Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews - Lesson 6

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Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews

CHRIST IS “BETTER THAN” AARON

Hebrews 5:1—10:18

LESSON VI

THE QUALIFICATIONS AND DUTIES OF A PRIEST
FULFILLED IN CHRIST

Hebrews 5:1-10

We begin today the study of the central theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is called, in the first verse of chapter eight, “the chief point” of the book. In the words of inspiration it is this: “We have such a high priest” as the One described in the preceding portion of the epistle. Having proved, in chapters one to four inclusive, that Christ is “better than” the prophets, “better than” the angels, “better than” Moses, and “better than” Joshua, the Holy Spirit now takes up the main argument, showing that the Lord Jesus Christ is “better than” Aaron, Israel’s first high priest. Aaron was the brother of Moses; and in his office as priest he represented the very best that Judaism could offer. He witnessed the miracles of God in Egypt, went with Moses and the children of Israel through the Red Sea, saw the Shekinah Glory, and ministered first in the beautiful tabernacle; yet he sinned, for he was a child of Adam. The Lord Jesus, of whom Aaron in his priesthood was only a type, always was and ever shall be better by far than Aaron or any of the Levitical priests. That is the heart of the message of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

We have called the topic of this main argument of Hebrews, “Christ Is ‘Better Than’ Aaron.” We might well call it, “The Person and Work of Christ, Our Great High Priest.” Or we might call it, “The Superiority of Christ’s Priesthood over That of the Levitical Order.” In other words, it seems to us that the Holy Spirit has selected Aaron as the representative of the Levitical priesthood, because he was the first and in a sense the greatest of Israel’s human priests. In proving that Christ is “better than” Aaron, He proves also that He is superior to all of Aaron’s lineal descendants, who alone could serve as Israel’s earthly priests. As always, the argument is forceful, clear, and conclusive.
Before we begin to consider, in some detail, the first portion of this "chief point" of the epistle, let us read carefully, repeatedly, and prayerfully all of 5:1—10:18. Because of its length, we shall have to break it up into several lessons; but let us not fail to see the message as a whole before we begin to analyze its parts. As we get this bird's-eye-view of this message, we see that it is divided into two sections: (1) Christ is "better than" Aaron in his order; that is, in His Person; and (2) He is "better than" Aaron in His ministry. Chapters 5-7 deal with His Person; chapters 8:1—10:18, with His work.

Again breaking up chapters five, six, and seven into their logical sub-divisions, we find a marked parenthesis in 5:11—6:20. In 5:1-10, which is our lesson for today, we see set forth the qualifications and duties of a priest in Israel, perfectly fulfilled in Christ—"a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," not after the order or Aaron. The very mention of the name of Melchizedek seems to remind the inspired apostle that the Hebrews, to whom he was writing, were mere "babes in Christ," unable to discern the deep and profound meaning of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, he pauses for another of the many, searching parentheses to be found in the epistle. That parenthesis will be the content of our next lesson. Then in chapter seven the Holy Spirit takes up once more the discussion of the Melchizedek priesthood, a beautiful type of the unchangeable, all-powerful priesthood of our Lord Jesus. (In these studies we shall use the Hebrew spelling of "Melchizedek," used also in the Revised Version of the New Testament.)

In Heb. 8:1—10:18 we read that Christ's priestly work is "better than" that of Aaron because He serves in a better tabernacle, under a better covenant, rendering a better service, having offered "once for all" a better sacrifice, even His own precious blood! These pages of God's inspired Word hold for us some of the most profound and soul-satisfying truths of all the sacred Scriptures!

Without taking time for a review of our former lessons, let us recall, in simple outline, the high points of the epistle. This seems essential to the understanding of the message of the very heart of this book.

CHRISTIANITY IS "BETTER THAN" JUDAISM AS SEEN IN ITS FOUNDER, CHRIST

I. Introduction, Heb. 1-4:
1. The eternal Son of God, chapter 1.
   (1) "Better than" the prophets.
   (2) "Better than" the angels.
2. The sinless Son of Man, chapter 2.
   "Better than" the angels.
   As the God-Man —
   Our Great High Priest
3. The Rest of God—A parenthesis, chapters 3 and 4.
   Christ — "better than" Moses and Joshua.

