**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (14): The Book Of Better Things**

**“Jesus, Our Great High Priest,” Part 2**

**Hebrews 5:1-10**

**April 7, 2024**

As we know by now, the author of Hebrews calls this letter a “word of exhortation” (13:22), and for good reason. It’s written to a group of Jewish Christians who were being persecuted for their faith (10:32ff; 12:4ff). Many were inclined to come to a full stop in their spiritual development, and some were sorely tempted to return to the faith of their fathers (a faith protected by Roman law). Hence his repeated word of exhortation: if they fall back, they have everything to lose; if they press on, they have everything to gain.

These exhortations are based on the superiority of Christ to all the leading features of Judaism. Jesus is God’s full and final revelation, far greater than the revelation given by the Old Testament prophets (1:1-3). He is greater than the angels, who were involved in giving the law at Mount Sinai (1:4-2:18), and He’s greater than Moses, Israel’s national hero (3:1-4:13). But most importantly, Jesus is greater than Aaron, and all the high priests of Aaron’s lineage. This becomes the central theme in our author’s argument, beginning in Hebrews 4:14 through 7:28.

Two weeks ago, we saw how he presented Jesus as “a great high priest,” a title which no Old Testament priest could ever assume (4:14-16). The reason was because of His transcendence. When Jesus ascended to the Father, He “passed through the heavens” into a heavenly sanctuary. With His work of atonement completed, He’s now seated at the right hand of God, constantly interceding on our behalf.

In the verses before us today, our author is laboring to demonstrate why Jesus is fully qualified and competent to serve as our High Priest (5:1-10). In the first part of this passage, he reviews the basic qualifications which any high priest must satisfy (5:1-4). In the second part, he demonstrates how Jesus has met those qualifications in a far greater way (5:5-10).

**A. Part One: The Qualifications for High Priesthood (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. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was*.”

The *first* qualification is found in verse 1: a high priest had to be “*selected among men*.” If he represented men in “*matters related to God*,” then he must be a man himself. **Q.** What right would an angel or animal have to represent us before God? **A.** None. Only a human being could serve as a “go-between” on behalf of the people and God. Such was the primary role of every high priest. On the Day of Atonement, he entered the presence of God and offered blood sacrifices for the people’s sins, which made it possible for them to maintain their fellowship with God.

The *second* qualification is found in verses 2-3: a high priest must be able to sympathize with those whom he represents. Every high priest had to minister to people who were “ignorant” and “going astray,” or wayward. (The Law made no provision for forgiveness when anyone committed the “high-handed” sins of rebellion; Num. 15:27-31). So, since every high priest was prone to the same weaknesses, they were able to “bear gently” with those who were also wayward. And since an Old Testament priest was a sinner himself, he was able to identify with sinners. In fact, on the Day of Atonement, he had to offer a blood sacrifice for his own sins *before* he could offer one for the people (Lev. 16:6).

The *third* qualification is found in verse 4: a high priest must be “*called by God*,” just as Aaron was. Not just anyone could serve as a priest in ancient Israel. In the first place, you had to be a member of the tribe of Levi. But not everyone in the tribe of Levi qualified. You also had to be a descendant of the family of Aaron, the brother of Moses, and only one of those descendants was given the privilege of serving as the High Priest. *That* was the man who was called by God.

**B. Part Two: The Qualifications for Jesus’ High Priesthood (5:5-10).** In reverse order, our author demonstrates how Jesus has met these qualifications – only in a much greater way.

*First*, He also was called by God (vv. 5-6). Our author sees this calling as having been prophetically proclaimed in two passages from the Psalms: “*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 become your Father’* (Ps. 2:7). *And He says in another place, ‘You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek’*”(Ps. 110:4).

Psalm 2:7 describes the anointing of a Davidic king and his ascent to the throne. In Hebrews 1:5, our author has already applied this verse to Jesus, demonstrating His divine sonship. The “today” of Psalm 2, when used in this way, is the day of the resurrection of Jesus, when He was publicly declared to the Son of God in power, strength, authority, and exaltation. But here this verse is cited with reference to Christ’s priesthood. The author’s point is that no Old Testament priest was ever described by God as “my Son.” Hence, no other priest is so qualified to serve.

