
The Suffering Obedience of Our Interceding Priest

Hebrews 5:1-10

The argument of the Author has been building to this point.

Opportunity – We may enter God’s rest by trusting Him.

Responsibility – We must believe God in an obeying way.

Difficulty – We have hard and callused hearts prone to drift and disbelief.

Accountability – We have the self-exposing power of the Word and our utter visibility and vulnerability to the Lord.

Accessibility – We have the superior and sympathetic priest who leans over from the throne of grace to give mercy and enabling grace.

The Author has been very concerned that we do not neglect the greatness of our salvation. Much of what he writes is to help us to think seriously and deeply about the salvation Jesus has purchased for us. This is a salvation from the condemnation and power of sin, from the wrath of God, from the fear of death and from a life of grinding, meaningless work. This salvation comes to us from the Son of God who is superior in every way and sympathetic to us.

Now he is going to make connections to their own religious past—to the Judaism they were converted out of. For many of you, we must do just the opposite and be sure that you are thinking of priests and sacrifices in Old Testament terms and not in Catholic terms. If a Catholic priest comes to mind when you hear about priests in the Bible and when you hear that Jesus is a priest, *you are not thinking Biblically at all*. So do your best to push away thoughts of men in backwards collars and surplices and bring to the front thoughts of Jewish men in Aaron’s family serving by actually butchering sacrifices, carrying real, steaming blood and splashing it on alters lit with roaring fire.

If Jesus is a superior and sympathetic priest, how can that be since He was not born a son of Aaron and is not in the priestly lineage. In fact, He is in the royal lineage of David. They were expressly forbidden from intruding into the priesthood and severely punished when they did. How then can Jesus be a priest? Before answering this and telling us how Jesus could be a priest, he wants to show us the connection between the saving and the priestly work of Jesus.

The Problem of the Earthly Priesthood

(v.1-3)

So he begins by pointing to several important features of the human priesthood. These characteristics people who want to worship God hope. They could approach God and have hope that they would be heard by God.

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.

The Purpose of the Priest

(v.1)

Priests were selected with the express purpose of representing men before God. They had a distinctly mediatorial function. They came to plead man's case before God on the grounds or based on the arguments that God had Himself provided.

So the priests had this mediatorial function of offering up gifts and sacrifices. When an Old Testament saint came to worship, he could not come directly to God. He could not bring his gifts and his offerings himself. He had to come to the priest. The priest would take the gift or the sacrifice and would offer it to God on the worshipper's behalf.

The primary purpose of priests was to deal with sins. They had to maintain the tabernacle, to keep the incense burning, to be sure the showbread was in its place, to judge matters in the camp. But day after day, they labored because of the devastating effects of sin. They saw men and women and children morning and evening who brought sacrifices *because of sin*.

The Practice of the Priest

(v.2-3)

But the priests were not exempt from the very sins of the people coming to God through them. The frail humanity and sinful nature of the priests was both their strength and their weakness.

The Strength of their Ministry

(v.2)

It was their strength because in it they could identify with the struggles of the worshipper. They had these same struggles. They fought doubt and apathy and spiritual boredom. They lusted and coveted and thought thoughts of God that were not true to Him. When the sinning Israelite came with his lamb, and then leaned his hand on its head as he spoke his sins — the priest knew in his heart that he was little different. So then he could give the word of encouragement and counsel.

He could empathize with both groups of people: those who were ignorant and those who went astray. He knew the temptations that came to those who knew little and therefore acted in ignorance yet incurred the judgment of God. He also could identify with those who knew, but just simply wandered and went astray in spite of their better knowledge.

The Weakness of their Depravity

(v.3)

This strength in their relationship with man was a significant weakness in their relationship with God. That he was weak and frail and sinful, meant that he had to deal with his own sins as well. Every sin-offering brought must have reminded him over and over of his own sins and sinfulness.

