

Hebrews Study Session 8 - Chapter 5:1-10

In this section of Hebrews, the author begins to make a comparison between Jesus and the priests of the old covenant. With the exception of a break between 5:11-6:12, this comparison will go on until chapter 10. This is only the beginning or introduction to the matter. He's going to begin by describing the office of the high priest as it is set forth in the Old Testament and then move to describing the priesthood of Jesus.

To understand this section of Scripture there are two things I need to explain to you. First, this passage is what is called a chiasm. A chiasm is a literary or oratory device that deals with how the information being presented is given. Chiasm is basically a mirror in that the writer/preacher starts off making points A, B & C (etc.) and then reverses them with new information as C, B, & A. Using chiasms makes remembering what is being presented much easier as you only have to know the first half of the arguments and the second half will match in reverse order. In this passage it looks like this:

- A. The old office of high priest (v.1)
- B. The sacrifice offered by the high priest (v. 1)
- C. The weakness of the high priest (vv. 2-3)
- D. The appointment of the high priest (v. 4)
- D'. The appointment of Christ, the new high priest (vv. 5-6)
- C'. The suffering of the new priest (vv. 7-8)
- B'. The sacrificial provision of the new priest (v. 9)
- A'. The new office of high priest (v.10)

This gives us a rough framework of how to look at the material in this passage.

The other thing that needs explaining is true of this group and not universal. It's me (your pastor) to you. As a group, we love the Word of God. We love to dive in and dissect it. We love to dig to the root meaning of words, look at verb tenses, and grammatical constructions. These are all good things and should continue and will be used in this session. However, sometimes we get so close to the trees, we miss the forest around us. Like the rest of Hebrews, the writer was incredibly elegant with Greek but it doesn't always translate well into the English. There are one or two verses tonight which are impossible to interpret using our linguistic tools alone. We have to take a step back and look at the larger picture the author is sharing with us to get the meaning of that verse in the passage. Remember, this is a broad overview of what is to come so we need to be mindful that we are in a large forest.

I. The general aspects of the old high priesthood.

[Read Hebrews 5:1-4]

Q: Where does the high priest come from? (*v.1 - from among men*)

Q: What is the role of the high priest? (*v.1 - to represent the people in matters pertaining to God*)

Q: What is the activity of the high priest that the writer of Hebrews brings out? (*v.1 - he offers gifts and sacrifices. The phrase "gifts and sacrifices" is meant to be inclusive of all the types of*

offerings raised up to God.)

The high priest was like all the other priests in this function with the exception that on the Day of Atonement, he would also offer the sacrifices for the nation's atonement. Word "to offer" is in a tense (present active subjunctive) that means that is on-going, or continually happening. So the offering of gifts and sacrifices by the high priest was going to go on as long as the old covenant was in force. The high priests' work was never completed as there were always more sacrifices to be offered, if not this year, then the next.

Q: Why can the high priest deal gently with ignorant and misguided (unknowing)? (*v.2 - because he is beset with weaknesses, also*)

The phrase "can deal gently" is actually only one word in the Greek. It means to take the middle course of action between apathy and anger. A good high priest was not indifferent to moral lapses but neither was he harsh. He shares the weaknesses of the people whom he represents before God. This is the only place in the New Testament this word is used.

Q: Based upon this word use in this context of dealing with the sins of others, how do you think God wants us to deal with the sins of others? (*gently, like the high priest - neither apathetic or with anger.*)

The word "weaknesses" means both physical and moral frailty. The high priest is one with the people in that he was weak and needed atonement for himself, just as they did. In this, he could deal gently with them as he shared their experience as a sinner in need of God's forgiveness.

The word NASB translates "beset" (some translations "subject to") means to be "surrounded by" or "chained to". The high priest is surrounded by weakness and in this context, it's speaking of his own weaknesses. This is the same word that the author will use later in **Hebrews 12:1**. Due to being human, the high priest is surrounded by and chained to his own weaknesses.

