eyeball with them in that way, give them a wake-up call.

Well, we can see there are three figures and we've already mentioned them, our Lord Jesus Christ coupled with Melchizedek and Aaron, and the contrast is between the ministry of Aaron, though there are some similarities but the contrast mainly so that the writer can show to the people what folly, what error it is to decline, fall away from Christ in order to pursue what belonged actually to the old order, things which in our obsolete and about to fade away, an inferiority, yes, of the ministry of Aaron however glorified in its day that it was, however the dignity that it possessed, and it did, and now that's eclipsed. The brighter sun has come and what belonged to inferior light now has been well and truly eclipsed by the greater, well, was in his day very very significant.

We read Exodus 28:1-4, there is the moment when Moses as the prophet of God to whom God spoke face-to-face unlike anybody else, and that he was told to appoint his brother Aaron and then his sons Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. We know Nadab and Abihu didn't make well in that ministry but they were called of God, not their own choice, not for themselves to refer, to be brought into this ministry. The ministry was by appointment of God and we can see that that family, the whole family, the family of the Levites was to play a very significant role in this. That was the family of Moses and Aaron, so we see in Exodus 2:1, "And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months." That, of course, is Moses. This is Amram and Jochebed, both Levites, the family of Levi. That's why later on the writer to the Hebrews is going to make much about this. This is the family that this priesthood comes from, the family of Levi. Then the contrast is the family of our Lord Jesus Christ is not Levi, we come to that, neither is Melchizedek, and so it's a different priesthood. This is somewhere else. But this was the honor that was conferred upon Aaron at that time from the family of Levi from which family only the high priest came but also all who are going to minister in the tabernacle and then later on in the temple when a permanent location for the ark and the precious things had been there brought about by God in Jerusalem. So this was their dignity, dignity that it was, what honor it was that was heaped upon him. In Exodus 28, which we read, garments for beauty, for dignity, and special wisdom, a spirit of wisdom given to those who had made those garments and all the various things, the breastplate, the ephod, the sash, the turban, the tunic, all of this carefully, carefully made to distinguish Aaron and his successors of the station, the office that they were occupying as high priest.

Well, I was his to officiate and oversee, superintend, everything to do with gifts and sacrifices. He was a mediator. He was representing fallen sinful people, standing before God as the worshiper would come with whatever offering it was, a bull, lamb, whatever it might be, but the worshiper could not themselves go to the altar, kill the beast. It was the priest to do. They officiated in these things pertaining to God, offering gifts and

sacrifices. Well, the sacrifices for sin always always attended every sacrifice, there was blood that was to be spilled there at the altar, and it was the high priest and his designates who officiated in that and saw that it was done according to the letter. Leviticus tells us what is the Levitical law, the law that the Levites were to oversee, Aaron as high priest or his successor as the one to insure that it was done properly. We know that from Eli, don't we, that he failed in this and his sons behaved abominably and that priesthood was removed from him eventually, from his family when Abiathar himself failed in the time of David. But also gifts that people would bring, freewill offerings. There is peace offerings that they would bring which were sacrifices, there was atonement written into the sacrifice, but where there was thanksgiving and a willingness to share with others and to exercise and express communion together both with God and with fellow worshippers and the high priest would be officiating in that.

He himself, of course, had the very great honor on the Day of Atonement. Just as the Queen comes into her own state opening of Parliament, well, this was the high priest's great moment. Leviticus 16 details for us what is to happen on that very significant day once a year, and the hymn that we sang a moment ago tells us this, only then, going in through the curtain, and able to sprinkle blood upon the mercy seat, the ark where the cherubim, their wings folded in that way and there the 10 Commandments that were inside this acacia wood, covered in gold, and the most precious place, God's glory resting there on that ark. And so the high priest only on that day and having himself made a sacrifice for his own sins. He was a man, wayward, foolish at times, ignorant, he's able to help the ignorant and those who are wayward, deliberately going astray because he himself is subject to those same weaknesses. So he makes atonement for his own sin. He has to make an offering as well as offerings for others on the Day of Atonement. It's Aaron's own offering first that has to be attended to before he can then officiate on behalf of the people and confess their sins and bring a proper offering, blood sacrifice, to cover all their sins of that community that year, the unconfessed sins, the sins done ignorantly, everything that had brought offense to God.