Let us remember that we have neither priests nor priestly class today. Preachers are not priests and no elder stands in relation to you as a priest. You may come to God directly in your prayer and you may do so *because Jesus is our final and superior High Priest.*

So the Old Testament priests were there because of sin—to offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins. Not only for those of the people, but also for their own. But if they were sinners, how do they become priests?

The Privilege of All Priests

(v.4-6)

Being a priest was a tremendous privilege. They were charged with the daily handling of things divine. It was a grand ministry full of honor and glory.

⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

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.”

Human – By Divine Appointment

(v.4)

The human priests were appointed by God. Not just anyone could serve God in this way. In fact, their appointment was hereditary. God appointed after the order of Aaron, Levi and his children. The sons of Levi served. So God brought men into the priesthood by causing them to be born into the Levitical line. So there was no self-honor. No one could simply choose to be a priest. No one could simply say, “Well, I’m not a good farmer. My farm has failed and my flocks are pitiful. I think I’ll be a priest.” Those who entered the Levitical priesthood were called by God by virtue of their birth. It was a divine appointment carried out generation after generation.

Jesus – By Divine Announcement

(v.5-6)

In the same way, Jesus’ being a priest was not for self-honor or self-glory. He did not decide that this would be the best way. He was our High Priest by divine decree, by divine announcement. That is the point of these two texts quoted from the Psalms. The first from Psalm 2:7 is used over and over again to refer to the resurrection. So our great high priest has passed through the heavens being a resurrected and ascended King-Priest.

But Jesus was not born a Levite. How could He be a High Priest? Because His priesthood was not in the Aaronic order, but after the order of Melchizedek. Psalm 110:4 is cited as proof of this. But listen to the stanza before it: Psalm 110:2-4

² The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter.
Rule in the midst of your enemies!

³ Your people will offer themselves freely
on the day of your power, in holy garments;
from the womb of the morning,
the dew of your youth will be yours.

⁴ The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.”

The Psalm declares that God will bring His Ruler, the scepter of His authority. That very same person is will a priest in the priestly order of Melchizedek. So Jesus is not in the line of Aaron or the order of Levi. He is in order of the King-Priest who appeared to Abraham. The Old Testament provides and predicts this about Jesus. But more about this later in Hebrews.

Earthly priests have the great privilege of divine appointment in the order of Aaron. Jesus has the glorious honor of divine proclamation in the order of Melchizedek. Jesus' priesthood is final and superior not because there has been a change of order. But it is greater because of the perfection of that priesthood.

The Perfection of Jesus' Priesthood

(v.7-10)

Human priests were familiar with the human condition. They understood why mediating was necessary because they themselves sinned.

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.

But what about Jesus? How does Jesus really understand the ignorant and those going astray? The author shows us that Jesus as a priest was perfect:

In the Intercession He Offered

(v.7)

Jesus knows what it meant to pray. Now we understand that Jesus' praying would have been powerful and intimate in ways that we can hardly fathom. The disciples heard Him pray and asked Him to teach them to pray like that. That praying was what it was because Jesus was the Son of God.

That is not the praying the Author has in mind here.

Its **duration**. It was over his whole lifetime. Note that he says "in the days of Jesus' life." This praying here was not just in the Garden of Gethsemane. Nor was it just the praying on the cross. It was a lifetime spent in this sort of praying.

Its **expression**. The whole language here means to convey the idea of sacrifice. He offered up – this is sacrificial language. He offered up prayers and petitions. He did so with loud cries and tears. This praying is torn from the depths of the soul. It is not ashamed to cry and pray loud. Why?

Its **cause**. He prayed with holy respect to the one who could save Him from death. Jesus was heard because He came in a way that respected His Father. He knew His father had the ultimate power over life and death. He too was tempted to disbelieve and to disobey. He too had to live by faith. He too had to totally trust His Father, even unto death, even through dying. He too was visible and vulnerable to God. Though He is equal with His Father, He prayed with passionate supplication and with reverent humility.