II. The "Chief Point"—Christ Is "Better Than" Aaron, 5:1—10:18:
1. In His order (or Person), chapters 5, 6, 7.
   (1) The qualifications and duties of a priest fulfilled in Christ, 5:1-10.
   (2) A parenthesis on arrested growth in spiritual things, 5:11-6:20.
   (3) The Melchizedek priesthood "better than" the Aaronic priesthood, 7.
2. In His ministry, chapters 8:1—10:18.
   (1) In a better tabernacle, 8:1-5.
   (2) Under a better covenant, 8:6-13.
   (3) Rendering a better service, 9:1-12.
   (4) Having offered a better sacrifice, 9:13—10:18.


We have already called attention to the fact that the climax of chapters one and two is the first reference in the epistle to the High Priestly work of Christ; and that the climax of chapters three and four is the second reference to this "chief point" of the epistle. In our last lesson we considered briefly those wonderful verses which close chapter four, and tell us about our Heavenly Priest. And the first word of chapter five links what is to follow with that which has gone before; it is the word "for." Here again we are reminded that, in the original, our Bible was not divided into chapters and verses. Therefore, let us enter upon our study of the portion of chapter five, which is our lesson for today, by reading once more those wonderful words which immediately precede it, as recorded in 4:14-16:

"Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we
are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help in time of need."

"For every high priest . . .," the inspired record continues; and from here on, chapter five has to do with the qualifications and duties of a priest in Israel, perfectly and forever fulfilled in Christ. First we read of:

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A PRIEST

It is important that we bear in mind the fact that the first four verses of chapter five describe the qualifications and duties of the earthly priest in Israel; they do not describe Christ. Then verses 5-10 show how our Lord meets all the requirements and fulfills all the duties, set forth in shadow and type in the Levitical priesthood. And once again we find here another of the striking contrasts of the book—our Lord Jesus is so much superior to the very best that Judaism could offer!

Two qualifications had to be met by Israel's human priests: (1) They had to be "taken from among men" (5:1); and (2) they had to be "called of God, as was Aaron" (5:4). Let us examine the meaning of these statements.

1. "Taken from among Men." A priest in Israel had to be a man. He could not be an angel. Not even Gabriel or Michael could meet the requirement of a priest, for they are spirit-beings. Someone who represented humanity had to be chosen, from among the people, to plead man's cause in the court of heaven.

Deep down in man's innermost soul there has always been a yearning for a priest, a mediator, a go-between, one to intercede for him before a holy God. In Eden, before sin entered to separate man from God, there was no such need; but sin broke man's beautiful fellowship with Jehovah; and only a priest could restore that fellowship. That is why Job was a priest in his own household, offering sacrifices for the sins of his sons, as well as for himself. That is why Noah and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob offered sacrifices upon God's altar—long before the Levitical priesthood was instituted, long before Moses and Aaron were born into the world. God had taught Adam and Eve and Abel that "without shedding of blood is no remission" of sin (cf. Heb. 9:22). And the offering of sacrifices is the work of a priest.

We have seen, in all our Bible study, that the priest in Israel was a man from Aaron's family, of the tribe of Levi. As a man, he knew man's weakness and frailty, and sin. As a man, he represented man's cause to God. But because he was a son of Adam, he was a sinner; therefore, he could never be a perfect priest; therefore, he had to offer sacrifices "first for his own sins, and then for the people's" (Heb. 7:27). Only in type could he foreshadow the coming of Christ, Israel's Great High Priest and the only Mediator "between God and men."