And as we say, Aaron himself was a man who was subject to weakness, and we know that, we know that in Exodus, first of all, because when Moses was on the mountain receiving the 10 Commandments and was tarrying there, the people became impatient, "What's become of Moses?" And so Aaron decided to bring together their ornaments and things, cast a mold, golden calf, set it up. "See here, this is the god that brought you up out of Egypt." Well, disastrous that, an express breach of the very commandment that Moses was receiving from God, the breach of the second commandment there clear and total and how the people then behaved abominably, foolishly, emptied themselves of any dignity, and Moses coming down found this and questioned Aaron, "Why did you do this?" "Well, you know these people that they're evil." He comes out with this excuse and remarkably says, doesn't he, that he cast the gold into there and out came this calf, so it just sort of popped up there and, well, what could I do, and trying to absolve himself of responsibility. Of course, that didn't work.

There was Aaron, needed to himself make atonement for his own sins and another instance of this we could turn to would be in Numbers 12 and where on that occasion he

is found with Miriam questioning Moses' leadership, querying the choice of Moses, his wife there, that he'd made in having an Egyptian woman. So we read verse 1, "Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. So they said, 'Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?' And the LORD heard it. (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.) Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, 'Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!' So the three came out." There the Lord struck Miriam with leprosy and Aaron had to plead with Moses to plead with God that that leprosy would be taken away. He knew his folly, that they had spoken ill of the prophet of God, God's servant who was serving and proving faithful over God's house, as Hebrews 3 tells us.

So there's Aaron, subject to weakness, needing to make his own sacrifice, having sympathy with those who are ignorant and going astray because that's also what he himself is subject to. So here's the contrast. There's Aaron called of God, surely he was, but then our Lord Jesus Christ and we notice in verse 5 the write begins with a comparison because our Lord Jesus himself did not glorify himself to become a high priest anymore than Aaron but he had that calling that we have in Psalm 2 and then in Psalm 110. What a calling that that is, a declaration that Aaron never had, that he, the Lord Jesus, is the Son of God. Son by nature, by his very being. This is an elevated place that he is, and so the priesthood that follows from that, that this is the Son of God, is a priesthood that goes beyond Aaron. Called by God, yes, as Aaron was, but a calling that was deeper and more significant and more royal than Aaron's as we read in Exodus 28.

Look at the contrast, Aaron's weakness, having to make sacrifice for his own sins, and our Lord Jesus Christ and of he in the flesh, yes, he was, he was offering up prayers and supplications, vehement cries and tears to him who was able to save him in death, and he was heard because of his godly fear. What a life that that was. What a ministry that this is built upon. What a person of such honor and such dignity and such nobility. Exceeds Aaron in this way, what did Aaron learn? Well, not enough in his life but the Son what he learned, well, he learned things there which were his to have to learn because of the task peculiarly his to have to bear, the suffering, how in suffering he was prepared for the ultimate suffering of the cross. He was perfected in a way that Aaron never was, couldn't be. There was something that responded in our Lord Jesus Christ, a purity, total devotion to God that is not there in any other person, any other human being, thinking of our Lord according to the flesh in that way.

Well, this is a ministry, this is a high priest indeed. This is one who was perfected not as though there was a disobedience, a need to be sort of knocked out of him by suffering. Not at all. This was an obedience that was proved by his suffering, that he was brought into different situations of suffering, not that he could learn and cast out of his heart his evil but so that that purity could shine through, so that that intrinsic wonder of his character could be seen. And where is it best seen? In suffering. Well, we can all of us present well in times of ease and comfort but it's times of suffering and affliction, that's when you find out who you really are. That's where you find out who he really is and

you'll find that he's pure gold, that his character is absolutely proven and true, and we can rejoice in that.

What a contrast here. Aaron for all his dignity never had the same dignity of character that our Lord Jesus had. There is the one perfected through suffering, becoming then the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him. Aaron couldn't be the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him. He couldn't offer that. His ministry couldn't take you that far. It was temporary. It was transient and now our Lord Jesus Christ by contrast, his strength which comes out of his identity as the Son of God and he brings gifts and helps well beyond anything that Aaron could. That's what the writer is proving to us here and he's showing that our Lord's priesthood and this we'll develop in a future week, belongs in the category of Melchizedek and he didn't belong to Levi, he hadn't got the Aaronic kind of priesthood. This was a different priesthood working here and the writer is saying just as our Lord's priesthood doesn't come out of Aaron, it comes out of something superior and deeper, a calling that has more depth and power to it, and thus what do we need now to go back to Aaron for? Why return to that? The writer is saying here is the author of eternal salvation, look at his life, trace his obedience in the garden of Gethsemane, see his passion as we can consider it around the Lord's Table later. That's beyond Aaron. That's a life that is exemplary, proving itself to be holy and divine. What need have we for any other high priest? What need of we of anybody else to bring our offering to God, to bring the persons that we are, and be able to make us holy and righteous in the sight of God? Aaron could never have done that.

