

† The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The Character of a High Priest (Part 2)

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.

Back in the early 1990's, a study was completed on corporate managers. In it they were asked if they voiced positions that (1) focused on the good of the company, rather than personal benefit; and (2) jeopardized their own careers. Emerging from this study were the four leader-types which are found in all organizations.

Type #1 - courageous. These people expressed ideas to help the company improve, in spite of personal risk or opposition.

Type #2 - confronting. These people spoke up, but only because of a personal vendetta against the company.

Type #3 - calloused. These people didn't know, or care, whether they could do anything for the company; they felt helpless and hopeless, so they kept quiet.

Type #4 - conforming. These people also remained quiet, but only because they loathed confrontation and loved approval.

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The researchers discovered that the courageous managers accomplished the most, reported the highest job satisfaction, and eventually were commended by superiors. Their commitment had certainly improved the quality of their lives.

Courage – that ability to face the fears and difficulties of a given circumstance, or as the late John Wayne put it, ‘Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway.’ The Hebrews, these Jewish Christians to whom this letter was addressed, were by and large greatly lacking in courage. Everything and everyone they loved from their Jewish heritage had been forsaken when they turned to Christ. Expecting that coming to Christ meant freedom from trials, freedom from dangers and freedom from persecution, they were sadly mistaken. Rather than seeing their troubles as an indication of truly following Christ, of walking in His footsteps, they saw their burdensome existence as if the frowning look of Providence was upon their lives. I believe that many of these addressed in the letter would be described as the calloused and conforming type of individuals; calloused because they felt helpless and hopeless and so no longer cared or knew how to follow Christ; conforming because loathing confrontation and loving approval, conformed or reverted back to the old ways of Judaism.

I submit to you that following Christ, as wonderful and as glorious as He is, takes tremendous courage. Remember the haunting words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:12, *“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”* Such a life requires courage. And our Lord Jesus Himself told us in John 16:33, *“In the world you have tribulation...”* That is a promise, beloved. No one in life gets through it untouched and unmarked. But as you know, Jesus did not end with the words *“you have tribulation..* but goes on to say what, *“but take courage; I have overcome the world.”*

I submit to you that what makes the tribulations, difficulties, heartaches and sorrows bearable is twofold. First, in knowing that Jesus knows our trials and second that He is so wonderful as to lead us through them, knowing that there is an end to this world of woe and we look forward to the blessing of eternal bliss in the presence of God. Did you hear what I said, beloved? We are to know Jesus as our wonderful Savior, Shepherd and, as is emphasized in our text now, as the great and sympathetic High Priest.

Last week we began this look at the Character of the High Priest. What are the attributes, actions and attitudes we are to find in the High Priest. Remember then that we outlined Hebrews 5:1-10 as addressing four particular areas which show us first the character of the High Priest and second how Jesus reveals this character. By way of refreshing our thoughts from last time, we first looked at the

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comparisons between the Old Testament high priest and Jesus. Without going into all the details, quickly note the following characteristics that show the comparison between Jesus and the Old Testament High Priest:

1. They both must be human – *“taken from among men...”* (5:1)
2. They both must be appointed by God – *“appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God...”* (5:1)
3. They both must offer a sin sacrifice – *“in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.”* (5:1)
4. They must both be sympathetic with people – *“he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided...”* (5:2)

These are the comparisons we can easily see between the O.T. High Priest and the life of Jesus. But there are also some key contrasts that we noted as well:

1. The priesthood of Aaron was temporary (until death) – the priesthood of Jesus is eternal (forever) (5:6).
2. The priesthood of Aaron was narrow in focus (on the people of Israel) – the priesthood of Jesus is broad (on all kinds, types of people – Jews and Gentiles for the priesthood of Melchizedek was not Jewish in nature (5:6).
3. The priesthood of Aaron was only priestly – the priesthood of Jesus was both priestly and kingly (Melchizedek was also a king) (5:6).
4. The priesthood of Aaron was an earthly right – the priesthood of Jesus was a divine right (5:6)

With that then we are ready to resume our look at the next of our points, namely the **conduct** of Jesus as High Priest, saving the fourth and final point of the **confirmation** of Jesus as High priest for next week.

III. The Conduct of Jesus as High Priest (5:7-8)

Let us read the text again beginning in verse 7 where we read just how Jesus was able to **“deal gently with the ignorant and misguided”** and be our sympathetic high priest.

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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.

