

Our Gracious Heavenly Father Gave us Priests

Hebrews 5:1-6

Halifax: 13 November 2022

Introduction:

Today we begin chapter 5 in the epistle to the Hebrews.

- From here all the way into chapter 10, this epistle speaks of Christ as our high priest.
 - The author has already touched on this several times in the first four chapters.
 - We saw that there was an introduction to this section at the end of chapter 4.
 - There we were told that Christ is the great high priest who is able and eager to help us in our time of need.
 - We were encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace.
 - The primary focus of this lengthy section is on the superiority of Christ to the priests in the Old Testament.
 - We will see that they were but shadows of Him.
 - That it is His priestly ministry upon which the salvation of all depends.

In the portion we are taking up today—the first six verses of chapter 5,

- We are shown that it is God who appointed priests for His people and who in these last days has appointed Christ.
- This is an expression of His unfathomable love.

Please give attention now to the reading of God’s Word.

- May the Lord bless you all as you hear.

Hebrews 5:1-6: 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”...

Praise the Lord for His faithful Word.

I. The first thing we see here is that priests were appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices for man. This is a marvellous thing!

A. The function of the priest is to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin.

1. This presupposes that we are sinners who cannot approach God.

- We must have a priest even to bring gifts to Him (offerings of thanksgiving and such) because if we were to bring them ourselves, we would not be accepted.
- And if this is so, much more we need a priest to bring sacrifices to God for our sins that we might be forgiven.
- That priests do this is pretty much known throughout the world. Why this was such a prevailing custom in the ancient world I will mention later.

2. Nowhere was the predicament of the whole human race more clearly shown than at Sinai.

- Here, Israel, the very people that God had chosen for Himself out of all the world were gathered in the wilderness to worship Him.
- God had delivered them out of Egypt to be His people and to be His worshippers, and now they are gathered before Him at His command and what are they told?
 - **Exodus 19:10-13: Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. ¹¹ And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹² You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Take heed to yourselves *that you do not* go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. ¹³ ‘Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot *with an arrow*; whether man or beast, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain.”**
- We are told in verse 19 that there followed **thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled.**
 - These were the people in all the world who were chosen to be His own, and they are shown that they dare not draw near to Him lest He break out upon them in holy wrath and vengeance.
 - If this is the case with them, what can be said for the rest of the world?
 - We are unfit to come before God!
 - All of us are sinners by nature and by our actions.
 - This is the great human predicament.

B. Yet, here in our text, we are told of these priests who are appointed and can approach God in our behalf with gifts and sacrifices for sin.

1. How is it that there is even such a thing as priests who can do this?
 - How did it ever come about that such persons should even exist?
 - a. It was not that some men decided that this would be a good way to deal with sin—get some guys to dress up and take offerings and sacrifices to God.
 - When you hear about Mt. Sinai, do you think it would be a good idea for the people to hear the prohibition about crossing the boundary and to decide that they would get some guys to do this for them?
 - Do you think anybody would have wanted to do that?
 - I think not!
 - b. The reason there is such a thing as a priest to offer gifts and sacrifices to God for sin is because God appointed them.
 - Look at verse 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.**
 - You see how it says that they are appointed *for* men—not *by men*, but *for men*.

- That is exactly what happened at Sinai.
 - No sooner had God presented Himself as unapproachable than He also appointed that there should be priests to draw near to Him in behalf of the people.
 - He was actually highlighting the need for the priest that He would give them.
 - There are priests because God appointed them.
2. What hope the appointment of priests gave to the people!
- a. By appointing priests who could offer sacrifices for sin, our holy God made it clear that with Him there was forgiveness for sin.
 - He made it clear He was a God that was propitious—able to appeased—a God who would graciously make provision for the forgiveness of His people.
 - He made it clear that it was not that sin was trivial or needed no provision.
 - Sin is actually a much bigger problem than we can even fathom—especially in the blindness that sin has caused.
 - It is a problem too big for us, but a problem that He would deal with.
 - He would receive gifts and sacrifices for sin from priests in our behalf.
 - b. God had already given this hope in the ancient world before Sinai.
 - I mentioned before that I would explain why priests were such a common feature in the ancient world.
 - We are shown in Scripture that God appointed them from the very beginning.
 - We see God receiving offering and sacrifices from Abel—and then later from Noah from whom all the families of the earth descended.
 - We can be sure, though we are not told, that God was the one who first instituted these sacrifices because again, this is not something that we could come up with—that there should even be priests.
 - It is God who appointed men to be priests in their homes and accepted their offerings for reconciliation to Him when they were offered in faith, looking to God to at last provide what was required.
 - It is for this reason that we find people all over the world offering sacrifices to God for sin in the ancient world.
 - Many of them perverted the truth of God and gradually exchanged Him for idols that were more like we are than like God is, but they continued to show the memory of the need of sacrifice by priests.
 - c. God's promise was strengthened by the dramatic events at Sinai and by the transference of the priesthood from the firstborn of every family to the sons of Aaron offering the appointed sacrifices at the central sanctuary.
 - God had already emphasised to Abraham that the sacrifice that would actually take away sin was yet to be provided and that it would be provided by Him.

