

Hebrews 5:1-9

Fulfilling Our Roles As Priests

For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins – v. 1

The first 4 verses of this chapter lay out the general rules that applied to the high priests in Old Testament times. They had to be taken from among men – they were ordained for men in things pertaining to God and they functioned by offering gifts and sacrifices for sins. They were to be compassionate and they were to be sympathetic since they too were compassed about with infirmities and shared not only a common humanity but a common depravity with the ones they ministered to.

The author's purpose in vv. 5ff is to show how Christ meets every qualification to be a high priest although we must acknowledge as Paul did earlier in 4:15 that while Christ can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities by virtue of His real humanity, He was and is, nevertheless, without sin. Paul will go on later in the chapter to demonstrate that the superiority of Christ's priesthood is due, in part, to the fact that He is a priest of another order – *after the order of Melchizedek* (v. 6).

As we enter into our study this morning I'd like you to keep a couple of things in mind. The first thing I want you to keep in mind is the verse that I read this morning in our call to worship - 1Pet. 2:9 *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.*

We find this truth conveyed to us again in Rev. 1:4-6. John to the seven churches which are in Asia: *Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

The priesthood of the believer is too plain to miss. This is the first thing I want you to keep in mind. The other thing I want you to keep in mind regarding our study this morning is that through salvation we are being conformed more and more to the image of Christ. *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren* (Rom. 8:29). You see in this familiar verse a close connection between predestination and conformity to the image of Christ. The evidence for a professing Christian being truly saved is found in his being conformed to the image of Christ. He has a new found desire to be like Christ. He wants to serve God and others the way Christ did and He wants to live a holy life the way Christ lived a holy life.

If we, as believers then are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people that are being more and more conformed to the image of God's Son then I think it stands to reason to say that these verses in Hebrews 5 that describe the qualifications for the high priest in Old Testament times bear a definite application to the people of God today. There is something, in other words, very practical about these verses that can serve us well by showing us our roles as priests and challenge us to strive to live up to the standard that Christ Himself has fulfilled as our Great High Priest.

And so the theme I want to call your attention to this morning is the theme of fulfilling our roles as priests –

We Must Fulfill Our Roles as Priests

It's in keeping with our sanctification and our being conformed to the image of Christ. How, then, do we rise to this challenge of fulfilling our roles as priests?

I. We Must Realize the Subjects of Our Priesthood

Notice the words of v. 1 – *every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men...* This is another one of those verses that teach us the absolute necessity of the humanity of Christ. High priests were taken from among men. They must possess a common nature with those they would represent as priests.

What I want you to see, however, is not only that high priests were taken from among men but just as importantly we note from the text that they were *ordained for men*. Taken from men and ordained for men. This is tantamount to saying that they were ordained for the benefit of others. Their calling into the priesthood was not for their own sake it was for the sake of others. Aaron and his sons were not called to the priesthood because God's design was merely to exalt and bestow honor on them.

It was an honor to them. So we read in verse 4: *And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron*. Even in the case of Christ we read in the next verse – v. 5: *So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest*. What was true of Aaron was also true of Christ – they were both called of God and they were both ordained for the benefit of others.

We think of this every time we read those words in 1Cor. 11 around the Lord's table - *this is my body, which is broken for you* (11:24). The same truth was conveyed to the shepherds by the angel when Christ was born – *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord* (Lk. 2:11).

High priests, then, are taken from among men and are ordained for men. It was true of Aaron and his sons, it was true of Christ and when it comes to the priesthood of the believer I think it would be fair to say that same thing is true for you and me. We were called to salvation not merely for our own honor and exaltation. Oh, we have been honored and we have been exalted. Salvation has taken us from the fearful pit and from the miry

clay and has exalted us to solid ground and has put a new song in our mouths, even praise to our God. We are honored with the righteousness of Christ being imputed to us. We are exalted to be Christ's inheritance and to gain our own inheritance in Christ. But the blessings of salvation were never meant simply to terminate upon us. Just as high priests were taken from men and ordained for men it can be said of you and me that we have been saved from among men and we have been saved for the benefit of men.

This principle, if you will, is revealed to us as a consistent pattern especially in the gospels. What happened most often when Christ performed miracles? The recipients of those miracles found themselves compelled to magnify Christ by sharing with any one and everyone what great things Christ had done for them.

