

Jesus: Our Perfect High Priest

Hebrews: Jesus is Better • PART 10 • Hebrews 5:1-10

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It is good to see you this morning! If you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), we are glad to have you with us, and we would invite you to fill out an online visitor card by using the QR code on the front of the bulletin or by going to our website at fourlakeschurch.org/visitor.

This morning, I'd like to start with some good news of a slightly different variety than we are accustomed to. We will get to the greatest of good news in just a moment, but I want to take an opportunity to share some good things that have happened over the past week or so. We've had some weather, haven't we? This picture came across my news feed several days ago, from a friend of a friend in Amory, Mississippi. Some severe storms and tornadoes passed through Mississippi and Alabama just over a week ago, and I want to let you know that God's people were on it almost immediately. And I know many good things have happened down there, but this picture caught my eye. The woman who posted this says that the "Amory Church of Christ had fed 700 people by 1:30 today and they continued serving all day." This was last Sunday. You guys, we have had some potluck dinners here at Four Lakes, but I just want us to imagine the expense and the logistics of feeding 700 people after worship this morning and then continuing for the rest of the day. We can hardly imagine, but God's people have been busy this week, in so many ways.

We are here this morning to worship God and to preach the good news that God loves us so much that he gave his only Son to take our place as a sacrifice for sin. Jesus came to this earth and gave his life for us on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. We obey that good news by believing it, by repenting of our sins (by having a change of heart), by confessing our belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and by obeying his command to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. And we will just share two examples this morning, starting with an update from Bisathu Mamidu, who is (I believe) from Uganda. He says,

The Lord is adding more souls to His church at Kaleyaleya church of Christ. Keep him in prayers to grow strong in faith. Glory be to God. Romans 6:3-4. This brother has been a good prospect for so long but he has today accepted to put on Christ. Amen

I love seeing two men standing in a river holding an open Bible!

And then we have an update from Rebecca Aponte-Young, who lives in Staten Island, New York. She says, "I have some great news! Another young person decided to dedicate their life to Christ and obeyed the gospel (1

Corinthians 15:1-4, Romans 6:1-7, Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19-20).” Great news from New York this morning! But we share both of these to help illustrate what it means to obey the gospel. Whether you live in Uganda or New York City, God loves you and wants you to be saved. And if you have not yet obeyed the gospel yourself, or if you aren’t sure whether you’ve obeyed the gospel, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside after worship today or reach out using the contact information on the website or on the bulletin, and we would love to study together.

This morning we return to our study of Hebrews by moving into Hebrews 5. Last week, we learned that Jesus is our Great High Priest. However, many people back then (especially those with a Jewish background) would have objected: How can Jesus be our high priest? He’s not even from the tribe of Levi? And if he’s really the Son of God, can he really understand what we’re going through? And who made him high priest? After all, one does not just wake up one day and decide to be a high priest! The author, then, anticipates these objections, and in today’s passage he focuses in on exactly why Jesus is qualified to be our high priest. He is perfectly qualified!

And he makes his appeal using a figure of speech known as a CHIASM [kai-asm]. Basically, he gives the three main qualifications for a high priest under the Law of Moses (A, B, and C), and then he applies these to Jesus in reverse order (C, B, and then A). I will reformat this into two columns in just a bit (to make it easier to read), but I’m arranging the passage in order to try to show the structure of it, the CHIASM – ABC (the qualifications of the high priests under the Law of Moses), followed by those same qualifications in reverse order – CBA (applied to Jesus). Some have suggested he does this to emphasize both the similarities as well as the differences between the two, others have suggested this is a kind of memory tool – but for whatever reason, we have a clear comparison and contrast between the high priests under the Law of Moses and Jesus as our great high priest today. By the way, I’ve been reminded this week of Irving Berlin’s famous show tune, “Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better.” Years ago, we went to the Fireside Dinner Theater over in Fort Atkinson, and we saw “Annie, Get Your Gun.” I will spare you me singing that, but I’m just telling you it’s in my mind this morning. And in my mind I can envision Aaron (the first high priest) and Jesus (our perfect high priest) going back and forth on this, with Jesus suggesting to Aaron, “Anything you can do, I can do better.”