- By appointing one high priest and by restricting the offerings to one Sanctuary, God emphasised it all the more that He must provide.
- The priestly service that God appointed at Sinai became the very core of Israel's religion.
 - Brown speaks of how the priesthood, more than any other aspect of their worship, captivated their hearts with its gorgeous apparel, its solemn investiture, with the mysterious sacredness of the high priest who entered the holy of holies once per year, with the grandeur of the temple in which He ministered.
- All of this was intended to declare to the people that there was forgiveness with God through the high priest.
 - Appointing high priests was His gracious testimony to all the world that He would be propitious to otherwise hopeless sinners.
 - All the world was to look to Him to be saved by a priest that would arise in Israel. Salvation was of the Jews.
 - As the text says, the high priests were taken from men to be appointed for men in things pertaining to God.

II. Our text speaks to us of what a privilege it was for the man who was called to be a high priest.

- A. He was a man who could help his people in the very way that help was most needed.
1. If we are not reconciled to God—if He has found us guilty and fit only to be condemned and cast into the pit of torment,
 - we are completely without hope—all is lost.
 - What else matters for eternity but a restored relationship with God?
 2. And here was the priest.
 - He could have compassion on those who wanted to serve God but found that sin was always before them, knowing that sin separated them from God.
 - As verse 2 says, **The priest can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray.**
 - That does not speak of persons who are angry at God and want nothing to do with Him—the high-handed presumptuous sinner who does not care about God or want to walk with Him.
 - The priest is for those who are ignorant and going astray—sinning unintentionally, or could we say, even though they don't want to.
 - They want to serve God, they want to honour Him and love Him, but they find that they always come short. They know it.
 - The priest can offer sacrifices for their sins—for the sins of those who repent.
 - God has appointed the priest for this purpose.
- B. How glad it made every godly priest that he could help.
1. The godly priest had compassion on his fellow worshippers.

- He did not look at them with an air of superiority because *he* was the priest and they were but laymen.
 - He knew that he needed the sacrifices he offered just as much as they did.
 - Again, verse 2 says of him: **He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.**
2. Verse 3 adds that because of this, the high priest was **“required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins.”**
- a. He knew that he had no more right, as a fellow sinner, to approach God than anyone else did.
 - It was only because God appointed him to do this that he could.
 - And because God had appointed him, he was constrained to do it—required to do it—it was the task that God had given him...
 - our gracious God wanted him to show that with Him there was forgiveness of sin.
 - b. What relief this ministry gave to those who laboured under the burden of sin.
 - Those dear souls that came to see what I hope all of you have come to see—that you are not fit to come before the holy gracious God who made you.
 - That your sins have cut you off.
 - c. What a delight it was to the priest to take the offerings that God had appointed—the bulls and goats and lambs and doves—and to transfer to them the guilt of the people...
 - and to kill those animals and offer them up for himself and for the people proclaiming that there is forgiveness with God.
 - He could say, “I did not appoint this—God did. He wants you to know that there is forgiveness with Him.”
 - The gracious priest took delight to see the burdened soul weighed down by sin relieved, filled with hope, filled with gratitude and love to the God who promised to be propitious to them.
- C. What a sacred ministry it was—no man who understood did dare to take this honour of priestly service to himself.
- Verse 4 says: **And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.**
1. Those who knew anything about the true God knew that you did not saunter in before His holy presence according to your own whims!
 - a. It was not for any man to decide that he would approach God as high priest.
 - It was only the one that God expressly appointed.
 - The sons of Korah complained that they should have the privileges that Aaron had as high priests. That claim cost them their lives.
 - King Saul took it to himself to offer a sacrifice when Samuel had not come, and he forfeited his kingship.
 - Uzziah the king took it to himself to offer incense, and he was struck with leprosy.

- b. Not even the high priest himself had any say in deciding in what way God was to be approached.
 - Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu tried that. They went before God with fire that God had not appointed and were struck dead immediately.
- 2. Coming before God as a priest was a privilege granted by God that no man had a natural right to.
 - We are all sinners.
 - There might justly have been no access to God at all for us. There is none for the angels who fell.
 - But the high priest was appointed to show that there was access for sinners to God, only through the priest and the sacrifice that He appointed.