Do you decline Christ? Do you put something else in the way, some other object of veneration, some other thought or ambition? Well, we know of people, haven't we, and disastrous it's been who have gone to Roman Catholicism from Evangelicalism. There was quite an exodus, wasn't there, a few years back now, it must be in 20 years ago, maybe it was when some quite notable people who were Anglicans of a kind but then unhappy at some of the changes in the Anglican church, were rightly unhappy and nevertheless went in the wrong direction entirely and then went under the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Well, what a decline that that was, to forsake for something that was perhaps deficient in many ways but to go then to the Roman Catholic Church which we have to say sadly is deficient in many many ways, not offering true teaching, not bringing there the finished sacrifice of Christ and saying that this is all that you need, but offering itself as a Church with all its ritual as what you need to be able to come before God. Disastrous and yet do we, in some way, insert other things ourselves? Some work or other, some obedience, some particular thing that we regard as being in some way there bringing us some extra merit, some extra place, some extra affection and favor of God?

Often people follow other people, don't they, prophets and other great speakers, and they take them into some weird weird world, some bizarre make-believe delusional Christianity. May be very exciting, can't compete with that, can we, with the everyday, if you like, normal Christianity and preaching and the hymns that we sing and what we do in the open air, that we're not jumping up and down, and I don't know, telling jokes and everything else out there. We can't compete with that but others do and try but it's not of Christ, it's not of God, and the results are sad to behold and people follow it.

Why go anywhere else? We have Aaron on one side, Christ on the other. And there the writer has raised the subject of Melchizedek. Well, if you want to do some homework, here's Genesis 14:18-20. Look him up in preparation for a couple of week's time. There is somebody else, some other priesthood entirely and that's the one that actually is like a pattern, like a type of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, we've got to move on. Our second heading: straight talking. Straight talking because that was where the writer was going until he was interrupted by the Holy Spirit and taken then on to a new tack. He was going to bring out this contrast more and develop the theme of Melchizedek. Ah, yes, Genesis 14 and what we have to say about him there, and Psalm 110 when our Lord is told, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." But he breaks away from it and he digresses there in verse 11 because he says, "I've got much to say about him, and hard to explain." Why? Because the material is hard, difficult? Well, no, he provides an explanation which wasn't very flattering to those he was writing to, "because you have become dull of hearing." Dull of hearing. The writer here, in a way, is like Aaron coming to the ignorant and those who are going astray, having compassion for them but here the compassion is what you might call tough love. That is a wake-up call that here it is shaking them, stimulating them to do some thinking. He's got some things hard to explain or they will be hard to explain because somehow they're just not equipped to hear it and he says that's disastrous, absolutely disastrous. You're hearing but you're not hearing. You're surrounded by truth and doctrine but it's not making any impact and the writer therefore has got some strong things to say because if they can't grasp what he's going to call elementary things and he talks about them at the beginning of Hebrews 6, what hope is there they'll understand about Melchizedek and how our Lord Jesus Christ, how we can say he's superior to Aaron by bringing in Melchizedek. Well, they would be totally totally at sea. But it is a basic spiritual failure that they've become dull of hearing.

Melchizedek is solid food but, well, it would be futile to try to feed the people about this anymore than it would be a babe there just about fit to have some milk and you're offering a roast dinner or something like that. Well, they can't cope with that. They'll not be able to eat that. They just need milk, that's all they're capable of having. And it's as though the writer is saying, "Well, I'd like to give you this food, this solid food, a roast dinner if you like, but I fear that you'd not be able to digest it. You wouldn't know what to do with it. You need to have milk still." But that is so so sad because he writes to the people now that really they ought to be doing better, in fact, they ought to be teaching people about Melchizedek themselves. They should be sparing him the pain and trouble that he's having to go to to write to them because actually it's a subject that they could say, "We can do that. We can teach this. We're versed in this. We've got to that place where that, we're familiar with these themes, confident in how we handle them, we can teach others about that. We could write Hebrews 7." Imagine that. Well, we can't because they weren't in a position to do it, and here they are, they should be teachers and he says it's as though somebody 30 years of age needs to be given milk. That would be incredible, wouldn't it that there are people who now want to actually be identified in their middle-aged as being babies and having to wear nappies and things like that. Well,

that's the folly of this is saying, that it would be a sad sad spectacle if having gone so so many years we find no progress, we're still having to have milk because solid food we still can't cope with it, and so it is really very much turning up the heat here.

