

## Hebrews 5:1-5 "So, Why Do We Need A Priest?"

We begin a new chapter this morning. This section, which starts here in 5:1 and ends in 10:39, concerns the doctrinal as well as the practical aspects of the priesthood of Christ. This teaching is very important and as we go through our study we'll see how the priesthood of Christ is central to our salvation.

The writer of Hebrews has just touched briefly on this theme in a number of places.

HEB 2:17 "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might turn aside God's wrath, taking away the sins of the people."

HEB 3:1 "Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess."

HEB 4:14 "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess."

It was assumed that the recipients of this letter knew something of what a high priest was and the functions of a high priest. But as we're going to see the writer wants to drive home the point that the best of high priests among mere men in Israel fall infinitely short of the high priest who took on flesh and represented us before the Father to atone for our sins.

But in our text this morning our writer wants to remind us of what a high priest in Israel did on behalf of God.

HEB 5:1-4 "Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. 3 This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. 4 No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was."

You'll first notice that the high priest is selected from among men. For a priest to represent men, he himself must be a man. No one else could do this and still be called a priest. This is why, for

instance, an angel could never hold that position. To represent someone as a priest you must be of the same essence.

A little background about the high priests of Israel. Though Aaron was the first officially appointed priest of Israel by God Himself, it was Moses who was the first chosen of God to act as high priest before God. You'll remember that it was Moses who went up to the mount to represent the people before God, and he did this in God's very presence.

It was Moses who continually came to God on behalf of a sinful and stiff-necked people. And he was continually asking God not to destroy the people even though they deserved it because of their rebellion. And even the people recognized this priestly role of Moses.

EXO 20:18-21 "When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance 19 and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." 21 The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was."

Serving in a priestly role of going before God on behalf of the people Moses could also act as prophet as he spoke the things he heard from God. But it was as priest that he could even approach the very presence of the creator of the universe because it was God who chose him and allowed him to approach.

But we don't want to lose sight of why a priest was necessary at all to approach God on behalf of men. The reason is very simple. Sin has separated us from God and so someone must be able to go before God and plead the case of men before God. This Moses did on a variety of occasions.

One of the most obvious times would have been when God called Moses up to Mount Sinai. The people who were waiting for Moses to come back down to them were afraid that something happened to him. Moses' brother Aaron decided to take action and commanded the people to give him their gold and he used it to fashion a golden calf which he said was their new god who brought them out of Egypt. And here's what transpired on the Mountain.

EXO 32:7-14 "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 8 They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' 9 "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. 10 Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." 11 But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. 13 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" 14 Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened."

Moses was able to approach the throne of grace with confidence. And in a priestly role he was able to receive mercy and find grace for the people. If this sounds familiar it's because you and I have the same privilege before God. In fact this is how chapter 4 ended.

HEB 4:16 "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Our ability to approach God in this way is directly linked to our high priest, Jesus Christ, who purchased for us a place with our God forever and has made us into a priesthood before God. This is what Peter meant.

1PE 2:9 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

As priests of our most high God we have the privilege to go to God on behalf of each other, but also on behalf of the lost. We are encouraged to serve as priests as we represent our Most High God before people in this world. But instead of bringing a bloody

sacrifice to the Lord we bring a sacrifice of praise as we humble ourselves before Him and out of thanks we serve men in this world in the name of Christ.

But before I get ahead of myself let me go back to the high priests in Israel. These priests had to be men among men and they had to be chosen by God. They were not duly elected officials. It was God who determined who would be high priest. Now there were some prerequisites to being high priest.

Number one they had to be descendants of Aaron who was from the tribe of Levi. In fact, the high priest had to be descended from Aaron's son Eleazar. If they were not then they could not be high priest although they could be priests. All priests in Israel were of the tribe of Levi, but not all Levites were priests.

There were three classes of servants who fell into this function of representing God regarding the temple service. The Levites were the ones who were assisting the priests who worked in the temple area. These Levites did not offer sacrifices. The next group of servants were the priests who were descendants of Eleazar or Ithamar, the other son of Aaron.

