



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ◇ Deo ◇ Gloria

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

The Order of Melchizedek

Hebrews 5:1-10

April 19, 2009

¹For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

⁵So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

‘You are my Son,
today I have begotten you’;

⁶as he says also in another place,

‘You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.’

- On October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg Chapel Door, his greatest concern was the abuses within the Roman Catholic Church as it pertained to the use of indulgences and the power of the papacy. In fact, in his sixth Thesis, Luther wrote:

The pope himself cannot remit guilt, but only declare and confirm that it has been remitted by God...

- Just three years later, Martin Luther published a tract entitled *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. In it, Luther continued in his critique of the papacy and the Roman priesthood, articulating a doctrine now known as the priesthood of all believers. The tract reads:

That the pope or bishop anoints, makes tonsures, ordains, consecrates, or dresses differently from the laity, may make a hypocrite or an idolatrous oil-painted icon, but it in no way makes a Christian or spiritual human being. In fact, we are all consecrated priests through Baptism, as

Peter in 1 Peter 2[:9] says, 'You are a royal priesthood and a priestly kingdom,' and Revelation [5:10], 'Through your blood you have made us into priests and kings...'

- ❑ Luther's point was clear: because of the work of Jesus Christ, no longer do we need an Aaronic priesthood to intercede to God on our behalf. We are now all priests, with Jesus Christ as our perfect high priest. To elevate the pope, or any man, to the level of high priest [reserved only for Christ Jesus] is nothing short of blasphemy.
- ❑ Just a couple of months Luther's *To the Christian Nobility*, he published his famous *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and in it, he wrote:

... we are all equally priests, as many of us as are baptized...If they [The Roman Catholic priests] recognize this they would know that they have no right to exercise power over us except insofar as we may have granted it to them, for thus it says in 1 Peter 2, 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom.' In this way we are all priests, as many of us as are Christians.

- ❑ The doctrines of *the priesthood of all believers* and that of *justification by faith alone*, would soon emerge as the central themes of the Protestant Reformation.
- ❑ Yet, Martin Luther, and those who followed him, did not simply create the doctrine of *the priesthood of believers* in order to fulfill some political agenda or objective. Rather, they read the Scriptures and let them speak for themselves.
- ❑ In fact, the priesthood of all believers is only understood when one exalts Christ to the highest position a views Him alone as the sole mediator between God the Father and sinful man. **It is Christ who is our high priest, not any man.**
- ❑ And this is the greatest emphasis in Hebrews.
- ❑ Another Reformer, John Calvin, wrote, also in the 16th Century, "There is, indeed, no book in Holy Scripture which speaks so clearly of the priesthood of Christ, which so highly exalts the virtue and dignity of that only true sacrifice which He offered by His death..., in a word, so fully explains that Christ is the end of the Law."

- I. **The Qualifications of the High Priest**
- II. **The Superiority of Christ's High Priesthood**
- III. **The Uniqueness of Christ's High Priesthood**

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I. Qualifications of the High Priest

- ❑ **Hebrews 5:1** begins with the author stating, "For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins."

- The theme of this section is certainly the high priesthood of Jesus Christ. Specifically, this section relates to the Aaronic Priesthood...the order of Aaron. However, as Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Aaronic high priesthood of the Old Testament, the author of Hebrews describes how **Christ met – and certainly exceeded** – all of the requirement and qualifications of the high priest in the Old Testament.
- Therefore, just as the author of Hebrews has stated Christ’s superiority to (a) the angels; (b) Moses; (c) Joshua, now he demonstrates how Jesus Christ is superior to Aaron.
- Yet, Christ could not be shown superior to these Old Testament saints unless He first equaled them in their qualifications, duties and accomplishments with respect to their particular offices.
- So, the author of Hebrews states, “...**every high priest chosen from among men...**”
 - That is to say, although the *office* of High Priest was honorable and exalted, the person who held the office was “chosen from among men...”
- The author continues by explaining WHY the high priest was chosen from among men: “For every high priest chosen from among men **is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God...**”
 - Yet, before he fully explains WHY the high priest was chosen by men, he states that the high priest **is appointed...**”
 - That, is, whereas the high priest was **chosen FROM men; He was appointed BY GOD.**
 - Donald Guthrie writes, “As the verb [for *appointed*] is passive, it is implied that the appointment of the high priest is made by God. The Aaronic order did not provide for democratic election, but only for authoritative theocratic assignments.”
 - It is here, then, that the Hebrews author states the WHY...That is, the high priest was **chosen** from among men; and he was **appointed** by God **to act on behalf of men in relation to God...**
 - Simply stated, the high priest was man’s representative before God. He had to be like them in order to represent them. Further, he had to be appointed by God in order to be accepted by Him.

- The author continues, “...**to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin...**”
 - It is here that the author states the particular duty of the high priest – to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin.

That is to say, the high priest had to be **like men** and **acceptable to God** in order to **offer gifts and sacrifices for sin**.

In other words, the high priest had to meet the qualifications [like men...acceptable to God] in order to effectively perform the necessary duties with respect to mediation [offer gifts and sacrifices for sin].