In Psalm 110:4, the LORD (*Yahweh*) addresses David’s Lord (Messiah) and calls Him “a priest forever.” But that could never be said of any other high priest. They were sinful men who would eventually die and need to be replaced. Further, God appointed Jesus to serve as a high priest “*after the order of Melchizedek*,” not from the priestly line of Levi. Melchizedek was King of Salem (Jerusalem), and a priest of the Most High God (Gen. 14:18-20). He met Abraham after a great battle, blessed him, and received a tithe from him. When we arrive at chapter 7, we shall see how our author views him a a type (a foreshadowing) of the high priestly ministry of Jesus, and why the priestly order of Melchizedek is greater than the priestly order of Levi.

*Second*, Jesus also is man who can sympathize with our weaknesses (vv. 7-8): “*During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered*.” We have already been assured that Jesus is a merciful and faithful high priest because He became fully human in every respect (except for sin), and that He sympathizes with our weaknesses because He endured all the temptations and trials that we have to endure (2:17-18; 4:15). Our author now reinforces these statements.

Throughout the course of His earthly life, Jesus found it absolutely necessary to pray. He faced real challenges and temptations, and experienced real exhaustion and frustrations, just like us. He was dependent upon the sustaining power of God the Father through the Holy Spirit, and so He prayed to His heavenly Father. There were also times when He cried aloud and wept aloud.

In one of those prayers, He asked the Father to “*save him from death*,” which appears to be a reference to His agony in the garden of Gethsemane. As we may recall, He prayed three times that this “cup” of suffering and death might pass from Him. Yet, in the end, He yielded to the will of the Father; “*Not my will but Thy will be done*.”

So how do we reconcile His prayer request in Gethsemane, with His death on Good Friday?

It’s by understanding that His prayer was heard and then answered on Resurrection Sunday! Jesus prayed that He might *not enter death*, but the Father delivered Him *out of death*, so that He might not be *held captive by death*. That’s the ultimate reason Jesus is our eternal high priest.

Our author goes on to say that although He was the eternal Son of God, He “*learned obedience through what he suffered.*” This is similar to what we saw in Hebrews 2:10; “*In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God . . . should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering*.” The “perfecting” in view has to do with His vocation, or His calling to be the Savior of His people. He learned to obey the Father by submitting to His trials and sufferings, and thus was made “perfect” for the ultimate “job” God had given Him to do. What was that job?

Our author tells us in the concluding segment of these verses (vv. 9-10): “*And being made perfect* (to carry out His redemptive mission) *he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him* (as he is offered in the gospel)*, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.*” No Old Testament priest, and no sacrifice that he offered could ever fully and finally take away the guilt of sin. That’s why those sacrifices had to be continually offered every year (Cf. Heb. 10:1-4).

Our *only* hope of ever getting to God is through a High Priest who is himself sinless, and is able to offer a sacrifice for our sins that is perfect and flawless and capable of forever wiping away the guilt of our sin. *Only Jesus is so qualified*. That’s why we should marvel and stand in awe and exalt and extol our great High Priest, the Source of our “*eternal salvation*.”

What is the greatest threat facing each and every one of us? Many would say climate change; or international terrorism; or the breakdown of law and order throughout the country, or our escalating national debt and collapsing economy; or the millions of foreign-born nationals who are flooding our country by breaking our federal laws. But as important as those issues may be, the *greatest threat* to our eternal welfare is God’s righteous judgment.

Our sins have separated us from God, and our *greatest need*, therefore, is “eternal salvation” from the guilt and condemnation of sin. That salvation is found in Jesus Christ, and in Him alone. To “obey Him” is to respond to the call to believe in Him, and to hope in Him, and to “hold fast” our confession that He is Lord, and that He alone can save us forever and ever, because He is our great High Priest.