Q: For whom did the high priest offer sacrifices? (*v.3 - for the nation as well as himself*)

Here is one of the three prayers that the high priest would offer up on the Day of Atonement:

"O God, I have committed iniquity and transgressed and sinned before You, I and my house and the children of Aaron, Your holy people. O God, forgive, I pray the iniquities and transgressions and sins which I have committed and transgressed and sinned before You, I and my house." (M Yoma 4:2)

The deal is that his situation is identical to that of the people - a sinner looking for forgiveness.

Q: How does one become the high priest? (*v.4 - the call/appointment of God*)

[Read Exodus 28:1]

The high priesthood came from Aaron. While the priests were all descendants of Levi, the high priesthood could all trace their ancestors back to Aaron. When a man became the high priest, he did so for the rest of his life (or he retired from the priesthood). It was a life-long appointment and after one man left the office, one of his sons (or close male relatives, with Aaron's lineage,) would fill the vacancy. These were men who lived, served and then died. God called him and his sons to fill this position for as long as the old covenant was in force. Thus no man could take the honor for himself but only as it was divinely appointed. Now, this isn't to say that several times people tried to take the office themselves without divine appointment. Disaster always hit these people like a ton of bricks.

a) Korah - **[Read Numbers 16:31-35]**

b) King Saul - **[Read I Samuel 13: 8-14]**

c) King Uzziah - **[II Chronicles 26:16-21]**

Q: What do these episodes from the history of Israel teach us about the high priesthood? *(that God takes it seriously and only He can appoint men to that office, etc.)*

This is how the high priesthood works according to Scripture. It is the way of the old covenant. Now starting from the end thought the author begins working backwards to make a comparison between the priesthood of Aaron and the priesthood of Christ, the new priesthood.

Christ's qualification for being a high priest
[Read Hebrews 5:5-10]

The quote from v.5 is Psalm 2:7. The quote from v.6 is Psalm 110:4.

Q: In what way was the Christ qualified to be a high priest? *(vv. 5-6 - He was appointed by God to that position. His unique relationship to God conferred this office upon Him.)*

Now it is important to know that we are not going to dive into this deeply tonight. We are looking at the forest, not the trees. In future weeks, we'll come back to all of this and we'll spend time lost in the trees for weeks.

Q: What is similar between Aaron's high priesthood and Christ's high priesthood? *(neither elevated themselves to that position. It was done by divine calling.)*

[Read Genesis 14:18-20]

Q: What does this passage tell us about Melchizedek? What were his offices? *(He was both a priest of God Most High and a king.)*

Q: Back to Hebrews 5, if Christ is in the priesthood of Melchizedek, what other office does He hold? *(Christ is also a king. Thus the new priesthood is a royal priesthood.)*

Q: Based upon v.6, what is one other difference between the priesthood of Aaron and that of Christ? *(Christ's was forever. The human high priests under the old covenant would die off*

eventually. However, since Christ now lives forever, His priesthood will remain in effect forever. There will never be a successor to His office because one will never be needed.)

Now let's look at vv. 7-8. These are the verses I was referring to earlier that they CANNOT be interpreted solely on the basis of linguistic and grammatical tools. At this point in the passage we are confronted with another difference between the two priesthoods. Christ's priesthood involves suffering. "In the days of His flesh" is meant to focus in on Jesus' humanity, He was one of us fully. (This is an echo of Hebrews 4:14-16.) "Flesh" is the usual word "sarx" which has with it the connotation of the weakness of this life. At the end of v.7 is the word "piety". This word means proper caution, reverence or fear. It was Jesus' attitude towards the Heavenly Father.