When Christ cast a legion of demons out of the demoniac, the healed demoniac's desire was to remain with Christ. But what was Christ's word to him in Mk. 5:19,20? *Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.*

Salvation, you see, was meant to be shared – and not only shared but spread – that's part of the debt of gratitude that we take to ourselves in salvation. *I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians;* Paul writes in Rom. 1:14 *both to the wise, and to the unwise.* And how would Paul pay that debt? He goes on to say in the very next verse – Rom. 1:15 *So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.*

This is something we need to constantly keep in mind – we have been ordained, called, or saved, if you will, for men. It was while we lived in sin that we lived for ourselves. The mark of a man still in sin is that he thinks everything should be for his sake. He's entitled to this, that, or the other thing, so he reasons. Everything should revolve around him and everything should be catered to him.

The term narcissism is a term that readily applies to our day and age. It's a term that's defined as *excessive admiration of one's self.* It's selfishness in the extreme. It's the rationale that the world revolves around me. And if the narcissist is not perceived as the center of attention then he pouts like a little child who has been robbed of his candy. The power of the gospel invades and destroys this mindset of selfishness and enables us to confess with the hymn-writer that we're channels only.

How I praise thee, precious Saviour, That Thy love laid hold of me; Thou hast saved and cleansed and filled me That I might Thy channel be.

If we're going to fulfil our roles as priests, then, the way we should, then we must appreciate that we are ordained for men – saved for the benefit of others. But not only must we realize the subjects of our priesthood, but would you consider with me next that:

II. We Must Know the Nature of Our Priesthood

Notice the nature of the priesthood as it's described v. 1 *For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.* Underscore that phrase *in things pertaining to God*. This phrase reveals the nature of the Aaronic priesthood to be spiritual or divine.

Aaron and his sons were ordained for men but they were ordained in a specific way for men. They were ordained in things pertaining to God. Their ministry, in other words, was to be a spiritual ministry. The benefits they would convey would be spiritual benefits. Things pertaining to God would cover such things as forgiveness of sins based on the sacrifice. The truths conveyed by the burnt offering and the sin offering and the peace offering would be the things pertaining to God that would be ministered by the priests. And don't we know, as Christians, that the things pertaining to God are the best things to receive.

Right around this time of year we begin to receive calls here at the church from people that make it their practice to call around to all the churches listed in the phone book. These calls are solicitations for help during the holiday season. They want financial help so they can buy presents for their children.

I find it somewhat amazing that the cultural mindset seems to be very strong that views churches exclusively as financial charity centers. Now I have to be careful how I make this point because I don't want to leave the impression that churches should not be charitable. When I read the words of Jn. 13:29, for example, that verse implies very plainly that it was the constant practice of Christ in His earthly ministry to make donations to the poor. *For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor.* The implication being that it was a routine practice for Christ to instruct Judas to give to the poor so this could have been something that Christ would have said to Judas often.

There's certainly nothing wrong with a church or a Christian making such contributions to the poor. The challenge we most often face is the challenge of discerning real needs from the plots of skillful con-artists. The thing to keep in mind, however, is that the Christian's primary ministry is spiritual in nature. And anything we do materially should have a spiritual aim behind it.

I love the verse in Acts that brings these two ideas together and shows the priority of Peter toward the spiritual when he says to the lame beggar in Ac 3:6 *Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.* What Peter gave to that lame beggar was of much greater value than a contribution of silver or gold. He was able to impart to that lame man the freedom and the power to provide for himself. We do the same when we impart the gospel to those that are lost. Through Christ they can be empowered to do what they need to do to have their provisions met. One of the benefits I gained early on in my salvation was a work ethic which included

the initiative to work. This was the natural outflow of the spiritual benefits that I received through the gospel.

So the nature of our priesthood as believers is spiritual. The nature of the priesthood is further described in the next verse as being compassionate. Heb 5:2 *Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.*

It is certainly from this compassion that we ought to be compelled to help the ignorant that are out of the way in any way we can – materially and spiritually. Would you notice from v. 2 that this compassion springs from our common humanity with those we minister to – do you see that the high priest himself was compassed with infirmity? This is what compels his compassion. He recognizes what he has in common with the ones to whom he ministers. And not only the fact of his common humanity but as v. 3 indicates, a common depravity - Heb 5:3 *And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.* This is, of course, where the comparison breaks down between Aaron's priesthood and Christ's. Christ never had to offer for Himself. He shares a common humanity with those He represents but not a common depravity. He could not be our Great High Priest and make effectual intercession for us if sin was found in Him. But where our ministry to others is concerned our compassion should be driven by the knowledge of our common depravity.

We should keep these things in mind when we consider the ignorant and those that are out of the way. We share a common humanity with them and a common depravity with them. And because of that common depravity we must acknowledge that we are every bit as capable of sin as the worst of sinners. The difference between you and the most vile sinner you've ever met is not your personal righteousness or your holiness. The difference between you and that sinner is the grace of God.

