

Lesson Eight

(4:14 — 5:10)

GOD'S HIGH PRIEST

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

5 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 bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. ⁴ And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is 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,

“Thou art my Son,
today I have begotten thee”;

⁶ as he says also in another place,

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"Thou art a priest for ever,
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 for his godly fear. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

The work of the high priest (the service of God, 2:17) has been introduced, with emphasis upon mercy and faithfulness. 3:1-6 enlarged the idea of Jesus as a faithful son. Our immediate text 4:14-16 will help us to know about his gracious, sympathetic nature. 5:1-4 outlines the necessary requirements of the high priest who serves God on behalf of the people, and then 5:5-10 makes clear how Jesus satisfies those requirements. If you have considered the outline of the book, you will have noticed that the major portion of it is given over to this subject: Jesus as God's high priest, together with the religious system based upon that point.

4:14 — **great high priest** — The first readers of this book were, if not all Jews, then evidently cognizant of the Jewish religious system. Any Jew who knew his history could doubtless recount high priests who were anything but great. During the years of the Roman occupation of Palestine, beginning in 63 B.C., none were "great" in the good sense, some were great in the evil they did, such as Annas and Caiaphas. So then to present Jesus as a "great" high priest would bring two immediate questions: 1) how is he great and 2) how did he get to be high priest. The next several chapters, through 10:18, are given over to that end.

who has passed through the heavens — This could not be affirmed of any other high priest. 1:3 had placed Jesus at God's right hand. Here the idea is repeated, and again in 6:20. This access to God would naturally provide Jesus with a greatness not possible to any "ordinary" high priest. Now, worship of God could be conducted directly with God. As Jesus taught in John 4:23-24, things had changed in the area of worshipping God: it didn't have to be done at Jerusalem through the auspices of Judaism; it could be done anywhere by anyone.

let us hold fast — Continual action is needed on the part of the people of God. In consideration of the high priest who serves them (and us), it ought not to be difficult to do — in fact, it ought to be a pleasure.

V. 15 — Jesus' ability to heed a cry for help is again placed before their eyes. They needed to compare what they had in Jesus with what was available in Judaism. Not many years after this was written, the

Romans destroyed the center of Jewish worship in Jerusalem, and Judaism has never recovered. Hence, the first readers would have soon known the inadequacy of the Jewish system — we who live now ought to be able to see such clearly.

sympathize — Though not necessarily a new idea, this particular aspect in regard to Jesus would be interesting, insofar as he was God by nature. The Jews had some scriptural teaching on the subject, and had developed a concept of God that almost placed God in a category of “wholly other.” Many other religions of the day had deities who were said to be of such nature that mankind was the farthest thing from their concern. It is said that Plutarch thought it blasphemous to involve God in the affairs of men. How much of this type thinking was true of the recipients of this letter is unknown, but certain it is that some would have to restructure their ideas about God in the light of this epistle. When Jesus taught people to pray “our Father,” he was striking at this point.

weaknesses — It was because of this fact about people that Jesus died, Romans 5:6. The word has various applications, but is often used comparatively, as strong/weak, healthy/sick, etc. It indicates a deficiency in some way, or a position relative to another.

without sinning — This is the important factor about Jesus: he was not guilty of sin; therefore he could take care of that problem which mankind could not do. It has been well said that sin is man's only problem, and Jesus is God's only solution. It is so.

V. 16 — The encouragement is: keep coming to God, because you have an adequate high priest who intercedes for you. Note the idea of “draw near” in 11:6.

throne of grace — Special emphasis here upon grace, because in other places different aspects of God will be presented. Sinners don't need justice, they need grace. Later on in ch. 7, the point is made that the law system is replaced with a new system. The “basic ingredient” of this new system is grace.

5:1 — **for** — The two basic qualifications in the Mosaic law system which must be met by every high priest were: 1) selected from men, himself a man, 2) selected by God, not self-appointed. Aaron was the first individual so chosen, and thus typical of the rest who should follow. The system was designed to encourage the worshipper to have confidence in the system, since they could realize that the one serving as high priest was like them, and was also God's choice.

V. 2 — **deal gently** — The Greek term *μετροπαθειν* indicates a state of mind between indifference and complete identification. The high priest must be willing to hear, to sympathize, yet not be of such nature that sins are soft-pedaled and swept under the rug. In other terms, he must be like God, who is both just and merciful.

