

**International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
October 16, 2016**

**Lesson Text: Hebrews 4:14-5:10
Lesson Title: The Great High Priest**

Introduction

The directions for religious life in Israel were given by God through Moses, but Aaron was appointed to carry them out (Exodus 28:1). The tribes of Israel greatly respected Aaron and the priesthood established by God. Although God bestowed Aaron and his sons with privilege, position, and prominence, he and his sons were imperfect and subject to sin and death, like any other man in Israel.

What God accomplished through Aaron and the priesthood was only a part of what Jesus would do perfectly and completely. Christ's priesthood is superior. He is the perfect and eternal High Priest whose sacrifice and ministry remain. Aaron and his sons served God's purpose, but Christ is more excellent than Aaron. It is Christ's priestly ministry we study in Hebrews 4:14-5:10.

Christ, Our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Jesus' high priestly ministry is one of the topics discussed at great length in the Epistle to the Hebrews. As High Priest, Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. But His high priestly work did not end there. He continues to be our High Priest or Mediator in heaven, representing us to God. That means when a child of God wants to talk to God, he does not need another human being to intercede to God for him. Instead, the child of God has personal access to God the Father through Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5).

Verse 14

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.”

After Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, He ascended back to His original home in heaven. Today, Jesus is seated at the right hand of His Father interceding on our behalf (Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2). All who are saved by grace have a great high priest interceding for us in heaven.

“Seeing then” means “now that we know.” Now that we know “we have a great high priest” is one of the greatest truths in the Christian faith. The Hebrew author believes knowing “we have a great high priest” is a great anchor of hope for all believers.

In the Old Testament, the ministry of the “high priest” was significant to the Hebrew. He ministered in the presence of God on behalf of the people. When the “high priest” went into the holy of holies he “passed” from the sight of the people and only stayed long enough to make atonement for sin. After the work of atonement was complete, he showed himself to the people. For the believer today, our “great high priest,” Jesus Christ, has “passed into the heavens.” Jesus is now in God’s presence and remains there praying for us.

“Jesus the Son of God” is the “great high priest” to whom the Hebrew author is referring. The exact phrase, “Jesus the Son of God,” occurs only here in the New Testament. It combines our Lord’s earthly name with His divine title and thus underscores the fact that both *His human nature* and *His divine nature* were necessary if He was to be our High Priest.

As a result of having “a great high priest” such as Jesus, we are commanded to “hold fast our profession.” “Hold fast” means “to use strength, seize or maintain.” The “profession” we hold too is defined in Hebrews 3:1, “*Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.*”

Verse 15

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched...” is different in relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. While the Old Testament priest may have performed his duties in strict obedience to God, there was no possible way he could have understood or been in touch with the reality of the people’s needs. But now, because of the Cross, “we have” a “high priest” who is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”

“Touched” means “to feel sympathy with.” Jesus sympathizes with His children and He knows how to suffer with us. Jesus does not pretend to know, nor does he try to imagine what we are facing. He literally sympathizes with us and knows the reality of our needs.

“Infirmities” refer to our feebleness, our weaknesses, sickness, and disease. Whatever you are going through or facing as God’s child, Jesus knows. He knows the reality of what you are facing and what you are feeling.

Verse 16

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

While “Let us” in verse 14 is a *command*, “Let us” in verse 16 is an *invitation*. The Hebrew author is giving the young Jewish believers an invitation to “come boldly” or draw near to the presence of God. Old Testament saints never enjoyed that privilege. The *permission* is “let.” The *people* are “us.” The *prescribed way* is “boldly.”

“Boldly” means “free to speak, no hesitancy on the part of the one coming.” The word “boldly” used here is the same word as “*softly*” in Ruth 3:1-7. In Ruth, “*softly*” refers to her going in and laying at Boaz’s feet. She had a right to be there and that caused her to have the right approach to being there. Believers do not presumptuously “charge the throne of grace” or go into God’s presence demanding our rights. Believers approach confidently, yet humbly into God’s presence through Jesus Christ our great high priest.

The “throne” is where God’s administrative work takes place. But this “throne” is a “throne of grace,” not judgment. At God’s “throne of grace” there is “mercy” to be “obtained.” The word “obtained” means “to be gotten hold of.” “Mercy” of course is God’s tender compassion. “Mercy” is something we do not deserve but God freely gives it to us. “Grace” is God’s unmerited favor. “Grace” is given to “help.”