So when we consider our common depravity with those that are ignorant and out of the way it should lead us to be humble. That's the next mark of the nature of our priesthood – humility. We recognize that we are in need of an offering for sin as much as any sinner is in such need. Boasting is eliminated, Paul writes to the Romans – especially the kind of boasting that springs from works which we might think makes us better than the next guy.

Notice the words of v. 4 again where we read *no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.* The reference is to Aaron's priesthood. He did not take that honor to himself. But can we not recognize that there's an application to here to every Christian as priests. We didn't take to ourselves the honor of being Christians. We were effectually called to be Christians. Had God not effectually called you, you would never have parted with your sins. Had God not effectually called you, you would never have gained an interest in Christ.

The knowledge of the grace of God in our salvation should contribute, then, to our compassion and to our humility. And what's more we should be encouraged to minister to others. If your salvation was by grace and your salvation came through an effectual call

then so can the salvation of any sinner who is ignorant and out of the way. This leads to my final consideration this morning. We've seen the subjects of our priesthood – priests are taken from among men and are ordained for men. We've seen the nature of our priesthood – it's spiritual in nature and is driven by a common humanity and a common depravity with sinful men. For that reason we are to be compassionate and humble. It remains for us to consider that if we would fulfill our role as priests:

III. We Must Know the Specific Functions of Our Priesthood

Those functions are revealed to us in v. 1 – *For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.*

The high priest's specific tasks, then, were to offer gifts and sacrifices – sacrifices for sins. We should note in connection with offering sacrifices that intercessory prayer was involved in the offering of those sacrifices. The priest would pray for the sins of the people to be forgiven. He would pray for the sacrifice to be viewed by God as vicarious. And he would pray for the benefits of the sacrifice to be visited upon the people so the people would come away with peace and with assurance that their sins were forgiven and they were in the realm of God's favor.

When I think of the New Testament counterpart to the offering of gifts I'm reminded of Paul's words to the saints at Rome. In Rom. 1:11 he writes: *For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established.* Paul also recognized the mutual ministry of the saints to each other for he goes on to clarify his statement by v. 11 by writing in v. 12 *That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.*

Do you begin to see, then, how the specific functions of the believer's priesthood come into sharper focus? The offering of gifts and sacrifices for sins corresponds to prayer and the ministry of the word to one another – the presentation of Christ to each other that we may draw from the power of the gospel and utilize that power in our lives. *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*, Paul writes in 10:25 *as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

We certainly in a day, don't we, when the priesthood of the believer needs to be exercised. We need to pray for each other. We know, even in a church as small as ours, that needs and challenges and trials are great within our own ranks. The need for the people of God to be encouraged is great. The needs and challenges within our families are great. It's the devil's design and desire to isolate the people of God from each other and thus make them more vulnerable to discouragement and despair and the forsaking of Christ Himself.

I remember hearing as a student years ago the story that was told of the bombing pilots in World War II. Those bombers were larger planes and thus slower planes than the smaller ones that could pick them out of the air. And so those bombers had to maintain a very tight

formation and by doing so they could create a formidable defense for themselves – that formation had to be maintained at all costs and the enemy pilots knowing this would charge straight at the bombers – sort of like playing chicken – and if they could intimidate a pilot to break ranks with the others for fear of crashing into an oncoming enemy plane then that bomber that broke rank would become an easy prey for the smaller and faster planes and they would shoot it down.

It's a good description of Christian families and their need to maintain a very tight formation. And the way we maintain our formation is by worshipping Christ together in His house on the Lord's Day and then by taking each other to heart in prayer and minister to one another as we fellowship.

The Hebrew Christians were in danger of being isolated and destroyed. They needed to be encouraged and built up in the faith. They needed to exercise their ministries as a kingdom of priests by ministering Christ one to another. The need is the same today. Let's recognize, then, that we have a role to fulfill as priests. We affirm the truth of the priesthood of the believer and we look to Christ, our Great High Priest to assist us in fulfilling our roles.

Just as the high priests in Old Testament times were taken from men and ordained for men so are we called to minister to one another. The nature of our ministry must be spiritual and we must be equipped to build up each other in the things of God. We must do so with compassion and humility. *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory*; Paul writes in Phil. 2:3 *but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves*. This shouldn't be such a hard task to perform when we remember our common humanity and our common depravity with each other.

Let us then fulfill our roles by praying for each other and by imparting to each other those spiritual gifts that minister Christ to our hearts. May the Lord give us grace to be Christ-like in our endeavors to fulfill the roles Christ Himself calls us to.