



“High Priests and Baby Christians...”

Hebrews 5 – 6:8

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PART 1 – Chapter 5, Verses 1-10

1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. 3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. 4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 6 As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek"; 7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, 10 called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"

The writer of Hebrews has been weaving an almost poetic presentation of theology for us. A detailed picture of the roles of Christ in our living...and in our eternity, as well as building a picture of what **our** personal role is in such. What our relationship with the Father and the Son is to look like...what our interaction with the Spirit realm is to demonstrate in our actual living. Hebrews deals with more than just the issue of salvation, but delves into the living dynamic...the manifest of God in us, through us, and reflecting out of us, in a fallen culture. In chapters 5 and 6, he will present a couple of pictures of such spiritual alliances, that of Jesus as High Priest and then us as concerning our faith maturity. Both of these scenarios are portrayals of how to attain such and how to fabulously fail at such.

We will look at the first of these relational presentations today...that of Jesus as high priest as well as our living under that unique interactive dynamic. What it means to have Jesus as our “high priest...”

HEBREWS 5:1-10

“For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten son...that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life...” He is, according to Hebrews, our prophet, our king, our priest...

Verse 14 of chapter 4 says, “**Therefore, since we have a great high priest...**” Now, that’s probably confusing language to those of you who haven’t grown up in church. Lots of us are quickly lost when dealing with this language of priests. Stuff about Aaron...the brother of Moses, the “order of Melchizedek” and references to the “blood of the Lamb”, we just don’t really grasp what it all means to us today.

Firstly, we need to understand that the term “high priest” is an Old Testament reference to the man who was responsible for carrying the sins of Israel into the presence of God to ask for forgiveness. So, in essence, a high priest was a mediator between God and man. That is an important theological aspect because when Jesus came along, he ended that business by both tearing in two the massive curtain which separated the Holy of Holies from the “most holy place” ...*the “residence” of God*, but also by giving us direct access to God without human mediation. 1 Timothy 2:5 says there is no mediator between God and man any longer except Christ Himself. *No more priesthood. No more mediators. No more “Father So-n-so.”* (See Matt 23:9) A high priest was one who went in and pleaded your case. So, in terms of the law, he was your defense attorney. In old Jewish times the high priest would go in and slaughter an animal for the sins of Israel and himself. And Hebrews is saying that even though we live in the New Testament era, we still have a high priest, and His name is Jesus...

Prior to the cross, the high priest was a man who was appointed by God, and once a year he would go into the Holy of Holies in the Jewish temple. Once again, the Holy of Holies was the place where God symbolically resided in His greatest manifestation. It was also the place that held the Ark of the Covenant. You all remember this if you have seen the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark. The high priest would go in and carry with him the blood of a sacrificed animal, a “stand-in” for all of the people. Going into this very holy place, he would approach the Ark of the Covenant and would take this blood of a sacrificial lamb, and he would pour that blood over what was called the “bema seat,” the *mercy seat*, which was the top of the Ark. This was a pre-cursor...a picture *if you will*, of what Christ would do on a grand scale on the cross. It was the idea that blood, *the essence of a life*, would be poured out...given... to cover our mistakes, our sins.

This symbolism was extended in the fact it was poured over the “mercy seat.” I think we all get why that happens! It is also an acknowledgement that although we’re guilty, ...*although we’re deserving of death and destruction*... there could be this innocent blood that could serve as a covering for our sin, and it would be through God’s grace and mercy that such an act would actually do the job. It was a picture of what was then the coming cross of death for Christ, where Jesus, our great high priest, sympathetic to our weaknesses, would pour out His blood as the innocent lamb, and in doing so, says, “I know your guilt, but come anyway, and I’ll make things right.”

This passage is saying that no matter how wicked of a lifestyle you are coming out of, no matter the sin and the pain that you are carrying, Jesus, as both the sacrifice as well as the high priest, understands. He gets it. I’m not saying in any way that He condones it. I’m saying he “gets it.” He’s not surprised. He’s not aghast or shocked. He understands.