Q: What scene from Jesus' life on earth does this verse conjure up in your mind? *(The prayers of Gethsemane, the night before His crucifixion)*

Q: So if Jesus was crying out to God, who was the One who could save Him from death, in what way was this prayer answered? V.7 in Hebrews clearly says that Jesus was heard by God and the word "heard" means that it was not just audibly received and understood but also answered. So how was it answered if Jesus died on the cross the next day? *(let them grapple with their answer, give Randy pillow for his head)*

[Read Matthew 26:36-46]

Q: What was Jesus' prayer? *(He wanted the cup of suffering and death to pass from Him, if possible but more than that, He wanted the Father's will to be done. This is the prayer of Jesus' that was answered. He was strengthened to do His Father's will when it involved horrendous suffering which would result in His death.)*

Q: What was the basis for Jesus' prayers being heard on high? *(v.7 - His piety)*

The word "offered up" is the same word used for sacrifices earlier. So one of the other sacrifices Jesus' offered up to God was sincere prayer. Notice that His prayers were those of complete reverential submission to God. The Father answered the Son's cries because they were offered from a posture of complete abandonment to the Father's will.

Q: Based on this, what is one thing essential for our prayers to be answered? *(they need to be offered from a heart that is fully abandoned to the Father's will. It isn't that we just pray in the Father's will but that we are surrendered to His will as we pray.)*

Q: What are some of the things that can keep us from offering prayers fully surrendered to the will of God? *(wait for answers, a few could be we have wrong attitude about God and His sovereignty and love for us, we could view God as a vending machine, we could want our own will and not care about His, etc.)*

Q: What event proved that Jesus's prayers were heard? *(the resurrection)*

Q: In what way did the resurrection of Jesus Christ vindicate Him or prove that God answered His prayers? *(If they had not been received by God and answered, Jesus would have stayed dead after His crucifixion. He entered the realm of death but the power of death could not hold Him as He was the divine Son who fully abandoned Himself to the will of His Father.)*

So from v.7 we understand that Jesus fully participated in the human experience and condition as one of us, He offered sacrifices of prayer from a heart completely abandoned to the Father's will, and that these prayers were answered in that Jesus had the strength to actually enter in and endure the full experience of the cross.

The author continues with his theme that the high priesthood of Christ is one that involves suffering. V.8 is another verse that cannot be interpreted by linguistic tools alone. It takes a broad look at what the author is saying to get this verse right.

The technical grammatical name for v.8 is "contraexception" or a "sweet surprise". In other words the author makes his point in a way that is completely unexpected. It doesn't make sense or seem logical until you get the whole picture and then you say "*Wow! That's cool!*"

The opening phrase reminds us that Jesus was a son. Remember in v.5 that we have just been reminded that Jesus is the unique Son of God.

Q: Throughout Hebrews thus far, what are some of the qualities of Jesus' Sonship that the author has emphasized? What has the author pointed out about Jesus being the Son of God? *(He is above the angels, He is eternal, He is faithful to God and above Moses, He is our great high priest who can sympathize with us because He was fully human, Jesus never sinned, Jesus fully submitted Himself to the Father's will and thus was pleasing to the Father and His prayers were answered, and more but these are the essential ones)*

Q: How do earthly kings treat their earthly sons, the princes? *(with special honor and privileges)*

[Read Matthew 17: 24-27] - The sons of the kings of this world are exempt from the mundane taxes levied on the average person. They are exempt from suffering the tasks and toils of the average citizen.

So when the author of Hebrews begins the sentence by making special mention of Jesus being a Son, in fact the Son of God, the reader is expecting that He will receive special privileges as a son, and especially as the unique Son of God. But the discussion of the obedience of Christ is qualified (or set up on the foundation of) the affirmation that Jesus is fully the Son of God, which transcends His incarnation and all the weakness and suffering that goes with being human.

Even though Jesus was the eternal Son of God, He entered into a new dimension in the experience of sonship when He took on human flesh and sacrificed Himself on the cross.

The word "to suffer" is only used concerning the passion of Jesus and takes the nuance "to die" with it. In other words, it is used exclusively to refer to Jesus's suffering which led to His death.

The author has in mind the redemptive sufferings of Jesus here as He is suffering as the Son in His discharge of His priestly duty and office. By suffering in His undeviating acceptance of the divine will as His own, Jesus honors God as sovereign and entrusts Himself to God, confident that God will give Him this office and the honor associated with it upon His resurrection.