Each one of these two verses provides us with a thought to consider. First, in verse 7 we learn that Jesus suffered the lot of humanity – He knew by experience what meant to be human. Our text once again emphasizes His true humanity saying, ***“in the days of His flesh...”*** Jesus did not just appear human, but actually took on real flesh and bone. That flesh of Jesus underwent not only the process of birth, but also the trials and troubles of humanity. What do most people do when they are faced with an overwhelming circumstance? They pray. Many of you know what is meant by foxhole prayers and foxhole conversions. In times of war, even the most ungodly of people, when under fire and under stress, often call out to God for help. When push comes to shove, humanity knows it needs God and so prays, however pathetic a prayer it might be. Jesus was really human, as well as really God, but in His humanity and often in trying circumstances, what do we find Jesus doing? Jesus prays. But our text tells us that Jesus did not simply pray, but also wailed, ***“loud crying”*** and grieved with ***“tears.”*** But just what was Jesus suffering through, praying for, crying after and grieved with? As it ought to be with the high priest, I believe Jesus was in agony over the sins of the people. And just where do we see this suffering and agony most vividly revealing itself? To be sure it was on the cross, but even more so I see Jesus suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, just hours before the cross. In Matthew 26:36-39, 42 we read –

36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, Sit here while I go over there and pray.” 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. 38 Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.” 39 And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” - - - 42 He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, “My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.”

It was at this time that the full reality of what was about to take place filled the soul of our Savior. Jesus is about to submit Himself to the fierceness of the full wrath of God toward the sins of men. Do you think Jesus needed courage?

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Where did He find it? At the throne of God, in prayer, with crying and tears. For within hours Jesus would expose the purity of His soul to the very blackness of human sinfulness. Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, is about to bear the punishment for the lies, the lusts, the deceitfulness, the anger, the grumbling, the cheating, and an innumerable host of other sins upon Himself. Jesus, in anticipation of the cross, prepares Himself to shoulder not simply the effects of sin, but the full effect of sin – the wrath of God. This is what cause Jesus to cry aloud and shed tears!

O beloved, that we would have the attitude of Christ over sin! That sin would cause us to weep and to mourn. That the sins of our children would cause us to offer a sacrifice of prayer and weeping on their behalf even as Job did for his children. O, that the sins of our brothers and sisters in Christ would burden our souls to reach out to encourage and exhort and once again to pray for their souls. Yet too often our prayers mimic that of the proud Pharisee of Luke 18:11-12 saying,

'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

This man does not weep over sin. But notice that the next man in the story does as the tax-collector, ***“standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'”***(Luke 18:13)

I ask you, when was the last time that you beat your breast saying, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner?” When was the last time that even as evil and dreadful things are thrust upon that you, in your cries to God for help still recognize and confess your sinfulness. Turn with me to Psalm 79. Psalm 79 is a lament, a cry for help from the people of God as an evil, pagan empire is overrunning Judah’s borders, ransacking their cities and destroying the place where they worship the true God. In the opening verses we read of these evil invaders and what they are doing to God’s people. In verse 6 we see the people cry out to God for what is rightly deserved justice, ***“Pour out Your wrath upon the nations which do not know You, and upon the kingdoms that do not call upon Your name.”*** Do not think for a moment that this is not an appropriate prayer. The justice of God is coming upon unbelieving people and ungodly

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nations. Even in the book of Revelation we read of the martyrs crying out in 6:10,

“How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

Justice is coming. But what I would like you to most note in Psalm 79 is verse 9. In the midst of all this evil that is befalling them, what are the people of God yet recognizing?

Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name's sake.

Let us be a people who so comprehend our own sinfulness and our own need for God's salvation, help, deliverance and forgiveness. Our Lord Jesus was sinless and yet because He who knew no sin was about to become sin so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21), He yet cried and grieved over such sin. How much more ought we grieve to sin against the goodness of our God? Jesus, as both a human and as high priest really suffered, really prayed, really cried and grieved in utter dependence of the salvation of God.

Is this not what we next learn? To whom were these prayers and supplications of loud crying and tears made to? They were made ***“to the One able to save Him from death.”*** Even as high a position as being the high priest was; even though many of the people might think that the high priest was much closer to God than anyone else, the truth was that the high priest was just as dependent upon the mercy and grace of God to save as anyone else. Here we see Jesus expressing utter dependence upon God as well. He who was to be our Mediator, our go-between cried out for courage in that Garden so that He might complete His high priestly duties.

And was He heard by God? Oh yes, our text declares that ***“He was heard because of His piety.”*** The word piety is best understood as “godly fear.” Jesus understood the holiness of God and the heaviness of sin. Jesus had a firm grasp on the severity of sin's effects on humanity along with sin's punishment and prayed accordingly and such a prayer was heard by God. Again, may we learn the lesson and have such an appreciation of what Jesus suffered for us and learn to pray even as He prayed for sins removal from the lives of those whom He came to save.