Their chief duties, according to the Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, were the care of the sanctuary vessels, and the sacrifices at the altar. (Num.18:5,7) The priest was also to instruct in the law of God (Mal.2:6,7) He was the final authority in all matters of the law."

But the priest was not allowed to enter into the holy of holies where the ark of the covenant was contained. That was reserved only for the high priest who, as I mentioned earlier, must be a direct descendant of Eleazar.

It was the high priest who entered into the holy of holies once a year on the Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. Again, this is what our writer in Hebrews brings out in the first verse....

HEB 5:1 "Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins."

Because of sin God demands a special representative to come before Him on behalf of the people. But even this representative is chosen of God. He must be God's choice. But this representative

must also be pure in all ways so as to demonstrate that his approach to God will be accepted.

This is why the priests were to be free from all physical defects, which was to symbolize being free from spiritual defects.

LEV 21:16-18 "The LORD said to Moses, 17 "Say to Aaron: 'For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. 18 No man who has any defect may come near:...."

There were a number of other restrictions which applied to the priesthood ranging from special cleansing rites he had to enter into, to having no contact with the dead except for a near-blood relative. He was to wear white robes symbolizing purity.

This representative to the people before God was no ordinary servant. Because the job he performed was no ordinary task. It dealt with life and death and the covenant God made with His people to accept them on the basis that they trusted Him and followed Him and showed their love and faith through obedience.

The priesthood was the focal point as it related to the sanctuary and the holy of holies which symbolized God's very presence. And though God met with men in the holy of holies we need to be careful not to think that that's where God lived while He was with them.

ACT 7:45-50 "Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, 46 who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built the house for him. 48 "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: 49 "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? 50 Has not my hand made all these things?' (Isaiah 66:1,2)

You can't put God in a box; literally. But it was at a specific place where God instructed the high priests to meet Him and come before Him with sacrifices for the people because of sin. Again, keep in mind that because man sinned, man must approach God for the forgiveness of sin as is prescribed by God which is through a sacrifice.

Now, all of this should sound familiar because all of these things regarding the high priest are simply shadows of the real High Priest who was to come, who just happens to be the subject of our text, Jesus Christ.

But here in our text the writer is making a point about the qualifications of the priest and why he must be a human being.

HEB 5:2 "He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness."

In other words, he is able to represent men before God because he himself is a man and knows intimately what man's need is. And because he knows man's need he is able to "deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray..."

The idea of dealing gently is in contrast to dealing in anger. And again, this is a beautiful picture of our High Priest. How many times have you and I thought, 'if I were God I'd be tempted to wipe out everyone.' And believe me this was the temptation of the high priests of Israel, not the least of whom was Moses, who wanted to zap the people of God on different occasions for their rebellion.

Rather, the high priest had to have compassion despite the wickedness of man. It was in this way that he could approach God and ask for mercy and compassion for the people. And because of his own weakness to sin he could approach humbly because he knew he needed forgiveness and mercy as well.

HEB 5:3 "This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people."

The Aaronic priesthood was made up of sinful men who too needed to have forgiveness of their sin. They had to be spotless to enter into the holy of holies so that they might approach God to ask for compassion on the people as they brought sacrifice for the people.

The only way the high priest could be made spotless was to be sprinkled clean with the blood of the sacrifice. Sound familiar? This same letter to the Hebrews speaks of this sprinkling concerning us today.

HEB 12:22-24 "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You

have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

You and I have been made clean by the blood of Christ which is what was foreshadowed when the high priest brought the blood of the sacrificed animal to God in the holy of holies which is the very presence of God.

But as the high priest did this once a year on the Day of Atonement we find that each year he had to repeat this process, which tells us that those sacrifices were not able to forgive, once and for all, the sins of the people. A greater and better sacrifice was needed.

We see this clearly in HEB 10:1-4, 8-10 "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2 If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, 4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

You and I in Christ don't have to continually come to God and ask for another sacrifice for our sins. We don't have to repeat the process of rededicating ourselves with the idea of being saved all over again. If we've truly believed then the sacrifice of Christ was sufficient for all our sins, once and for all.