Dull of hearing, surrounded by truth, but not profiting from it, not benefiting, not growing, that it's not having an impact, it's not traveling that distance that it's taking hold of us and informing us and refining us and shaping us. So he tells us that this is something we need to do something about and he's doing a short shock here in order to get them ready so when he does pick up the theme in a chapter or two's time, then it might be a little bit better prepared to listen, that they've been disciplined, they've been rebuked, and that now they might be able to engage with what it is that he is going to say. Well, what a sad fact that it is that we can not respond or that our response can be flawed and fail, and that people of many years standing in the Christian faith can suddenly shock us by the things that they then choose, the things they read, the things they watch, the things that they think about, things they say. "You've been a Christian so long and yet you can say something so empty, so foolish, so devoid of spiritual wisdom. Ought you not to be a teacher by now? Ought you not to be able to share some word of comfort consolation and encouragement?" No, it seems not and that is a rebuke, isn't it, to us there?

People often will rather than go to Scripture in time of pressure and hardship go somewhere else, like here they go back to Aaron like we might go to our parents and their wisdom if they might have had some wisdom, they might not have had all the wisdom that we might need in our situation or to some kind of former thoughts that we entertained about the Christian faith which lack depth and have no power and don't really help us in time of need, and we can just use really what we might have learned in Sunday School and not gone beyond it, and something there that we're leaning on but it's not really sufficient for the situation that we're in and the trials we're in and what pats our soul and what it's exercised about. We need something more but it's not there when we need it because we haven't grown, we haven't made the progress that we need to be making.

And the writer and we'll finish with this, really that it is, it's discernment. It's discernment. It is here becoming skilled in the word of righteousness, for everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness. Righteousness, the Scriptures, not just memorizing it. Well, that's a good discipline, that certainly is, but not just sort of knowing the key doctrines but being able to engage with it and apply it and to use it in different circumstances and that is the word of righteousness, gaining skill in that. Solid food, gaining more of these things, it's for those of full age and how have we got to full age? The writer supplies the answer, those who by reason of use. Reason of use. They have been engaged in this. They've been thinking about it, that thinking stuff again, isn't it? They've been thinking. They've been challenged and provoked, come out of their comfort zone, looked at Scriptures which could be hard Scriptures to look at, but have not shied away from it and we mustn't either, and to engage with the whole counsel of God, the parts that are more comfortable, the parts that are less comfortable, the parts that may even offend us and yet they're there, they're written for our instruction. And



what happens? Well, our senses become exercised, our spiritual senses, our ability to read something and understand it, our ability to hear something and weigh it, to say, "Oh, that doesn't sound quite right there. There's something a bit off with that." And that becomes something that gets more and more embedded in us, discerning both good and evil because that capacity to discern has been developed and exercised through exposure and things and books we've read, things we watch perhaps and DVDs or television or whatever else it is, and being able to get to it and see what it's about and being able to understand it, respond to it, reject it, or embrace something or embrace part of it but not all of it.

So it asks something of us, doesn't it? The choices that we're making whether we're growing in full age in that, or whether we are as babes where our sense are being properly engaged, and it requires thought, it requires effort. It is our coming into the word of God, reading books that will build us, and which will take us on because if we don't go on, we'll just be condemned to make the same mistakes again and again and again. We'll miss much. We will fail to see what God perhaps has intended for us. We won't get it. We won't see it. And when times of trouble and hardship come, we'll be at sea, we'll make bad choices, we'll not be able to access the truth that is there because our senses, our discernment wasn't being sharpened, we weren't being challenged.

So it is a thinking religion. Christian faith requires much of us. It requires of us to ponder and reflect, to pray, to wrestle, to come before the word of God and to hold it, wrestle with it until we grasp it and see where it works and see how to apply it, be able to compare Scripture with Scripture and have a more settled kind of oversight of it. Systematic theology, that's what we call that, and being able to put things in their place and see where that fits with that. That's a lifetime's labor. Are we ready for it? Are we willing to do it? Are we willing to do the hard graft of it because the rewards for it are immense. We have to be of full age, able to understand things better, be able to discern, be able to respond and react to things in a way that is more spiritual. Well, that's a promise, isn't it? There's something in that.

So, well, it is, turning up the heat, there is some hard teaching and we haven't come to Hebrews 6 yet in its first 10 verses and we'll come to that, God willing, next week but we'll need to have ears to hear that and be able to test ourselves against that and still be found standing at the end of it. So let's work, let's make this week a week of good service, of intelligent reading, of mindfulness in its best sense, mindful of Scripture, filling our heads with thoughts that may shape us and help us move to full age because I tell you this, friends, this day in which we live requires that of us. This is a demanding age and if we're not thinking clearly and if we're not thinking straight, I fear that we may fall. So friends, let's be busy and let's be diligent. Amen.