- Notice here, though, the necessity of the high priest comes into full focus: **to deal with sins**. Were there no sin, there would be no need for a high priest. However, with the fall, came a separation between God and man. It was the high priest’s function that demonstrated the need for a mediator between God and man.
- Philip Hughes states, “The high priest was something far more than a cultic or liturgical specialist. His office was concerned, above all, with the radical problem of human sinfulness and the need of the people for reconciliation with God.”
- The manner in which the high priest dealt with sins was through the offering of **gifts and sacrifices**.
 - It is quite possible here that **gifts** [*dora*] corresponds to the meal offerings offered to God by the priests and **sacrifices** [*thysias*] corresponds to the blood offerings and sacrifices.
- The Hebrews author then shifts slightly to the **personal component** of the high priestly duties, in **Verse 2**: “He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.”
 - The author’s point here is clear: the high priest who represented the people before God was **able** to sympathize with those who represented because he, like them, was “beset with weakness.” He shared in their temptations, struggles, and even sin.
 - But it is significant that the author of Hebrews writes that the high priest was able to “deal gently *with the ignorant and wayward*.”
 - The high priest of the Old Testament sacrificial system was appointed for the purpose of dealing with **unintentional sins**. With respect to **intentional** or **high-handed** sins, the sacrificial system in the Old Covenant had no provision.

Numbers 15:22-31: “But if you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments that the LORD has spoken to Moses, all that the LORD has commanded you by Moses, from the day that the LORD gave commandment, and onward throughout your generations, then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, all the congregation shall offer one bull from the herd for a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma to the LORD...If one person sins unintentionally, he shall offer a female goat a year old for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven. You shall have one law from him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the people of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them. But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him.”

Leviticus 22:14-16: “And if anyone eats of a holy thing unintentionally, he shall add the fifth of its value to it and give the holy thing to the priest...”

- Most certainly, the *insufficiency* of the Old Testament sacrificial system with respect to dealing with all types of sin was by divine plan and orchestration. For, if the sacrificial system was designed to deal with all types of sin, the people would then place their trust in their ability to fulfill the demands of the sacrificial system in order to ensure their own sinlessness. **In fact, the sacrificial system was never intended to be the final remedy to the problem of sin.**
- Notice, however, one of the characteristics of the high priest was that “he himself is beset with weakness.” This was *why* he could “deal gently with the ignorant and wayward...”
 - Certainly, with respect to the Aaronic high priests, the weakness spoken of here is the weakness of the flesh that leads to sin. **The high priest could deal gently with sin because he himself battled with and occasionally succumbed to it.**
 - However, with respect to Jesus Christ, He, too was “beset with weakness.” However, the phrase in the original Greek means “since he is *clad with weakness*.”
 - The idea is that Jesus assumed the frailty, limitedness, and weakness of human flesh; yet, **He, unlike all priests that preceded Him, was without sin.**
 - And, as with all aspects of the Old Testament, the imperfect sacrificial system – as well as the imperfect high priest Himself – pointed to the perfect high priest, the perfect sacrifice...the Messiah, the Christ.
- Then, in **Verse 3**, the author of Hebrews writes, “Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.”

- In other words, *because the high priests of Old were beset with weakness [and sin], they had to first offer sacrifice for themselves before they could offer sacrifices on behalf of the people.*”
- In fact, this was one of the significant steps of the priest on the Day of Atonement – to offer up a sacrifice for his own sins (Leviticus 16:11).
- Consider, even, the founding head of the Aaronic priesthood, Aaron himself. Was it not he who gave in to the Israelites’ demand for a visible sign of god, saying, “Let any who have gold take it off”; so they gave it to me; and I threw it into the fire, and there came out this calf” (Exodus 32:24)?

Yet, this is precisely why Jesus Christ, as the Perfect High Priest, is so far superior to Aaron. Because Jesus was perfectly righteous, and without sin [and need no sacrifice for Himself], His high priestly work atoned for not only unintentional sins, but high-handed, openly rebellious intentional sins as well.

- He continues in **Verse 4**, “And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.”
 - Once again, the author underscores the importance of the high priest’s appointment by God. He does not elevate Himself to the office; God places him there. Aaron was called by God [Exodus 28:1; Leviticus 8:1; Numbers 16:5; 17:5; 18:1; Psalm 105:26], his successors were as well [Numbers 20:23; 25:10]; and ultimately Christ was appointed by God [the Father] to the office of high priest.

II. The Superiority of Christ’s High Priesthood

- Now that the author of Hebrews has highlighted the qualifications of the high priest in the Old Testament, he shifts to emphasizing the superiority of Jesus Christ to the Aaronic high priest.
- As is so common in the Book of Hebrews, the author quotes from the Old Testament.
- He opens his two quotations, in **Verse 5**, by stating, “So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

‘You are my Son,
Today I have begotten you.’

- This verse is a quote from **Psalm 2:7**. This has already been quoted in Hebrews 1:5.

