

**Hebrews 5: 1-7; “Christ Our High Priest”, Sermon # 18 in the series –
“Holding Fast Our Confession”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on November 11th, 2018, in the Morning Worship Service.**

In the Old Testament times, every high priest was taken from men, and appointed for men, in things pertaining to God. A priest was thus called of God to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins in accordance with the ceremonial law. This is what our Lord Jesus Christ was called to do, in a much greater sense, on behalf of God, for people like ourselves, who are sinners. He had to become our High Priest so that He could minister to us in our sinful weakness. Our Lord Jesus Christ was, and He is today, a faithful High Priest who sits on a throne of grace at God’s right hand. And we are thus encouraged to come to Him that we may obtain mercy and to find grace to help in the time of our need.

The verses that I have just read to you tell us some things about His intercessory work as our High Priest at the right hand of the Father; that He ever lives to perform this good work of sympathizing with us in our weaknesses, and helping us in our times of temptation, and in all of our learning to be obedient to God. And so, 1st of all - I would like to set before you Christ our High Priest as the One who was appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices. (verses 1-4) 2nd – Christ our High Priest as the One who was of a Special Priesthood, of the order of Melchizedek. (verses 5 and 6) And 3rd – Christ our High Priest as the One whose prayers on our behalf were heard because of his godly fear. (verse 7)

1st of all – Let us think about Christ our High Priest as the One who was appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices.

“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.” “He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.” “Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins.” “And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.” So, here we have a comparison between Aaron and our great High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is stated that they are both men and they were both called to be High Priests. The comparison between them is developed in terms of what a High Priest is called to do.

In Old Testament times, we read that the high priest was called to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. That is, when a person among the people of Israel became conscious that they had sinned, they knew according to the law, that a ceremonial offering was needed to atone for that sin; to have it forgiven, and to cover it from the sight of the holy God. And so, the sinful person brought their gift to the priest, who brought it to the altar, and he offered it there as a sacrifice. These gifts that were brought included freewill offerings, peace offerings, burnt offerings, sin and trespass offerings. The proscribed kind of animal or bird, or grain offering was brought, which God had stipulated should be brought, for each kind of sin committed. And it was offered up on the altar.

Now, we should see and conclude from this, that we cannot approach God directly ourselves because of our guiltiness, and our ignorance of how much we owe to God, that we cannot repay, because of our sins in His sight. We should understand that God will not allow us to approach Him on our own behalf, on the basis of our own merits, thinking that we can claim any favor with him because of anything that we have done. But God will only allow us to approach Him through a High Priest of his appointment. During the time of the Old Covenant, Aaron’s office of high priest was intended to be a type of our great High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ.

John Owen says this – “It may be, that it will be said, “That these priests themselves, of whom the apostle treats in the first place, were also sinners, and yet they were appointed for

men in things appertaining unto God; so that sinners may appear in such matters before the Lord.” “I answer, ‘It is true, they were so.’” “And therefore our apostle says that they were to offer for their own sins as well as for the sins of the people, verse 3; but then they did none of them officiate in that office merely in their own names and on their own account, but as they were types and representatives of Him who had no sin, and whose office gave virtue and efficacy unto theirs.” And certainly this is true. (end of quote)

So, although there were many sins which an Israelite may have committed, and become aware that they were guilty of, there are only two areas of concern which are mentioned here in verse 2. That is, when those among the Lord’s people had sinned ignorantly, or when they were going astray. The high priest was to have compassion on such, and the reason that he was not to severely reprove them, or look upon them in an indignant manner, as if to say – “Why have you done this?”, when they came to him, was because “he (that is the high priest) was also subject to weakness. Therefore, he, when he ministered as a priest before the Lord and on behalf of those who came to him, he ought to be a man of compassion when it comes to ministering to others who have sins of ignorance and weakness to confess.