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V. 3 — **to offer sacrifice for his own sins** — This plain fact was too obvious in some priest's lives, but it was yet a definite point that had to be recognized by every high priest, that he too was sinful, and dare not act otherwise.

V. 4 — **one does not take** — To do so would be presumptuous, which would not do for a high priest. Saul was such, and displeased God, 1 Samuel 13:8ff.

V. 5 — **So also** — Christ, chosen of God, will be the burden of the epistle through 7:28. The human nature of Jesus has been noticed, especially in ch. 2, 4:14-16 and here in 5:7-8.

Thou art my son — The use again in Psalms 2:7, as in 1:5. God had made this statement to no high priest prior to Jesus, which makes this a significant fact.

V. 6 — **Thou art a priest** — Note the first reference to Jesus' priesthood as given in Psalms 110:4, which will be used as support again in 7:17, 21.

Melchizedek — This personality would be known by any Jew from his bible, Genesis 14. The prediction in Psalms 110 was added strength to the importance of Jesus, since it indicated that God had planned the selection of Jesus before it actually took place. Moreover, the use of Melchizedek sets up in a general way the type of high priest Jesus would be.

V. 7 — **his flesh** — Bringing again to mind the humanness of Jesus, with special stress upon the point because this was one of the requirements just mentioned. Jesus was man, for he was hungry, thirsty, tired, angry, compassionate, limited by flesh, bruised, broken — he did not play at being human!

prayers and supplications — These are mentioned to enforce the idea that Jesus could sympathize with those coming to him, who felt deeply the need of God in some way. He, too, had so felt!

him who was able — It is always helpful to remember Jesus in the garden and on the cross — so human, not unwilling to do the task God had laid upon him, yet not ignorant of the demands therein, not desiring the shame, the agony, the sin, the death. He yet trusted his heavenly Father, and in trusting, was not delivered from his trials but rather through his trials.

V. 8 — **Son . . . learned obedience** — It was not beneath the dignity of God's son to have to obey; neither was it contrary to his nature to have to learn. Indeed, the position he was to fill as high priest made these things a necessity. Now he can know, and we also, what it means to be tempted to disobey because of the demands of obedience, and yet in subjection be found faithful to God, the prime requisite for pleasing God.

V. 9 — **made perfect** — This point is important in that it signifies to

all that Jesus has nothing in his life that would keep him from being the perfect high priest. From the human point-of-view, Jesus satisfied every demand of God, and is able "to do abundantly above all that we ask or think."

eternal salvation — Eternal is the key. As before noticed, no other religions, including the Mosaic/Judaism could take away sin, and thus no one had the promise of salvation. Ch. 10 will enlarge this idea about Jesus' sacrifice and its sufficiency.

all who obey — The Greek text is clear: obedience must be a life-long trait, not just now and then. One must not put the hand to the plow and keep looking back, Luke 9:57-62, unless one wishes to die in the wilderness! If Jesus could learn and obey, ought his followers to be different? Note here the expression "obedience of faith" Romans 1:5 and 16:26, and the statement of Jesus in John 14:23-24.

V. 10 — Picking up the idea in v. 6, the special type of priest Jesus was to be is stated. After a rather lengthy "aside" in 5:11 — 6:20, the topic is treated in detail in ch. 7.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 8:

60. Where does this section fall in the total outline of the book?
61. Have you kept in mind the various arguments made about Jesus that display his greatness?
62. Have you ever tried to imagine the demands of being a high priest (the obnoxious ones, the pitiful, the ignorant, the disrespectful, the ugly — and you, beset with problems yourself, and God looking to you to represent him adequately)?
63. Would it make any difference if one were encouraged to draw near a throne of judgment rather than a throne of grace?
64. State the two basic requirements for being a high priest of God. (Was being a Levite among those two?)
65. Why was the high priest chosen from men?
66. Why wouldn't one appoint himself to be high priest?
67. How does the writer reinforce the point that Jesus was God's selection?
68. Did Jesus know humanness?
69. What was the condition upon which Jesus was heard?
70. Can sons learn obedience?
71. Would it be encouraging to know that Jesus had to learn obedience?
72. While learning to obey, did Jesus disobey?
73. How does one acquire eternal life?
74. What is your understanding of "made perfect"?
75. With what would "eternal" salvation be in contrast?