Scripture tells us clearly that Jesus was tempted in all the ways that we have *been* tempted or *are being* tempted. Think about that for a minute. Our supreme tendency is to place Jesus over here in a super-spiritual category, and rightfully so, to some extent. But along with that categorization, we attach an almost naiveté to His humanity. Do you understand what I’m saying? Meaning we can sort of believe that Jesus was not only pure and perfect, but He was kind of unaware, unknowledgeable about weakness and sin. That He was so far from sin that He didn’t even really see it or grasp the power or the magnitude of it, let alone the draw, the pull, of it. That He doesn’t understand the issue of temptation. That’s what we can often tend to think without giving that premise any real credence. But it *is* the most comfortable stance for most of us when it comes to Jesus the man.

But the writer of Hebrews is bringing us into a stark reality. And that is that Jesus knows what sin is all about and moreover, *He knows us*. He gets it.

I was reading something recently that was stressing that as a pastor or minister, even as a Christian, I am going to find it really hard to sympathize with any sin that I have never experienced or never been tempted in. For example, I have never gotten the thing with gambling addiction. I'm left scratching my head in a "What the heck?" kind of way. But then, I have never experienced that powerful draw. In fact, the most I have ever gambled was maybe 40 years ago when I went out of curiosity to a dog track and bought a \$5 ticket and lost it. That was enough for me. But with sins and worldly passions that I **am** drawn to, I tend to have a greater sympathy and patience with someone else's weakness in that same area. We all do.

Hebrews is bringing us into a truth that when that moment comes, that terrible moment, when, because of our sin, we are struck with shame, despair, and guilt, ...when all that comes down on your soul, ...we have a high priest who "gets it" and further, because He does, He sympathizes with us. He's not going, "Man, when are you going to get this right? Am I going to have to kill you or something?" Jesus, our high priest, looks at the guilt, the shame, the distress, and the desperation and sympathizes with us. He feels our pain. He gets it. He can sympathize with us because He is "...*One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.*"

Note verse 16: "*Therefore let us draw near **with confidence** to the throne of grace...*" Oh, come on! Really? With confidence? But this should be the result of that understanding by Christ! Because if it's true—if He **does** get us—then the result is that we don't need to fear. We need not run and try to hide from God. So often, many of us feel that because we are so bad and He is so good (true).. we gotta get the heck away from Him. "*I must disgust Him! I must really make Him so angry. He probably wants to kill me.*" But our passage is saying just the opposite. He's saying that we can now just saddle up close to Jesus and can do so with confidence. Because His throne is a "throne of grace." We tend to come to Jesus with the world's "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" mentality, but that's not Christ. When we think we have blown it, we want to run away. But we are being told here that it's better to run **towards** Jesus because He understands us and is the bearer of boundless grace. No doubt He is the only one too! So if not Christ, then where will you go? That's why so many of us have been running for so long, trying to find relief from some bondage and some understanding from someone concerning our struggle. But that "M.O." is the sovereign ground of Jesus Christ.

The writer, in an attempt to explain what seems impossible for us to get our minds around, begins to elaborate. The understanding of all of this revolves around the issues of the priesthood and what a priest must be and what he must do to be a priest. Immediately, in chapter 5 we get this: "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; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided..." *Ignorant and misguided.* Hmmm...that sounds kinda blunt. Yet truth is that we all tend to find ourselves on that road more often than not.

We see some initial absolutes in order to be a priest: One, you must be a man. Two, you have to be called and appointed. No one just gets to show up and get themselves a plastic kiddy badge and declare themselves the lead pastor. I know plenty of guys who have tried! No, others must be involved. God first, and then some other people following that to actually confirm God's call here on earth. Three, you have to understand the guilt of humanity. You have to be able to wrap your mind around the 'ignorant and misguided,' the very sin of mankind. You have to get that we're all guilty. And four, you have to be weak yourself, *that part is not hard for us*, so that you can extend mercy and grace to those you serve instead of judgment and wrath.