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In addition to verse 7 showing us that Jesus really suffered as a human and that He responded as humanity ought to, we find in verse 8 another aspect of the conduct of Jesus, something to which I have been already alluding to – namely that Jesus, as our high priest provided us an example that we might follow. In verse 8 we read;

8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

On the most basic level this verse is saying, “Even though Jesus was the divine Son of God, yet as a human He learned something, something that was absolutely necessary. Our text says that Jesus **“learned obedience.”** Now, this cannot mean that Jesus had to learn to obey, for He Himself said in John 8:29, **“I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”** The word “learned” here has the idea of learning by experience, of having gone through something that brings knowledge. For example, I can read all I want about scuba diving. I can learn everything there is to know from the book about the topic, but does having such a theoretical knowledge make me an expert scuba diver? Will reading the books allow me to know what it is really like to dive? No, for while there are things to learn before you dive, I must learn by experience, but actually diving to know what it is really like. Jesus had to learn, by the real human experience of suffering, what it was really like to be human in order to qualify as a true and sympathetic high priest.

Now I find this statement that **“He learned obedience”** interesting from another standpoint as well. Remember that the first readers of this letter were struggling with obeying Jesus because their circumstances were so difficult. So here we now read of Jesus, who as described in verse 7, which I believe to be a reference in part to the Garden of Gethsemane, who, in order to prove faithful to God and effective for man, learned obedience from what? From the things which He suffered! So we not find ourselves often in the same mode of thinking as some of these early readers, struggling with following Jesus because sometimes following Jesus is just outright hard and can result in some less than pleasant circumstances?

Do you want to rightly, faithfully and honorably learn to obey God? Then follow the example of Christ who suffered in order to fully learn or manifest obedience to God. Rather than complain about the difficulties in your life, which often are far less than what saints of previous generations and circumstances have faced, give thanks for the trials, the hardships and sufferings you face, for

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beloved, the promise of God is that a right response to such thing will actually draw you closer to God. Look with me at 1 Peter 4:1-2, 12-14. Let us carefully read these verses:

1 Peter 4:1-2

1 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

Do you desire to see sin diminished and extinguished in your life? To suffer in the flesh according to the will of God so diminishes sin and causes the believer to depend less upon himself and his will and to turn to God and God's will.

1 Peter 4:12-14

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

I can think of no greater joy than to know that the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon me. But how might I most experience this presence and closeness to God? When I am suffering for Christ. Some of you may have heard that John Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, has just been diagnosed with prostate cancer. I have never met the man personally. I have only listened to and read His messages and perused his books, but I suspect you will find a man who in this difficult and trying circumstance will be drawing closer to God. He will not look upon this illness as the frowning face of providence upon his life, but rather as an opportunity to gain a greater glimpse of the smiling glory of God as he further trusts in his God.

Now this is not to suggest that we go looking for trial or try getting sick. But when such tribulations and sickness come, and they will come, welcome them for they are a means by which you may draw very close to God and, in effect, as the beloved apostle John, lay your head on the bosom of your Savior, who like you has a real heart beat and feels the pains and pangs of humanity being a true high

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priest. Such a way of life requires a people of real courage, people who are bent on seeing the cause of Christ expand in spite of personal risk or opposition. Our Lord Jesus, as a human, was courageous. Our eternal destinies were entirely dependent upon the obedience of Jesus Christ. For without His sinless and perfect life, the cross would be meaningless. But Jesus faced and endured the torturous horrors of the cross, even despising its shame, executing the office of high priest by offering Himself the sacrifice for the sins of His people and dealing gently, sympathetically with us sinners, who really deserve nothing but God's wrath, but now by faith in Christ, receive God's grace and mercy. Since Jesus has so faithfully fulfilled His role as high priest and continues to do so in heaven, then how much confidence ought we to have in order to obediently follow Him regardless of our circumstances. You see, because Jesus Christ was faithful and courageous, He will enable all who place their faith in Him, and so demonstrate that faith by a life that reflects Him, to find in Him a place of refuge and the strength to persevere in all things.

Do you so know Christ? Remember what was said last week. It is not enough for a someone to "know" that Christ was instituted high priest to act on behalf of men, unless that person also "believes" that he himself is one of these people for whom Christ was appointed to be their high priest. Do you know Jesus as your personal high priest, who has offered the sacrifice for your sins and who knows your weakness but rather than condemning you for them, gently reminds you, "My child, for those sins I died – I, who knew no sin, became sin on your behalf, so that you might become the righteousness of God in Me." Are you becoming the righteousness of God, reflecting the life of Christ? May it be your prayer, may it be your desire, may it your experience, may it be your act of obedience. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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