The word “help” means “aid.” It is a picture of someone running to the aid of another who is crying out for assistance. The same word “*helps*” is used by Luke in his description of the storm tossed ship in Acts 27:17. This procedure of passing ropes under the ship to hold it together is known as frapping, (*frap is a nautical term that means to draw tight, to lash down or together*). So in the midst of the storm the sailors wrapped cables around the ship’s hull and winched them tight. Thus supported, the ship would be better able to withstand the severe pounding of wind and sea. That is the same kind of “help” available to Christians when we come to the “throne of grace.”

The “time of need” mentioned here could be anything or anytime in life. When you have a personal “time of need” in your life it really does not matter what “time” it is for anyone else. Our great high priest is there to “help.”

Christ, Superior to Aaron (Hebrews 5:1-10)

From Hebrews 4:14-16, the author reminded us to hold fast our profession of faith and draw near to the throne of grace. The reason that is possible is because Jesus Christ is our great high priest. In Hebrews 5, the author continues to magnify our great high priest by giving us more information concerning His superiority to Aaron.

Verse 1-3

“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: 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. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.”

What we have in the first three verses of Hebrews 5 is a reflection on the purpose of the high priest applied to Christ.

First, the words “for every high priest taken from among men” means the high priest did not choose himself. He was chosen by God. The author wants us to know that it is God who has chosen Christ to be our high priest. Aaron did not choose himself to be the high priest. He was God choice. The same is true of our great high priest, Christ. He was chosen by God.

Second, “taken from among men” emphasizes the fact the high priest must be fully human. In order to function as a high priest and represent man before God, the priest must be human. The fact Jesus Christ was born of a virgin and came into this world to live in human flesh was no accident. It was essential for Christ to be our Mediator.

Third, “ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” describes the functions of the high priest. The high priest, on a yearly basis, especially the Day of Atonement, went into the holy of holies and offered sacrifices on behalf of the people’s sins. By stating this the author wants the people to think on the priest’s duties in the Old Testament and connect his ministry with Christ’s work on the cross.

Fourth, “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” is a beautiful description of how Christ is able to sympathize with us because he understands our humanity and our weakness. As a fellow human being “compassed with infirmity,” the high priest could identify with the people he was called to serve.

Fifth, the words “And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins” describes the high priest offering sacrifices. The sacrifices he offered were intended to cover his own sins as well as the people. The Hebrew author wants us to recognize the Old Testament high priest, the descendant of Aaron, knew what it meant to sin and to need forgiveness.

Now we know as high priest, Jesus’ relationship to God sets Him apart from all previous high priests. Jesus never sacrificed for His own sins because despite all He went through, He had no sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Verse 4

“And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.”

“No man taketh this honour unto himself” is an expansion of verse 1 emphasizing God chooses the priest. It means a man just did not decide he wanted to become a high priest. Only “he that is called of God, as was Aaron,” could be high priest. In order to be a high priest in the Old Testament, a man had to be from the tribe of Levi and a member of “Aaron’s” family. The Lord Jesus was not of the tribe of Levi nor was he a member of “Aaron’s” family. He was born into the tribe of Judah. So, how can Jesus Christ be a rightful high priest? He may sympathize with us as humans and have compassion for us in our sins and troubles, but is He a true high priest? The answer is yes. Verse 5 explains further.

Verse 5

“So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.”

In spite of the fact Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi, nor was he a descendant of Aaron, He was nevertheless chosen by God to be high priest. Christ did not “glorify himself to be made an high priest.” Christ did not take it upon himself to appoint himself to that position. Christ was appointed the task of being high priest by God the Father.

“He that said unto him” is God the Father speaking to God the Son, Jesus Christ. “Thou art my son, to day have I begotten thee” is God the Father saying, “Jesus Christ is my Son, and I can have no high priest but my Son.” “To day have I begotten thee” is a quote from Psalm 2:7. It refers to the day or time when Christ began his redemptive work here upon the earth.