Because the priest in Israel had to be "taken from among men," our Lord Jesus "was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This, we recall, is the message of the second chapter of Hebrews. In order to offer one perfect sacrifice for sin forever, Christ Jesus was made for a little time "lower than the angels for the suffering of death." In order to die, He had to become a Man; for as God, He could not die. God is eternal; Jesus is God; but as the "Man Christ Jesus," He is both human and divine. He is both God and Man. Thus He fulfilled, in His incarnation, the first qualification of a priest, as set forth in the fifth chapter of Hebrews. He was "taken from among men."

2. "Called of God."

"And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" (Heb. 5:4).

There were twelve tribes in Israel, but the priests came only from the tribe of Levi. Moreover, not every Levite could be a priest. There were three families of the Levites, named after the three sons of Levi, a son of Jacob: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. Therefore the three families of Levites were called: Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites. Their tents were pitched on three sides of the tabernacle in the wilderness, nearer to the sanctuary than were the tents of the other tribes. Yet by far the most of these Levites could not minister in the priesthood. Their duties were to take down and set up the tabernacle and its furnishings; they were responsible for these things while Israel was on the march. The opening chapters of Numbers tell us all this. Later they had duties in the temple worship. They were, indeed, blessed of God, given the special privilege of caring
for the holy things. When they entered the land of Canaan under Joshua, they were given forty-eight cities, six of which were the cities of refuge. They were to live from the tithes and offerings of God's people. They were specially blessed. Yet they could not they dared not intrude into the priests' office! Only Aaron and his sons; only Aaron and his children's children, could be priests. They were "called of God" to this sacred office!

Once, during Israel's wandering in the wilderness, the sons of Korah, of the family of Kohath, of the tribe of Levi, "gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron." With them in this rebellion against God were some sons of Reuben and "two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly" of the children of Israel, "famous in the congregation, men of renown." Their sin was that they, too, wanted to minister as priests; they accused Moses and Aaron of taking too much upon themselves in this sacred office. Read the sixteenth chapter of Numbers for the whole story; read it to see how Moses warned them, asking, "Seek ye the priesthood also?" (Verse 10). Read it to see how God opened the earth to swallow up the rebels of the family of Korah. Read it to see how "there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men" - rebels "that offered incense." Then it was that God told Moses to take twelve almond rods, one for each tribe; to write the name of one of the tribes on each rod; and to write Aaron's name on the rod for the tribe of Levi. Then God said that these twelve rods were to be placed before "the testimony"; that is, the ten commandments in the Holy of Holies; and that on the morrow the rod of His chosen priest should bear buds and bloom blossoms and yield almonds. We know the story - how it was Aaron's rod that budded and blossomed and yielded almonds over-night, establishing forever the fact that only Aaron and his sons were allowed by Jehovah to minister as priests before the Lord. As if to help Israel to remember this lesson, God told Moses to put Aaron's rod that budded in the ark of the covenant, together with the ten commandments and the golden pot of manna. That is how sacred the office of the priest was in the sight of our holy God! Why? Because it foreshadowed the coming into the world of our great High Priest, even Jesus, the Son of God.

Again, in the days of Saul's rebellion against Jehovah, he intruded into the priest's office; and that was one of the sins which cost him his kingdom. Read the story in the thirteenth chapter of I Samuel.

Yes; the priest in Israel had to be "called of God, as was Aaron." And every Hebrew to whom Paul was writing well knew this established fact. Because he was a sinner, no mere man, except a rebel, dared presume to take this office upon himself. But both the God-appointed priest and the people he served knew that their holy God would accept the service ordained by Him and committed unto His chosen priest, who was a type of the promised Heavenly Priest, even Jesus.

Christ fulfilled this requirement of the priest in Israel, even as the often-repeated quotation from Psalm 110:4 states,

"Thou art a priest for ever ... called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:6, 10).