So why say this now? Because we come confidently to the throne of grace to find help in time of need *because Jesus did*. We can come knowing this is how Jesus came. We come to the one who holds our life in His hands. We come to Him with reverence. We come with

tears and sometimes loud crying. Sometimes our coming like His in Garden of Gethsemane, which was the clearest moment of this kind of praying

In the Obedience He Learned

(v.8)

Jesus is our perfect High Priest because of the obedience He learned. Jesus learned obedience in the in the crucible, the furnace of suffering. This does not mean that He moved from being disobedient to being obedient. It means He experienced obedience in a personal way. He moved from being untested to being tested and proven. He moved from obeying without temptation and the pressure of suffering to obeying through unspeakable suffering. As one writer said, "It means that the gold of His natural purity was put in the crucible and melted down with white-hot pain, so that He could learn from experience what suffering is and prove that His purity would persevere." (Piper)

In the Salvation He Provided

(v.9)

Within the confines of our own church communion, we might feel that we have really grasped that Jesus is the only source of eternal salvation. But let me ask a very important question. Do you believe that is true *for every human being on the face of the earth today*? It has been amazing to me to realize that many people believe that Jesus is the only source of salvation *to those who get to hear about it*. In other words, if you grew up in India or the Amazon or the Congo and you had never heard the gospel and therefore had no opportunity to believe, you could go to heaven (as though that is what salvation is all about) by believing something that approximates the gospel. Hear this text and how it agrees with all of the Scriptures:

⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,

Listen to me loved ones. The Bible is utterly clear that all men everywhere in all times, whether they have a clear knowledge of God or not, are lost, condemned and will die in their sinful rebellion against God and perish in an eternity of hell *unless* God in His mercy and electing love sends them the gospel so that they hear and repent. In this day of Ecumenicism and pluralism, we must proclaim the absolute necessity for men to believe the saving message of the gospel. We must proclaim the good news (and you do believe that it is good news, yes?) that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, as revealed in all the Scriptures, is the only way to God. Believing in His Name is the only way by which men are saved. This means all people of all ages in all places.

It may be compassionate humanism that says, "They had no chance. They are good people. They are sincere." But it is a God-honoring theism and Biblicism that affirms and believes and trusts in this One who learned obedience in life of suffering, who died a substitutionary death for His people, who was raised by the power of God for their justification and who has passed through the heavens in victory to sit on the throne of grace as our Priest and King. He, and He alone, for men and women and boys and girls from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, has become the source of their eternal salvation. May God in heaven be praised and magnified.

In the Designation He Received

(v.10)

He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

The words of Heb. 5:10 are repeated in 6:20. They frame a parenthetical section in which the author, given the difficulty and scope of his subject, confronts his readers with their relative

immaturity. They are not ready to hear the doctrine of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ in the Order of Melchizedek. And we must face this issue head-on in coming weeks as well.

Jesus is the source of our salvation:

Having been appointed by God (v.5-6)

Having entered into our experience (v.7)

Having learned obedience by suffering (v.8)

Thus He is perfect.

Reflect and Respond

Jesus' reverent submission. In the trials and temptations that squeezed tears and loud prayers from His suffering soul He believed God in an obeying way. Do you? To those whom Jesus has saved from sin, has He saved you from sinning?

Let us come to this perfect priest. Let us worship Him in His dignity and eternity and purity. Let us strive against unbelief and sin until we cry out to God that we might live. For we will be heard. And our believing obedience will be a trust that looks like rest. Because Jesus has labored for us.

Is Jesus the sole and only source of *your* salvation? Do you sense the enormity of your sin and rebellion against this great King? Have you ever seen in an understanding way that Jesus is precious and a treasure above all price? Do you believe the gospel in an obeying way? My plea with you as an ambassador for Christ, be reconciled to God through Jesus. Believe Him. Trust in His salvation. Bow to His Sovereignty. Do not let the cares of the world, its fleeting pleasures and passing attractions and choking desires turn you away from being satisfied with Christ. Believe Him today.