Verse 6

“As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

“As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” is taken from Psalm 110:4. Commenting on this verse, Doctor John Phillips writes, “The writer now shows his hand and reminds his Jewish readers of something they had long forgotten: that there was a priesthood that far exceeded that of Aaron and that was in existence long centuries before Aaron ever was born, the priesthood of Melchizedek. God chose Melchizedek to

be a priest long before He chose Aaron. In fact, the first mention of the priest in the Bible relates to the priesthood of Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-21). This sudden mention of Melchizedek throws a shaft of light into the whole argument of the letter. It would become immediately apparent to the intelligent Hebrew where the argument was leading. At this point, however, the writer does little more than inject the name, but he comes back to it later and builds mightily upon it in Hebrews 7. So then, Christ was exalted to be a priest as Melchizedek was exalted to be a priest.” (*John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring Hebrews: An Expository Commentary.*)

Verse 7-8

“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;”

While Jesus lived upon earth “in the days of his flesh,” he actually did priestly work. First, “he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death.” Jesus prayed to God the Father on our behalf long before he died and rose again. In John 17, Jesus prayed for all believers, then and now. But Jesus’ “prayers, supplications, strong crying and tears” give us a deeper glimpse into our Lord’s devotional life and also remind us of the intense suffering of the cross.

The Bible tells us Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, over the city of Jerusalem, and in the Garden of Gethsemane. But the reference here to the “strong crying and tears” seems to refer to that night of prayer and preparation for the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was there our Lord agonized until his sweat became as great drops of blood (Luke 22:44).

Jesus prayed to the One who was “able to save him from death.” When Christ prayed to be saved “from death” it means He prayed to be saved “out of death.” He did not pray for the Father to rescue Him from the cross, but to raise Him from the tomb. His prayer was answered. Certainly Christ was willing and ready to face the cross and to drink of the cup God had poured for Him (John 12:23-34).

“Was heard in that he feared” is one of the most sacred arrangement of words in the Bible. The word “feared” means “caution, reverence.” When God hears our prayers, he hears because of Christ and His grace unto us. But when God hears His Son, He hears because His Son deserves to be heard! That is what makes the intercessory work of Christ so powerful. When Christ comes to the Father it is different from when we come to the Father. Jesus, through His person and His passion on the cross is worthy to be heard. He has earned the right to be heard by the Father through His obedience and righteousness. You

and I could never be heard unless we go to the Father through the One who deserves to be heard, Jesus!

We are also told Jesus “learned obedience by the things which he suffered.” That stresses to us how Jesus is able to sympathize with us, even though He is sinless. Even though He cannot be tempted from within because there is no part of His being that can be touched by Satan; nevertheless He is able to sympathize with our weakness because of His suffering.

Verse 9-10

“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.”

“And being made perfect” does not suggest there was a time when Jesus was not perfect. Jesus was always morally perfect. The words mean His perfections were made visible while he lived here upon the earth. To all who acknowledge that truth “he became the author of eternal salvation.” Meaning Jesus brought salvation into being. He is the cause of salvation.

“Salvation” in Christ is “eternal.” It was possible some of the Hebrews to whom this epistle was written were of the opinion one could lose salvation. The book of Hebrews does not teach a truly saved person can lose his salvation. Salvation, once received, is “eternal.”

“Called” in verse 10 is a different word than “called” of verse 4. “Called” in verse 4 means “ordained or appointed.” “Called” in verse 10 means “to address by name or greeting.” Jesus was “called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.” That means after Jesus completed the work of eternal salvation, died, was buried, and rose again, God the Father greeted, and saluted the Son, welcoming him back to the right hand of the Father.

The Hebrew author stresses again how Christ is “an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.” “At this second mention of the name Melchizedek, all within a few sentences, the intelligent Hebrew reader would begin to pace the floor with a thousand thoughts racing through his mind. Aaron! Melchizedek! A ritual priest! A royal priest! A priest installed by the law of Moses! A priest installed before Moses was born! So then, Christ is not only a real priest, He is a rightful priest. He has been chosen as priest.” (*John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring Hebrews: An Expository Commentary.*)

Conclusion

Under the Law in the Old Testament, Israelites were unable to go before God's throne. They obtained access through Aaron and the priesthood established by God. Only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, could the high priest enter into God's presence. Even then, he entered with fear and trembling.

Because of Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, Christian believers, Jews and Gentiles, have access to God's throne of grace. We may come whenever we have a need and are guaranteed help from our Great High Priest.

Knowing the glorious truth of our Great High Priest is one thing. Taking advantage of it is another. As you pray today, thank the Father for our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Amen.