We find an example of this if you will turn with me over to Leviticus chapter 4, verse 1. “Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘If a person sins unintentionally (that is – through ignorance) against any of the commandments of the Lord in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them, if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the Lord for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering.’” Andrew Bonar in his commentary on Leviticus says this – “As the burnt offering showed, in a more general way, the person accepted through the sacrifice, so now the sin offering will show the sin dealt with to the uttermost, while the person is accepted.” “God points out what is to be done when they come to the knowledge of any sin of which they were not aware of before.” “The cases are understood to be things committed, not mere omissions of duty; and how saddening it is to find out that we grieve the Lord in so many hidden ways!” “We have a heart as prone to sin as the body is to weariness.” (end of quote)

Well we should understand that the sins that are being spoken about here are not such as were committed with a high hand, in the full awareness by that person that they were breaking a commandment of the Lord. They were sins which although they were committed against God and man, there was an ignorance on their part as to the guilt of what they were doing, while they were being committed. An example of this can be seen in Paul’s persecuting of the Church before he was converted to Christ. He says in 1st Timothy 1, verse 12 – “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man: but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”

Unbelief can be a sin committed in ignorance as to how God-dishonoring it is. Saul did not want to believe that Jesus Christ was his promised Messiah. And remember also the words of our Lord Jesus as He was suffering on the cross – “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.” Even murder can be a sin which is committed by a person not realizing how damning it is; the person thinking that he is even offering service to God. Now, these are sins which must be repented of if that person is to be saved. Of that, there is no question. But they are also sins which must have the High Priestly intercession of Christ take place in regard to them, so that they may be forgiven, the sinner instructed, and then led into the right paths of obedience. Do you and I commit sins of ignorance? No doubt we do. And that is why we need Jesus as our High Priest.

You see other sins of ignorance which are mentioned in chapter 5 of Leviticus, verse 1, as well. “If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or knows of the matter – If he does not tell it, he bears guilt.” Verse 4 of chapter 5 – “Or if a

person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatever it is that a man may pronounce by an oath, and he is unaware of it – when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty in any of these matters.” “And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matter, that he shall confess that he has sinned that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a sin offering.” “So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin.” Brethren, we need to understand that the antitype, Christ, is so much greater than the type; that is, Aaron. Our Lord Jesus Christ became our High Priest at the appointment of God, and His purpose in coming into the world was to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1; 29) When He went about to minister, He did so on the basis of compassion, and to give real knowledge and understanding to the ignorant. He saw people as sheep without a shepherd.

In Luke 15, it says that all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.” “And the Pharisees and scribes complained saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” “So He spoke this parable to them, saying: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?” “And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.” “And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.” “I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”

This was our faithful High Priest during the days of His earthly ministry. His purpose was to obey and to fulfill the law in our place. His love and His compassion was to offer Himself as a sinless sacrifice on the altar of the cross that He was crucified upon. His finished work of righteousness in fulfilling the law and all of the commandments of God included His going to the cross, to offer Himself there for all kinds of sinners, all of whom were unworthy of his love and sacrifice, and they were even ignorant of how sinful they really were. The same is true today. We little realize how ignorant we are of how sinful we are, even as Christians. We would minister to others, but we must be ministered to ourselves by our great High Priest before we can effectively minister to others. Aaron and all of the other high priests of the Old Covenant had to offer gifts and sacrifices not only for the sins of the people who were in ignorance and weakness in regard to their sins, but they had to also offer up gifts and sacrifices for themselves as well. In doing this they learned to be compassionate men if they were at all sensitive to what the Lord would have them to learn.

I would like to say to you that applying this to ourselves here today, that if a minister or any Christian for that matter, cannot show compassion to those who are ignorant and going astray, it is because they do not understand their own sinful weaknesses. But if you would learn how to show compassion, and help those persons, Christians and unbelievers alike, then you must first of all know the reality of Jesus’ sacrifice and intercession being applied to your heart and mind. 1st John 2: 1 – “My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin.” “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” If you as an unbeliever come to Christ, you will realize the greatness of propitiation; the power and merit of what Christ has done for you, the sinner who needs a Savior.

Then, as a believer, when you begin to live your life for God, you will begin to realize how important it is that you understand not only what the commandments of God are, but how God would have you to go about to keep His commandments. This is a learning process. You will begin to realize that your sins of ignorance are real, and you will come to see how important it is to deal with these sins through confession of them. You will glory in the fact that this passage of Scripture is true; that you have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens. And He

who sits on the right hand of God, who was victorious over sin, and is alive from the dead, is applying the merit of His blood and righteousness to your heart and life. I am saying, then you can learn to show compassion as Jesus did. That real compassion can only be learned from Christ, and by His Spirit working in your heart.