Well, this brings us Hebrews 5:1-10 (a contrast between the priesthood of Aaron and the priesthood of Jesus – Hebrews 5:1-10,

¹ For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; ² he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; ³ and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. ⁴ And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, “YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”; ⁶ just as He says also in another passage, “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.” ⁷ In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. ⁸ Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, ¹⁰ being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Again, in terms of the structure of this passage, I hope we notice that we have a CHIASM – three qualifications for a high priest under the Law of Moses (ABC), followed by those same three qualifications applied to Jesus in reverse order (CBA).

- I. So as the first readers of this book start objecting to Jesus being qualified, let's start by noting **WHAT MAKES A HIGH PRIEST A HIGH PRIEST UNDER THE LAW OF MOSES.**
- A. And the first description of a high priest under the Law of Moses (in verse 1) indicates that the job or the function of a high priest involves offering **SACRIFICES**, resulting in forgiveness or salvation.

This is what priests do: They sacrifice! And I was somewhat surprised to learn that the high priests were not really teachers of the Law, but instead, they were appointed, *"...in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins."* This is what priests do: They offer sacrifices. And this implies that we have a need for sacrifices. We have sinned, breaking our relationship with God, and somebody needs to help make that right. Somebody needs to bridge the gap. And that was the job of the high priest. He offered *"gifts and sacrifices for sins."*

- B. The next description of the high priest's qualifications is that he must be **SYMPATHETIC** to the sins of the people.

In his case, *"...he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness."* But this means, of course, that he must offer sacrifices not only for the people, but also for himself. And we think back to Aaron, the first high priest, and we know that Aaron could definitely sympathize. Aaron was *"ignorant and misguided,"* just like the rest of them, from the beginning. We think of Moses going up to get the Law on Mount Sinai, Aaron is left behind, and when Moses comes back down from the mountain, Aaron has made a golden calf, and there is this huge party going on. Moses is irate, and Aaron defends himself by basically saying, "I threw some gold in the fire, and out popped this golden calf! The people made me do it!" Aaron himself sometimes acted in *"ignorance."* Sometimes Aaron himself was *"misguided."* We think of Paul (in 1 Timothy 1:13) where he listed his terrible sins and then explained that he *"was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief."*

In our family, we refer to having a "stupid attack." Sometimes we act without really thinking things through. That was Aaron. And from that time forward, as Aaron offered sacrifices for the people, he could empathize. He could understand why they had done what they had done. And for this reason, Aaron (and the other priests on down the line) could *"deal gently"* with the people. To *"deal gently"* is to take the middle road between apathy and anger. They certainly couldn't ignore the sins of the people, but they couldn't be overly harsh either. It's almost like the job of a parent: We need to hold our kids accountable without breaking their spirit. And that was the job of the high priest: Due to his own weakness, he could truly empathize with the people.

- C. And this brings us to the third qualification as we find that the high priest had to be **APPOINTED.**

So here, the author just briefly acknowledges that, yes, a high priest does have to be appointed. You don't just wake up one day and think, "You know, I'd like to be a high priest! I think I'm gonna go to high priest school!" You don't apply to be the high priest. This isn't like finding a job by sending out a resume. You couldn't run for the office of priest. But instead, the high priests were appointed, they were chosen by God, in fact. Aaron was a priest because God wanted him to be a priest.

Of course, over time, this process got corrupted. In the First Century, for example, the Romans came in, and they put their own guy in the office of high priest. You may remember that when Jesus faced the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council), both Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas are described as being the high priest. Some have suggested that Annas was the legitimately appointed priest, but that he couldn't be pushed around, so the Romans appointed his son-in-law Caiaphas in his place. If true, this may explain why the Jewish people brought Jesus to Annas first (the legit high priest, under the Law of Moses), and then Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas, to seal the deal, to get Jesus condemned by Caiaphas, so that Jesus could then be crucified by the Romans. I don't know, but I'm just saying that the author of Hebrews recognizes that a high priest had to be appointed. A legitimate high priest had to be *"called by God."*

- II. Well, we've looked at ABC in the chiasm (as applied to the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants), which leads us to the CBA in the chiasm (as the author now applies these qualifications to Jesus, but in reverse order), and with each of these, he makes the point that Jesus is better; in fact, JESUS IS PERFECT as a high priest.
 - A. So, to apply all of this, let's move on to verses 5-6 as the author continues this idea of an APPOINTMENT, but now he applies it to Jesus (this is the C in the chiasm).