We have a perfect sacrifice put to our account. And our High Priest hand delivered it to the Father and the Father received it and confirmed through the resurrection of the Son of God that His sacrifice was sufficient for all our sins.

But once again, I'm getting ahead of myself. The subject in these first four verses has to do with earthly priests of the class of mere men. Always keeping in mind that their function is to point to another.

The class of priest in these verses were men chosen of God to perform a specific function. These men could not be chosen according to the desires of men because they would choose a priest in their likeness and perform functions according to their own wisdom if left on their own.

This is what mankind has always done when they decide to approach God on their own terms. If left to man he would try and build a system which would reach high to heaven and glorify himself in the process. The religiosity of man always does this. This is not new. This has gone on from almost the beginning.

You might remember the tower of Babel. This is exactly what men, left to themselves, will do when thinking they know better than God.

GEN 11:1-7 "Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar (That is, Babylonia) and settled there. 3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." 5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. 6 The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." 9 That is why it was called Babel - because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth."

When man chooses himself, he will always place himself in a position where he is the final authority. But when God chooses a man the Lord will always place man in his proper abode in subjection to his creator.

When it comes to worshipping the one true God, God must be the one to choose because only God Himself will set the standard by which all men can approach Him and have fellowship with Him.

The High Priest had to be chosen by God so that he could not take honor to himself as we read in verse four. And yet the irony is that when God's ways are chosen by men through faith the honor we thought we were giving up is the very thing we end up receiving.

That's the way God wants it. Remember what Jesus said?  
"Whoever is first shall be last and whoever is last shall be first."  
The very opposite of how the world works. Jesus Christ, our King and Lord, the greatest of all, became the least for our sakes taking our penalty for sin. And yet our Lord has ascended on High and sits at the right hand of the Father.

You and I have not been called by God to take honor to ourselves. We are to bring honor to our God and Savior Jesus Christ as we represent Him before the world as we are those people chosen of God, a holy priesthood called to proclaim the praises of God.

Aaron didn't volunteer to be God's priest for the people. God chose him. And this is the point of our next verse. Whomever God chooses, that one is given the responsibility and privilege to serve God faithfully. But we know that mere men will always fail God as well as other men.

But, what if God chose someone to represent us who would be guaranteed not to fail God or men? What a great representative that would be. He would accomplish everything that God set before Him. And He would then be able to go before God after completing His priestly duties and fully satisfy the debt we owed to God so that we could come back to the Father in perfect fellowship with the assurance that that fellowship would last forever in His presence.

Well, the Father chose such a One.

HEB 5:5 "So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you " (Psalm 2:7)

Jesus did not assume that position, He was specially chosen for that position with the express purpose of giving glory to God when He finally fulfilled the prophecies concerning Himself and came into this world to accomplish our salvation.

This is what Jesus conveyed to the Jews when He said in JOH 8:54 Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.

The Father chose the perfect High Priest for us and His name is Jesus. The Son of God was not begotten or came into existence for the first time at that declaration, but He is eternal. That declaration was made in the gospel of Matthew.

MAT 3:16-17 "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

This declaration was made for the sake of the people that they might know that the Father had chosen for them the perfect representative; a representative with whom the Father is well pleased. There is no greater approval than to be personally sent from the Father and knowing that all the Son does will please Him and allow Him to be our perfect representative.

The Son of God gives all the honor to the Father and in return the Father glorifies the Son.

HEB 2:9 "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

<And we who are in Christ and honor Him with our lives will one day too receive all honor from His hand as we enter into His presence and He says, welcome good and faithful servant.

We serve a great King and all the host of heaven testify of this. And we should continually join in with their adoration.

REV 5:9-14 "And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." 11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" 13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" 14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped."

May our lives honor our God in a way that brings Him glory as He lives in and through us. The Lamb is worthy of our praise and allegiance and adoration. May our lives be filled with His power, power from on High as we seek Him and love Him and serve Him all our days.