III. And now God has made it absolutely clear that His priest for us is Jesus Christ.

- He is the one who offers the sacrifice that reconciles us to God.
- A. The Hebrew believers needed to see this.
 - All the Jews needed to see it. It is the whole point of the priesthood.
 - 1. Now that Christ had come, there must be no uncertainty about whether He was the priest.
 - There must be no wavering between Him and the priests of the Old Covenant, the Sons of Aaron.
 - They had served their purpose, but all must know that now the one to whom the priesthood rightly belonged had come—
 - the one upon whom the priesthood had been given forever.
 - 2. Uncertainty was the great problem that some of the Hebrew believers were having.
 - They were being pressured to return to the Old Testament ceremonies that they had grown up with.
 - They were outcasts because of following Jesus.
 - There was a pull to go back to the glorious rituals.
 - To quote Brown again, "The priesthood had truly captured the people with its gorgeous apparel, the solemn investiture, the mysterious sacredness of the high priest, the grandeur of the temple in which he ministered, all these operated like a charm in riveting the attachment of the Jews to now over-dated economy, and in exciting powerful prejudices against that simple, spiritual, unostentatious system by which it had been superseded."
 - Has it not been the constant tendency of Christians to want to have priests today, even though the glory of the New Testament is that we have Christ alone as our priest at His Father's right hand?
 - There is no office of priesthood instituted in the New Testament. It is an invention of men who are uncomfortable with Christ as He is revealed in the gospel.
 - It is the yearning of those who don't know the true comfort of the gospel.

- Do you know the true comfort of the gospel?
 - Do you know what it is to rest in the Saviour that God provided to be our high priest forever?
 - Do you know that through Him, your sins are completely forgiven and that you have a place with God in glory forever?
- B. The LORD has made it clear that Christ is now His appointed priest, and that forever.
1. Verse 5 tells us that even Jesus did not “glorify Himself to become high priest.”
 - He, being the eternal Son of God, became flesh and dwelt among us.
 - And as a man, He did not assume any right to take the office of high priest. The priesthood could only be bestowed on Him by His heavenly Father.
 2. The Scriptures of the Old Testament testified that the Father would appoint Him to be both our everlasting king and our everlasting priest.
 - Hebrews 5:5-6 points to two remarkable texts from the Old Testament to prove this: **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”**
 - a. The declaration “**You are My Son, today I have begotten You.**” is from Ps 2.
 - It is the God the Father speaking to God the Son.
 - This verse was referenced in Hebrews 1 to show that Jesus is superior to the angels because He is God’s own Son.
 - But it is referenced here to show that because He was God’s Son, when He became flesh He was officially declared to be God’s anointed king who would inherit all the nations.
 - Though He was the eternally begotten Son, He was said to be “begotten this day” when He was raised from the dead and declared to be Lord and Christ as the Mediator who had given Himself for our sins. He was exalted and given the name that is above every name. He was declared to be the Prince and the Saviour of the world.
 - b. Likewise, Psalm 110 is quoted where it is said to Him who is the reigning king, “**you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.**”
 - We will be looking at this in a lot more detail when we get to chapter 7, but here it is cited to prove that Christ is the eternal priest of God for us.
 - He is the one that God has appointed forever as priest because He has offered the only sacrifice that takes away our sin.
 - He Himself is the Lamb of God who takes away our sin and He Himself is the priest who offered Himself as a sacrifice.
 - He is the priest who ever lives to make intercession for us.
 - He is the priest that God has appointed.
- C. What grace that God has provided Christ to be our priest forever!
1. Let all the world know that He is the one God has chosen.

- There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved.
- a. Let no other priest be sought.
 - Don't look for a man with fine clothes to burn incense for you and to offer sacrifices for you.
 - Don't try to be your own priest.
 - We are priests only through Christ—we come to God only through Him.
- b. Let no other sacrifice be trusted.
 - Micah said, in 6:6-7: **With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?**
 - Many in the world have gone so far as to offer their own children as sacrifices to their gods.
 - The murder of a child is a great evil, but there is a greater evil in it still that God stresses—"I never required this of you."
 - God never appointed the offering of our own sons as sacrifices, not because that would be more than He requires, but just the opposite—not enough... and with the presumption that it was enough!
 - If God's Son is required and we try to offer our sons instead, it is an insult to divine majesty.
 - God will have respect for the offering that He appointed.
 - Trust in His priest and His offering and you will not fail
- Let not other priest be sought.
 - Let no other sacrifice be trusted.
- c. Let no other hope be entertained.
 - Many entertain the vain hope that God will not judge, or that their good will outweigh their bad.
 - God did not appoint His Son to be priest because there was no need of an offering for sin. He appointed Him to offer the only sacrifice that can take away our sin.
 - Do not hope in your observance of Christian rituals or in your church attendance.
 - The rituals are designed to set you resting and keep you resting and looking to Christ. They have no power in themselves.
 - So with church attendance. All who come to Christ become part of His church and continue with His people and in His appointed worship,
 - But they do this because Christ is their priest, and this is what He has appointed.
 - They do not do it as if they make themselves right with God by it.
 - God has made this clear.
 - Christ is His appointed priest.

- He is the one who offered the only sacrifice that can take away our sin.
2. Rejoice in the priest that God has given you and in the God who graciously gave Him.
- Worship Him among the nations.
 - Make Him known to all peoples.
 - Let the nations be glad and rejoice in Him.