When Christ is your High Priest you will willingly learn to endure grief and to rejoice even when you are suffering wrongly. 1st Peter 2: 19 – “For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.” “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?” “But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.” “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed.” “For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.” You see, it was Jesus your High Priest who saw you when you were wandering far astray. It was His compassion towards you to bring you back from your wandering from God and the path of righteousness, and now you too must learn to show this kind of compassion to others who are ignorant and going astray.

2nd – Christ as our High Priest was of a Special Priesthood, of the order of Melchizedek. (verses 5 and 6)

“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.’ “As He also says in another place: ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’” We see here from these verses that there is only one great High Priest over the house of God, and that office He has always held. He did not take this office upon Himself, but God appointed Him to it. When Christ was born, He was not born of the tribe of Levi, but from the tribe of Judah. And yet He was the High Priest who had come to fulfill all of God’s holy law; all of the ceremonial types and sacrifices that were offered would be fulfilled in Him, and in doing this, He would bring the Old Testament, Old Covenant priesthood to an end. He was called to this great and good work, and it glorified God that He was of this different order of priest; the order of Melchizedek.

In this order of priests, there was only the two of them; Melchizedek and Christ, and the first was the type of the second. When Abraham came back victorious from having done battle with some of the kings of the land, who had kidnapped Lot, he brought him back from his being held captive. When Abraham returned victorious in this battle, Melchizedek came out to meet him with bread and wine. What is being pictured there? It was that Christ, who would come later, as the High Priest over all of God’s house, Jew and Gentile would be victorious in His work as High Priest, a work of His giving His body and blood in the offering of Himself as the only sacrifice which could really take away sins.

Let us glory in the fact that Christ has fulfilled the law through the sacrifice of himself; and thus is the only High Priest needed for all of God’s people. He came not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life, as it says in Hebrews 7: 16. Let us understand that Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become the High Priest over all of God’s people. Rather He was called to, by the Father. All of this was decided in eternity past by the Father and the Son; that the Son would take upon Himself a true human nature in the fullness of time. He was eternally begotten to this purpose, and all of these plans came to fruition in His High Priestly work, in His becoming the Savior of the world through the sacrifice and offering of Himself, and then in His being raised from the dead when the work of sacrifice for our sins had been completed.

But Jesus we need to see, was declared to be a Savior from His birth. In his living of His whole life, He was the High Priest. His High-Priestly work was the work of a lifetime of sinless, self-denying, submissive obedience to the Father which eventually led Him to the cross. In His sinless humanity, Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become High Priest, but He glorified the Father who had appointed Him to this work. This is indicated to us in John chapter 17, verse 1, in His High-Priestly prayer when He said – “Father, the hour has come.” “Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him all authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.” “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” “I have glorified You on the earth.” “I have finished the work which You have given me to do.” “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

What earthly man born of Adam could ever say such words? None can. But Jesus Christ our Lord who was both God and Man; two natures in one Blessed Person, could do so, because He was a priest of a different order from Aaron and the Levitical priests. He was a priest of the order of Melchizedek. So, we should understand that Christ was on this great mission of the purchase of redemption with His life. This mission was not only on our behalf, to atone for our sins, but in order to satisfy the Father’s justice through living a perfect life in God’s sight, to please Him entirely and fully on our behalf. God righteousness and His holy law would all be fulfilled, so that our sins would all be atoned for. In this great work, Christ would defeat all of our enemies, and secure the victory for all of God’s chosen people; that they should be rescued and saved from Satan’s deceptions, and overcome the world, and even the wickedness of their own hearts.

But suffice it now to say, concerning Melchizedek, that he was a type of our Savior in his ministry to Abraham. He pointed Abraham, through his bringing to him after the battle, the symbols of the bread and the wine. He was pointing Abraham to Christ’s finished work; that He would partake of it. He would partake, by faith, in Christ’s future work of redemption; His doing battle on the cross, as our great High Priest; offering not the blood of bulls and goats, but His own precious body and blood. These are the emblems of Christ’s victory in all generations since Abraham. This is the victory that overcame the world in Abraham’s day; even his faith. And this is the victory which overcomes the world in our day; our faith in the Christ who laid down His life for everyone who believes in Him.