The word “learned” has the undertone that it is the learning that takes place after one comes to understand that the Scriptures are the Word of God. The early church co-opted this word and used it in this fashion. From Scripture, especially the Psalms quoted and more, Jesus learned that His passion was fully grounded in the Word and will of God and that this suffering could not be severed from His calling as Son and high priest.

In this we see that “obedience” is the call to suffer death in accordance with God’s will. (This is the link to v.7 and v.9) Jesus then fully accepted the suffering of death because Scripture, and through it God, appointed Him to this sacrifice so that He could take this office as the new high priest.

Thus we see the transcendent Son is in a paradox. He is eternally God but also ordained to suffer death. Instead of clinging to His privileged position as His unique position could imply, He receives this exalted new office and position from the Father only after He has suffered the humiliation of death on the cross. Jesus learned by experience what obedience entails through the passion in order to achieve salvation for us and become qualified to become the eternal high priest. In other words, God ordained His only Son to die in the place of mankind for their sins. He did not will for Him to live a cushy and easy life while on earth but rather His will was to suffer.

Here’s another way to put the verse. Although Jesus was the unique, eternal Son of God, through Scripture He learned that His calling was to suffer death to be obedient to God’s will.

Thus the listener is thinking that Jesus should not need to suffer due to His divine sonship but He does, in fact, He suffers to the point of death because He understands that what the will of God for Him is. Then when we get to v.9 we will see how the paradox resolves. Here’s the preview, Jesus only clings to His exalted position as the divine Son and high priest of a new sort after He suffered death. That’s new - dying first and then coming into your position of glory and power.

Q: Think of vv. 7 & 8. What application do you think the original audience could imply from this section of Scripture? *(that as Jesus surrendered fully to God’s will and that will involved suffering, God’s will for them might also involve suffering in this life.)*

V.9 opens up with the phrase “having been made perfect”. In the English this sounds like Jesus wasn’t perfect before he suffered but after He suffered, He was perfected. This is yet one more instance of the English not doing justice to the Greek. The word “having been made perfect” means to complete, to finish, to fulfill or to consummate. A translation that better captures the intent of the phrase is “*And God’s will having been completed, He became to all...*” The “perfect” is in aorist tense meaning it was fulfilled in the past and the results of that completion are still in effect. The effect of that completion is summed up in the word “became”. This

indicates a new relationship following the completion of the will of God (i.e. - the suffering death of Jesus). Before the passion, Jesus was the Son of God but afterwards He was also the great high priest of our faith.

Q: According to v.9 what is Jesus to His people now after His suffering? (*the source of eternal salvation*)

v. 10 - Until Jesus submitted fully to God and fulfilled the Father's will, He was not qualified to be the source of our eternal salvation. "Eternal" means perpetual.

Because of Jesus sinless humanity, characterized by Him being fully abandoned to God's will, He was qualified to be the great high priest. Jesus was fully equipped to come before God in priestly fashion and offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for us and now He is exalted in God's presence forever. Jesus' radical obedience to God makes salvation open to all who obey Him (submit to the Father's will, which is also the Son's will).

Q: In what ways is Jesus like Melchizedek? (They both has their offerings accepted by God, their priesthood is not through the Aaronic line)

This entire passage moves us from the office of the old high priesthood which the original readers were familiar through the Old Testament to the office of the new high priesthood which is Christ's.

When we look at Scripture, we will not see the extent of the will of God for our individual life marked out as clearly as Jesus did but we will see the will of God for Christians brought out often. From what we've read tonight, what may be some of the attitudes we need to possess in order to fulfill God's will? (*recognition of His sovereignty, abandonment of our wills to God's will or to take the Father's will as our own, to realize that Jesus has suffered so that we can have eternal salvation which leads us to thanksgiving and praise of Him, etc, many other answers*)

Q: When it comes to this passage and it's application to us, we've got to ask, what motivates us in the pursuit of God? What keeps us seeking after Him? (*God called us for such things, and many other answers*)

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?