Just as Aaron was appointed, so also Jesus was appointed. And I love how he doesn't say "but," but he starts this section by saying *"So also."* In other words, just as Aaron was appointed, *"So also Christ"* was appointed. Again, this would have been the objection: Jesus can't be our high priest, because he wasn't appointed; in fact, Jesus is not only not a descendant of Aaron, but he's not even from the tribe of Levi. And in that system, that direct line of succession was incredibly important. We might compare it to the division between the Sunnis and Shiites among our Islamic friends. That division goes back many, many years, to a disagreement over who has the right to lead. This is important; so, acknowledging that Jesus is NOT a descendant of Aaron, the author of Hebrews, explains that Jesus was appointed by God himself, and then he brings up this rather obscure reference from the distant past as he explains that Jesus has been appointed *"a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."* And notice: He bases this on scripture as he quotes from Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 (that's why we have so much of this in all caps up here – these are direct quotes from the Psalms).

So, we come to Melchizedek. The story of Melchizedek goes back to only four verses in the book of Genesis. If you've been with us for our Wednesday class, you might remember how Lot got himself kidnapped, but his uncle Abraham rustled up an army and absolutely dominated the foreign army, orchestrating a dramatic rescue. Well, when Abraham comes back home after that daring raid, he is met by Melchizedek, described as the *"King of Salem"* and *"priest of the most high God"* (we find this in Genesis 14:17-20). Salem will end up being Jerusalem many years later. So, Melchizedek is basically king of Jerusalem before there's even a Jerusalem! But the important thing for us to know today is that he is also a priest, and he's a priest of God in Jerusalem, hundreds of years before the temple would ever be built! And in that account in Genesis 14, Abraham gives 10% of the spoils to Melchizedek. So we have Abraham, the father of the faithful, acknowledging that Melchizedek is a legitimate priest. And Aaron, as a descendant of Abraham, would obviously be of a lower rank, so to speak. Melchizedek, then, is special – appointed by God himself, and of a higher rank than Aaron's priesthood. The author of Hebrews, then, is saying that Jesus is a priest, not according to the line of Aaron, but he is *"a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."* Jesus is a better priest! By the way, do you remember what Melchizedek brought out as a gift when he met Abraham? Bread and wine! Do you remember what Jesus gave his disciples as a permanent memorial of the sacrifice he was about to make? Bread and the fruit of the vine. We have some interesting parallels between Melchizedek and Jesus. Both were kings, and both were priests (which would have been impossible under the Law of

Moses). We think of Saul and Uzziah (both kings) who would get in trouble for offering sacrifices. They were not properly appointed.

We will get back to Melchizedek in Hebrews 7, but the point for us this morning is that just as Aaron was appointed, so also Jesus was appointed. And this is in keeping with what we know about Jesus during his life on this earth. He didn't just pop up one day and say, "Woohoo! I'm the Son of God, just trust me on that!" No, everything Jesus did was validated by God. At his baptism, we have the voice of God from heaven, we have the Spirit descending like a dove. At the transfiguration, we have the voice from heaven, and everything he did he did by the Father's authority (according to John 5:19 and John 5:30). Jesus was sent. Jesus was appointed.

B. This brings us back to the "B" in the chiasm, as we get back to Jesus being able to SYMPATHIZE with us.

Both Jesus and the priests in the line of Aaron can sympathize with their people, but not for the same reason. So, we have a comparison and a contrast here. Over in verses 2-3, the priests descended from Aaron could sympathize because they also sinned. They had to offer sacrifices first for themselves and then for the people. Jesus, though, can sympathize with us because he *"learned obedience from the things which He suffered."* He learned, not just by reading a book, not just by looking down on us from heaven, but he came here to experience life just as we do. One author made a comparison by asking us to imagine a guy who owns a company. It's a huge operation with hundreds of employees, and he wants his son to take over some day. But the father understands that the only way his son will ever be ready to do that is if he starts at the bottom. So, he puts his son in the mail room, and then in the warehouse, and then he has him drive a truck, and then he moves into sales, and then he works his way up into management, and only then is he finally ready to take over. It's not a perfect illustration, but I think we see the comparison. Before asking us to obey, Jesus had to *"learn obedience"* himself.