These words run like a refrain throughout this portion of the epistle. Of their significance, we shall have more to say later in our studies; but just here we would note the fact that, as a Man, our Lord was "called" by the Father to be Israel's Great High Priest and the "Mediator between God and men" Jew and Gentile. Melchizedek lived in the days of Abraham, 2,000 B.C.; and Psalm 110 was written by David a thousand years before Christ; yet all those hundreds of years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the Holy Spirit recorded the fourteenth chapter of Genesis and Psalm 110:4, in order that we might know that, from all eternity, the Father "called" the Son of God to become a "faithful and merciful high priest" in things pertaining to God. As a Man, the Lord Jesus did not seek the priesthood; as a Man, He was "called of God," the Father, to that sacred office! Remembering that verses 1-4 of our lesson for today describe the human priest in Israel, and not our Lord in His priestly character, we only mention in passing just here His qualifications as a Priest; those qualifications are discussed in verses 5-10. But before we leave the opening verses of this chapter, we would see also that they set forth the duties of a human priest, as well as his qualifications.
The Duties of a Priest

The duties of Aaron and his sons in their priestly office, detailed and exacting as they were, may be summarized in a three-fold way; for it was the function of a priest in Israel: (1) To remove the barrier of sin by sacrifice; (2) to "bear gently with the ignorant and erring," encouraging the sinner to "draw near" to God on the basis of the sacrifice of the promised Redeemer; and (3) to pray for the people. With this three-fold function in mind, let us read again verses 1-3 of our chapter:

"For every high priest, being taken from among men, is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can bear gently with the ignorant and erring, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity; and by reason thereof is bound, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins" (R. V.).

The words of the text here plainly limit this description to the earthly priest, of Aaron's family; for it could never be written of our Lord that He was "compassed with infirmity," in the sense that He needed to "offer for sins" of His own. He "knew no sin," the Scripture teaches from Genesis to Revelation! From the many passages which prove the sinless character of our Lord, we quote here only two, one from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, and one from this Epistle to the Hebrews:

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21).

"... who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people's..." (Heb. 7:27).

And now let us look briefly at each of these three duties of an earthly priest in Israel; for in so doing we shall get a clearer picture of the ministry of our Great High Priest, whose coming into the world these earthly priests foreshadowed.

1. To Remove the Barrier of Sin by Sacrifice, the priest in Israel was "ordained for men in things pertaining to God"; that is, in order that he might "offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb. 5-1).

Every careful student of the Law of Moses, recorded in the first five books of the Old Testament, knows that day after day, century after century, the guilty sinner in Israel brought his animal sacrifice to the priest before the brazen altar in the outer court of the Jewish tabernacle; or later, to the temple in Jerusalem. He could present only a clean animal—a calf, a goat, a lamb, a turtle-dove, or a young pigeon—for these animal sacrifices pointed to the sinless Lamb of God. Placing his hand upon the head of the victim, he confessed his sins, figuratively laying his sins upon the promised Messiah and Saviour of the world. Then the animal was slain, and the priest sprinkled the blood upon the sacred vessels, or poured it out at the brazen altar. Morning and evening, throughout the long centuries, for some fifteen hundred years, the fire upon the brazen altar of sacrifice was never to go out. (See Lev. 6:13.) That fire did go out when idolatrous Israel was taken away into captivity, and her temple destroyed; but such was not God's plan for His ancient people, and the faithful remnant who returned from Babylon to Jerusalem restored the temple worship with its daily sacrifice for sin.

Briefly this is the picture of the work of the priest in removing the barrier of sin by sacrifice. God had made man in His own image, that He might have fellowship with His creatures. But sin broke that fellowship; and only on the basis of the death of the sinless Son of God could that fellowship be restored. Indeed, this is the lesson God taught in the Garden of Eden, long before the Law of Moses was given upon Mount Sinai. That is why God was pleased with Abel's "more excellent sacrifice," that of a little lamb; whereas Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground was not acceptable to a holy God. It represented the works of his own hands; it did not manifest faith in the promised Redeemer, whose blood alone, poured out at Calvary's altar, could take away the sinner's guilt. The scarlet thread of sacrifice runs throughout all the Old Testament; for, from the beginning, God taught His sinful creatures that "it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11); "and without shedding of blood is no remission" of sin (Heb. 9:22).

