

Jesus, Our Unique High Priest (Heb.5.1-10)

WestminsterReformedChurch.org

Pastor Ostella

6-8-2008

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. 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." 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.

Introduction

For communion remembering this morning, we will continue our reflections on the book of Hebrews (specifically, 5.1-10). We must read 5.1-10 as a unit that is applied to Christ with similarities and dissimilarities, with likenesses and dis-likenesses, and with comparison and contrast. Here the writer expands on the fact that Jesus is a sympathetic high priest *because* ("for," 5.1) what is true of every high priest (5.1-4) is true of Him but, importantly, in a unique way. Thus, in 5.1-10, we learn some things about Jesus as our sympathetic and *unique* high priest. He is a true man, a spiritual mediator, a representative sinner, and an appointed Savior. The last point is what the writer emphasizes, so we will try to put an exclamation mark there.

1A. True man

For every high priest [is] chosen from among men (5.1a). In order to do the work He came to do, the eternal Son of God, God the Son, had to become a man: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men...¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1.1-4, 14).** Likewise, the preacher here in Hebrews pointed us in the same direction: **Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (Heb. 2.14-15).** This is such a fundamental truth and we can never cease to marvel at it. It is not enough that Jesus is God and with God from the beginning. He had to be God *incarnate* in order to be a high priest. He had to be **among men**.

2A. Spiritual mediator

Next, the text tells us that every high priest acts **on behalf of men in relation to God (5.1b)**. He stands between man and God. Jesus is thus a mediator with regard to man's spiritual life, not man to man but man to God. Here, the need is clear: there is a problem, a sin problem. That is what is wrong with the human race; that is why there is sickness, aging, dying, and death. Therefore, it is good news to know that Jesus has the role of high priest to deal with sin: **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 (5.1)**. He had to be a man to be the final *sacrifice* for sins and He had to be God in order to be the sacrifice of *ultimate value* to mediate and bridge the gap between the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man.

How He fulfills this role is striking, even unheard of, but straightforward: He fulfills this role as a sinner. That is our next point.

3A. Representative sinner

To appreciate this point we have to make the necessary adjustments in thought without losing the awesome power of the good news that leaps us at us from the written word: 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** (5.2-3). What applies to OT high priests applies to Jesus *mutatis mutandis*. There is ground for sympathy in the priests of old because they knew their own sins and had to make offerings for their own sins before they came on the Day of Atonement to make the special offering for the people (Lev. 16). How can we apply this to Christ? We can hear that it does apply to Him, for one, in the notion of sympathy from the previous chapter (4.15). Thus, we have to apply it boldly but thoughtfully because He faced temptation like we face it, but He was without sin (4.15).

In the case of our Lord, there is no difference between His own sins and the sins of His people. Now we have the marvelous and unspeakable point: when Jesus was baptized by John, He repented of *His* sins, that is, of *the sins that He owned as His own* (Mat. 3.13-17). As high priest, the Lord Jesus, who was tempted in every respect as we are and yet without sin, *owned our sins as His own* so that He could make the final atonement. He could then sprinkle His blood as it were on the altar of a broken law before a holy God. He was made sin, He who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Co 5.21). Every high priest is a sinner and Jesus is such in a unique way! That makes Him a Savior.

4A. Appointed Savior

Remarkably, Jesus did not take on this role saving high priest in some independent way. Just as every high priest had to be appointed, chosen, called, and designated for the task (5.1, 4, 10), so also was Jesus. God appointed Him as high priest and Jesus took up this role in covenant faithfulness. He did not take this honor for himself (5.4). Thus, finally, as every high priest, He is an appointed Savior (mediating, sympathetic, and saving).

This point is the one that the preacher to the Hebrews expands. He does so by discussing the proof of His appointment from Scripture, the basis of His appointment, and the result of His appointment.

1B. Proof

He cites two Scriptures: Psalms 2 and 110: 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"** (Heb. 5.4-6). Psalm 105 informs us that God chose Aaron from among the people to be the first high priest in Israel (v. 26, **He sent Moses, his servant, and Aaron, whom he had chosen**). His election is conjoined with His call (**Aaron was... called by God**, Heb. 5.4).