He learned *"from the things which he suffered."* He went from being untested to being tested and proven. And by the way, I think it's interesting how the author says that this learning happened *"in the days of his flesh."* We read about the *"prayers and supplications"* and the *"loud crying and tears,"* and we often say, "Well, that was in the Garden of Gethsemane." Yes, it fits, but isn't it interesting that the author doesn't say "on the night Jesus was betrayed," or "on the night before he died." That night is certainly included here, but he widens it up, doesn't he? *"In the days of his flesh."* That's a reference to the Lord's life in general; all of it. By living here among us, Jesus *"learned"* what it means to *"obey."* And he learned what it means to *"suffer."* In heaven, there were no negative consequences to obedience. Here on earth, though, he learned suffering through obedience. Here on earth, faithfulness wasn't necessarily pleasant. Here on earth he proved himself. I'm thinking back to when our kids were little and proving to you how faithful they are by ordering them to eat the flavor of the day they just picked out at Culver's. That's no test, is it? The test comes when I ask them to clean their rooms (or whatever). The test of obedience comes when the consequences of obedience are not pleasant. In this sense, Jesus *"learned obedience."* He *"learned obedience"* in the same way that we need to learn obedience. When we obey, we may also suffer. As God's people, we are not immune to suffering. In fact, suffering may be a test of our obedience, just as it was for Jesus. Harry Emerson Fosdick once wrote, "If our vocabulary did not have in it words like 'trouble,' 'adversity,' 'calamity,' [and] 'grief,' [then] our vocabulary by no possible means could have in it words like 'bravery,' 'fortitude,' 'patience,' [and] 'sacrifice.' He who faces no calamity will need no courage. Mysterious though it is, the characteristics in human nature which we love best grow in a soil with a strong [ad]mixture of trouble." The point is: Suffering can be a learning experience.

And let's also note that while suffering (during his life of trouble), Jesus prayed – he prayed, not just when facing death, but he prayed through all of it, ***“in the days of his flesh.”*** And if he can pray, we should pray also. This reference to prayer is here for a reason.

C. This brings us back to the “A” in the chiasm, as we get back to this idea of A SACRIFICE BEING OFFERED, RESULTING IN SALVATION.

The word ***“perfect”*** (in verse 9) is not ***“perfect”*** as opposed to being “flawed” or “sinful” in some way, but it’s a word referring to something that is “complete.” It’s the same word, in fact, that Jesus spoke from the cross when he said, ***“It is finished.”*** When Jesus’ life was complete, therefore, ***“he became to those who obey him the source of eternal salvation.”*** Once he was truly qualified to be a high priest, he offered himself as a sacrifice. The priests descended from Aaron offered sacrifices (up in the previous A in the chiasm), Jesus, though, IS the sacrifice. And he saves ***“all those who obey him.”*** If you want to see some scripture-perverting mental gymnastics, crack open a few denominational commentaries or sermons on this text. Their conclusion is: Whatever this verse means, it must not mean that we must obey the Lord to be saved. Their conclusion is: We aren’t saved by works, obedience is a work; therefore, obedience must not be required. I’ve read pages upon pages like that this week. And yet, the verse actually says that Jesus saves ***“all those who obey him.”*** Because he was obedient, we must also be obedient. We cannot dismiss that!

And it may not be the main point of the passage, but let’s not miss the reference to ***“all”*** in this passage. Jews and Gentiles are included here. In the mid-60’s AD, in a time when the church had just come close to splitting over this, the author wants us to know that ***“all”*** can be saved. Aaron was a priest to the Jews; but like Melchizedek, Jesus is a priest to everybody.

Let’s also note here that the salvation Jesus offers is ***“eternal.”*** Unlike the priests descended from Aaron who offer sacrifices year after year, Jesus’ sacrifice is the last and only one needed. And then we close with another brief reference to Melchizedek, which will tie into our study next week. But the point here is: Jesus is qualified to serve as our perfect high priest. He not only meets the qualifications set for those priests serving under the Old Law, but he exceeds those qualifications in every possible way. Don’t turn back! Jesus is better!

Conclusion:

There’s more to say about Melchizedek – we’ll get to that in Chapter 7, but for now, we are just starting to learn that Jesus is fully qualified to serve as our perfect high priest. The question is: Is Jesus OUR high priest? Is he YOUR high priest? Have you obeyed him? Have you obeyed the gospel? If we can help with that, please get in touch.

Before Michael leads us in a song to prepare us for partaking of the Lord’s Supper, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you so much for the gift of your Son. We are so thankful for his willingness to offer himself as a perfect sacrifice. We pray that as we live, the world around us will see Jesus through us.

We come to you today through Jesus, our Savior, High Priest, and King. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com