- Certainly the ultimate fulfillment of this Psalm was the enthronement of Jesus Christ after his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. It was when He sat at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

Richard Phillips comments, “The burden of this verse is not the establishment of Christ’s nature as Son of God, but his public declaration and confirmation as Son and heir. As Paul explains in Romans 1:4, Jesus ‘was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.’ The resurrection and ascension were the fulfillment of this Old Testament citation and the occasion of his appointment to enter heaven as Son, heir, and high priest.”

- It was also at this point when Jesus fully assumed His role as High Priest for all the Father gave to Him.

III. The Uniqueness of Christ’s High Priesthood

- Then, in **Verse 6**, it states, “...as he says also in another place,

‘You are a priest forever,
After the order of Melchizedek.’

- In **Psalm 2:7**, Jesus is proclaimed the Davidic Messiah; here, in **Psalm 110:4**, Jesus is declared the great high priest.
- Moses records the story of Melchizedek in **Genesis 14:17-20**:

¹⁷After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). ¹⁸And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)

¹⁹And he blessed him and said,

‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;

²⁰and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!’

- Melchizedek is one of the most mysterious figures in the Old Testament. And the author of Hebrews will elaborate on the significance of the Priesthood Order of Melchizedek in Chapter 7. However, for now, the significance of Melchizedek is simple: **He was a unique figure who foreshadowed the uniqueness of the high priesthood of Jesus Christ.**
- Some have suggested that the scene in Genesis 14 was a *Christophany*, and that the figure of Melchizedek was none other than the pre-Incarnate Christ. This may or may not be the case; however, there are several truths that emerge from the account in Genesis 14 that give great significance to this passage in Hebrews.

- First of all, Melchizedek was not only a priest [He was priest of God Most High]; but, he was a king – King of Salem.
 - Many, if not most, conservative Old Testament scholars believe that the city of Salem [coming from *shalom*, meaning “peace”] is none other than Jerusalem. It is important to note as well that there is no coincidence here that Jesus will also be referred to as the Prince of Peace in Isaiah 9...as the figure Melchizedek is the King of Peace.
 - In fact, Melchizedek is unique, as he **pre-dates the establishment of both the Jewish priesthood and monarchy.**
 - Further, though, consider that, in **Genesis 14:18-19**, when Melchizedek blessed Abram, he brought with him **bread and wine.**
 - Certainly in the immediate context, the bread and wine served as nourishment for Abraham. However, it also, no doubt, foreshadows the work of Jesus Christ, and elements He used in the institution of the Lord’s Supper.
 - Also, consider, in Verse 1, the role of the high priest was to offer (a) gifts; and (b) sacrifices.
 - As stated previously, in the Old Testament context, the gifts likely correspond to the meal offerings; whereas, the sacrifices likely correspond to the blood sacrifices required under the Old Testament sacrificial system.
 - Consequently, it is highly possible that the bread and wine offered by Melchizedek foreshadow the meal offering [bread] and blood sacrifices [wine] required from the high priest to God on behalf of the people [not to mention the significance with respect to the Lord’s Supper].
- Secondly, given the author of Hebrews’ reference to **both Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4**, another truth emerges: **Jesus is BOTH the Davidic King and the Melchizedekian High Priest.**
 - Some Christians may wonder: Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament as the Davidic King, because he was from the line of Judah; yet, how could he fulfill the role of the Aaronic High Priest if he was not from the line of Levi [which He was not]?
 - The answer lies in these passages. Jesus is the Davidic Messiah King, and he had to come from the line of Judah as the Davidic King, because the Scriptures explicitly state this. However, he fulfilled the function and office of High Priest without being a direct descendent of Aaron.

- This is biblically consistent because nowhere does the Bible assert that the Messiah-High Priest was to descend biologically from Aaron. Further, the **order** of the high priesthood of Jesus Christ places Him in a unique category – for He is of the order of Melchizedek.
 - And, consider the order of Melchizedek – for it is the oldest legitimate priestly order mentioned in the Bible, pre-dating its reference in **Psalm 110:4** by 1,000 years.
- Yet, the final unique aspect of Christ’s priesthood, with respect to Melchizedek, is that it is **eternal**. The high priesthood of Aaron was temporal, pointing to Christ. Yet, the priesthood of Christ is eternal – with no end.

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- Last week we commemorated **Resurrection Sunday**, examining the implications of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet, there was one of the implications that we did not examine – the high priestly, mediatorial work Jesus Christ on our behalf.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ is exalted and enthroned, but He is also interceding. At this very moment, Christ is interceding on our behalf before the Father.
- The reason this is possible is because of the Bodily Resurrection. When Christ was raised from the dead, Christ did not abandon His human nature. His divine and human natures remained, and remained today, joined. Yet, when He was raised from the dead, He remained fully human – albeit glorified.
- Consequently, Jesus Christ, our great high priest, intercedes for us before the Father...as a man. He is like us, and we will be like Him. Consequently, He knows us, understands us, and works on our behalf.

From this, the words of the Apostle Paul become clear: “⁵For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all...”
1 Timothy 2:5-6a