Our faith is not only fixed on Christ’s death, but it is also focused on His resurrection. Christ was raised from the dead on the third day, so that the apostle Paul could rightly preach of this great event in Acts chapter 13, verses 32 and 33, as His being begotten by the Father in the sense of His having fulfilled all righteousness, in regard to His High Priestly ministry of sacrifice. He offered Himself up to God as the sacrifice lamb, and the acceptance of that sacrifice by the Father was certified by God’s raising Him from the dead on behalf of all who would believe in Him – “And we declare to glad tidings – that promise which was made to the fathers.” “God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus.” “As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’”

3rd – Christ our High Priest as the One whose prayers were heard because of his godly fear. (verses 6 and 7)

“As He also says in another place: ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’; 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.” There are two aspects to Christ’s High-Priestly earthly ministry; they were the sacrifice which was offered, and the prayers that He prayed. Let us think now of the prayers which He offered up that led up to the sacrifice. Our Lord, in His holy humanity, had a great struggle in His mind and heart when He knew that He was going to have to go to cross and

suffer at the hands of wicked men. The phrase, “in the days of His flesh” denotes the weakness that He was subject to as a man. As the God-Man He knew that He must go to the cross, and He was perfectly willing to do so, as our great High Priest. But He had sinless infirmities of His flesh which came out in His prayers at the latter part of His ministry; in the garden of Gethsemane, just before He was betrayed by Judas and arrested by the temple guard. It was here that He offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears.

Turn with me over to Matthew 26, verse 36 – “Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while I go and pray over there.’” “And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.” “Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.’” “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’” “Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?’” “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” “Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.’” “And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.” “So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.” “Then He came to His disciples and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting?’” “Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.” “Rise, let us be going.” “See, My betrayer is at hand.”

Now in reading this passage to you, I want you to see that Jesus our great High Priest prayed before He offered Himself up as a sacrifice. His prayer grew out of the great sorrow and deep distress that He felt in his soul. He confesses it to his disciples as a deep feeling of anguishing sorrow, even unto death. Indeed, He knew that it would lead to His death. And so to relieve this distress which was his sinless infirmity, he asked his closest friends and disciples, Peter, James, and John to stay with Him and watch with Him. He Himself went on a little farther away and fell on His face and prayed.” It was the prayer that is described for us in Hebrews 5: 7, as offered up with strong cries and tears – “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” He struggled with drinking this cup of sufferings that would come to Him in the trial and arrest, the blasphemy, the mocking, the scourging, being led away to the cross to bear the sufferings of the cross. He righteous soul shrunk back from this. He sought for some other way if possible. But He knew that it was not possible. And so His cry and His prayer was – “Not as I will, but as You will.”

He then turns and comes back to the disciples and finds them sleeping. This was their sinful infirmity. They loved their Lord; they believed that they would do anything that they could to help in this hour of trial, but Jesus finds them asleep! In another place, it says that they were sleeping for sorrow. And so, Jesus says to them – “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. It is from the flesh that come all sins of infirmity such as this; being unable to pray and in fact sleeping at the most crucial times. I want you to see that it was for this sinful infirmity that Jesus prayed as High Priest, and then He went to the cross to suffer there for these sinful weaknesses. Let us see that our strength to obey at critical times, and to deny ourselves and to pick up our cross, comes not from our fleshly strength or boastful pride of what we think that we can do in such situations. It comes because Christ who has suffered to obtain it, as a part of His High-Priestly work.

Let me close by telling you that Christ was heard because of His godly fear. “If this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done,” He said. And it was done. God honored His godly fear; his godly regard to do His will in this matter of going to the cross and not suffering for His own sins, for He had none, but suffering for our sins, which are many. His

prayer was heard in that He was enabled according to the Father's will and the Holy Spirit's working, to be able to endure the sufferings of the cross and despise the shame, "to drink the bitter cup with silence and submission". (Burkitt) Let us learn from Christ how it is that we will be able to do the will of God in the difficult situations of our lives, by praying and crying to God using Christ's holy name, and we too shall be heard and answered.