At this point, we should note that reference to "every high priest" looks back to all high priests of the OT, so, it does not just look back to the Aaronic line of priests in the history of Israel. It also looks back to a divinely authorized high priest *outside of Israel and before Moses and Aaron*, to the high priest by the name of Melchizedek.

We already know that Jesus was begotten and marked out as God's Son in a unique way by His resurrection (Heb. 1.5; Acts 13.33). Now, the writer presses home the truth that by the resurrection, Jesus not only became the Sabbath king, but He also became a unique priest: after the order of Melchizedek. This enigmatic priest, Melchizedek is part of the picture that shows that Jesus is a unique high priest. Jesus has the office of high priest by divine appointment because Psalm 110 tells us that God spoke to David's Lord promising that He would be king and priest. He speaks to David's son that is David's Lord: **The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand,**

until I make your enemies your footstool." 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" (Ps. 110.1-4).

2B. Basis

The promise of Psalm 110 reflects covenantal arrangements within the trinity before time; those arrangements came to expression in the prophecy of the Psalm. Nevertheless, it is unmistakably clear that the reason that Jesus received the office of king-priest is a matter of history. The appointment is because of His humble submission and godly fear: 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** (Heb. 5.7-8). It bears repeating that Jesus learned about obedience and grew in obedience through *suffering*. His suffering was both physical and mental. He suffered in His death and He suffered in anticipation of all that it involved. Of course, He recoiled from the bitter cup of God's wrath and cried out for another way, but in the same breath He committed Himself to the will of the Father. As John reports it, with every ounce of self-preservation in His being, Jesus cried out, "What shall I say? I must say with loud cries and tears, Father, save me from this hour!" But, with the fullest resolve and determination, He then said, "Father, your will be done. Bring on the cross and through it glorify your name" (Jn. 12.28). We only have a glimpse, but it is a powerful glimpse at the godly fear of our Lord by which He learned obedience and on the basis of which, the Father exalted Him to the place of the unique king and priest after the order of Melchizedek.

3B. Result

As Melchizedekian high priest, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him: 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** (Heb. 5.9-10).

Perhaps, one of the best ways to picture the deliverance that is eternal is by reference to the high priest and the two goats on the Day of Atonement. The annual sacrifice was necessary because of the uncleannesses, transgressions, sins (Lev. 16.16) and iniquities (16.22) of the covenant people.

Two goats were brought forth. They *killed* the first goat and its blood is brought into the holy place beyond the veil (**Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil, Lev. 16.15**). With both hands on the head of the second goat, Aaron confessed the sins of the people and figuratively placed them on the goat. It is the scapegoat; they took it into the wilderness and let it go free. God had Jesus killed because of our sins. Ah, but He is also the scapegoat. God placed our sins on Him and He runs in freedom through the wilderness. Where does He go? He runs through the wilderness blazing a trail for us to the heavenly Canaan. His freedom earmarks our freedom for the very creation will be delivered into the freedom of the glory of the sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8.21). He said that He will never leave us or forsake us that we may say, "I will not fear." He will see us through to glory, to the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God.

What then shall we say to these things?

1) I need the unique high priest

I acknowledge my sins and the breach that they cause between me and God. I need a mediator because I deserve only justice and thus the wrath of God against sin. I need the blood of the goat that they killed to make atonement. I need Jesus. O Lord Jesus, I need you.

2) I own the Lord Jesus as my great great-priest

I take Him to my palate as my food and sustenance for life. He is mine, mine, mine; Jesus is mine. He suffered in order to bring me joy. His poverty is my wealth. O Lord Jesus, I own you as my prophet, king, and unique high priest.

3) I own the family of this priest as my family

He came to save a people. He was not ashamed to be identified with us: He is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters (Heb. 2.11). He became incarnate, God in the flesh, in order to be our unique high priest and divinely appointed Savior. He saves a family of brothers and sisters. There is one loaf so that we being many are one in Him.

Therefore, I know that I cannot claim to love God if I do not love His children; I do not love Christ if I do not love His brothers and sisters. O Lord Jesus, I own your family as my family to love and serve in the communion of the saints in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, let us so take and eat to the glory of our unique high priest.