Now I don't think any of us have any problems with this criteria, up unto that last one. Most would agree with all that the writer presents, but now, when we actually place Christ into that role of High Priest, all sorts of questions arise. The first might be the requirement that such a man be weak himself. Can we really say that Jesus knew weakness and the human condition to that degree? First, we must note that it doesn't say sin—it says **weakness**. Yet a lot of folks have a real issue with this line of thinking. They can't wrap their minds around

the humanity of Jesus or the fact that He was “tempted in all ways that we are” or that, as this passage presents, He had (*deep breath*), “*weaknesses.*”

Yet how can we really accept his humanity if this is not true? How would He understand our weakness unless He had experienced them for Himself? I mean, wasn't that a major point of all of His coming, living, dying and being resurrected? The passage says we can “boldly approach the throne of grace” because He does indeed understand! Notice verses 7-9 say, “*In the days of His flesh...*” which means when He was alive, here on earth, walking among us, when he was in human form, “... *he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could rescue him from death. And God heard his prayers because of his deep reverence for God. Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him.*”

So where exactly did all of this play out? One of the clearest places was in the Garden of Gethsemane before the cross. There was prayer. There was a soul deeply grieved. There was fear. There were great tears and sweat drops like blood. No matter how uncomfortable this eval makes us, the reality is that, at that moment at that place, there was weakness. Certainly we must note, that His issues there in the garden, however personally He felt them, were not because of **His** actions, but because of **ours**. Yet the book of Hebrews is saying to you and me that in that moment, that all the weight that accompanies sin in this world—all the shame, all the guilt, all the despair, all the overwhelming force of our failures—fell on the soul of Jesus and began to crush Him. There had to be an overwhelming thought at that moment to just get the heck out of there. To run. To hide. To leave it all behind. Is there a person in here that doesn't know what that feels like? To be so overwhelmed with an issue of sin that our only answer is to just get as far away as we possibly can? You know, the “Who cares about the consequences! I'll deal with them later” kind of thing. Yet Jesus did not run. He took it. All the pain, the fear, the anguish, and soon the betrayal of Judas...one He loved and counted as a friend. He knew what it was to feel all of that. He knows. Man, *He knows*. But instead of running, what did He do? He went instead to the throne of God: “Father, thy will be done.”

It was there in all of that pain and messiness that we see the gospel in full form. It appeared not first at the cross, but first in the garden. Look, you can run and hide in those terrible moments, but when you do, there is nothing that will free you from the pain that accompanies it all. You can go. You can try to hide and try to shake all those awful feelings. But it will stay with you for your lifetime. He's offering you a path where you can unload it all in the same place that He did: *the cross*. That's the gospel. The gospel that we are called to embrace and live out every day of our lives. It's all an invitation to come and be healed. Maybe today you are there...this is your “Garden of Gethsemane.” You're wrestling with fear, pain and weakness. You too have a choice. Run and hide or go to God's throne of grace. Because, gang, He knows. He gets it. He understands. He doesn't hate you. He loves you and wants you to trust Him.

I know that's hard. For many of us, it is hard to trust anyone. But we can't say that He is aloof and distant and that He wouldn't understand because He does this morning, and that is the gospel. That's the good news. The blood of our sacrificial lamb has been poured over the mercy seat of God so you can be forgiven. So you and I can “boldly approach the throne of grace...”

I am reminded of how Jesus dealt with Peter after the cross. Could there have been a better time to just take off, Peter? Wouldn't we have all just figured it was over for us? That we had irrefutably blown it, and that the best thing to do at that point was cash it in and move to Nova Scotia...or Eau Claire or some such place and just call it quits? But how Jesus loved Peter, even despite his incredible blunder. Scripture records how gently He dealt with Peter that day after the resurrection. And, further, we read how Peter dealt with the situation. Make no

mistake: Peter had indeed done what we all probably would have done. Figuring that his error had just been too great to redeem, he just went back to his old life. He just went back to fishing.

In John 21:1-7, Jesus proved Himself still “in” with Peter. He came looking for Him that day as Peter went fishing. One can only wonder what was going through his mind at that moment of realization that it was Jesus there on shore. There in the courtyard that night when Peter denied Christ three times in a row was not the epic moment in Peter’s life. No, that was later...that was those few seconds in that boat when he recognized Jesus on shore. Would he run and hide or would he go to the throne of grace? The scriptural account tells us that Peter jumped into the ocean and swam to Jesus. Overcome, ***Peter was going to the throne of grace.***

If you are Peter today, then this is your great crossroads of life. You can run and hide, or you can come home. The door is open for you. For just like with Peter that day on shore, Jesus is gently asking, ***“Do you love me?”***