Thus one of the duties of the priest was to foreshadow
the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). But let us ever remember that, before he could offer for the sins of others, the earthly priest had to offer a sacrifice first for his own sins. Both the priest and the people he served were saved “on a credit,” as it were; for by their acts of faith they showed their need of a Saviour to come and their trust in God’s promise of His atoning work on the altar of Calvary’s Cross.

It hardly need be repeated here that our Lord fulfilled this duty of a priest. That is why He came into the world—to die for guilty sinners! That is the “chief point” of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as it is the heart of the message of the entire Word of God. Concerning it, this epistle has very much to say, as we shall find in our continued study. The High Priestly work of our Lord began at His cross, when He offered Himself “once for all” as the Substitute for sinners, pouring out His precious blood as an atonement for our souls.

The “gifts” referred to in Heb. 5:1 refer to the tithes and offerings of God’s people. From these the priests and the Levites had their support; and repeatedly God reminded His people not to forget their obligation to these ministers on behalf of the spiritual needs of Israel, even as in New Testament times “the labourer is worthy of his hire,” and Christian people are obligated before God to supply the material needs of His ministers and missionaries.

2. To “Bear Gently with the Ignorant and Erring,” the priest in Israel was called of God. The earthly priest was ever conscious of his own “infirmity”; therefore, he could “have compassion” on his erring brothers. Aaron’s sin of leading Israel in the worship of a golden calf must have been brought before his mind’s eye time and again as he heard the confession of sin on the part of others. How ashamed of his weakness and frailty he must have been! And so soon after God’s mighty miracles in Egypt and through the Red Sea! He would not dare be too harsh with others when they fell into Satan’s snares! God called him to “have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way,” the erring children of God.

What a picture of our blessed Lord! There was no sin in Him; but because He became a Man, He “suffered being tempted”; and therefore, He can “deal gently”—how gently! He is the compassionate, sympathetic Heavenly Priest! Because He wept, He knows how to have compassion upon us when we weep. Because He was the “Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” He knows how to heal our wounds. “He knows; He loves; He cares!” That is why He came into the world—to become our Great High Priest, not only in His death on the cross, “once for all,” but also in His present ministry before the “throne of grace,” as He deals gently with us in our ignorance and in our erring ways.

3. To Pray for the People, the priest in Israel was called of God. While this duty of a priest is not mentioned in particular in the opening verses of chapter five, yet it is given prominence in the epistle; and every Hebrew well knew of this function of the priest. Before “the way into the holiest” was opened by the rent veil of the temple, at the death of the Lord Jesus, only the priest could go into the Holy Place to pray for the people. In our studies of the Jewish tabernacle, we saw that there were two rooms in that sanctuary: The Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. We saw that only Aaron and his sons could enter the Holy Place, wherein were the golden candlestick, the golden-covered table of shewbread, and the golden-covered altar of incense. Before that altar the priests stood to pray for the children of Israel. Many centuries later, it was before the golden altar in the Holy Place of the temple in Jerusalem that Zacharias stood “to burn incense,” even as the “whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense” (Luke 1:9, 10). It was there, before the golden altar, that he stood as he saw the Angel Gabriel, “standing on the right side of the altar of incense.” It was there that Gabriel told Zacharias that he and Elizabeth were to become the parents of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Israel’s King.

In our studies of the Jewish tabernacle, we saw also that only Israel’s high priest could enter the Holy of Holies. Moreover, he could enter that Most Holy Place only once a year, on the great Day of Atonement. Even as He went into the presence of God, who appeared to him in the Shekinah Glory, Israel’s high priest took with him the censer and sprinkled the blood, confessing Israel’s sins, and interceding for
his people. The Holy of Holies was a picture of heaven, into which our Great High Priest has entered, to present His own shed blood as the one sufficient sacrifice for sin; and to pray for His blood-bought children—Jew and Gentile. There He is seated today, on the right hand of the Father, ever living “to make intercession” for all those who “come unto God by him” (Heb. 7:25).

My Christian friend, would you like to know the kind of prayer your Great High Priest is praying for you even now? Then read the seventeenth chapter of “The Gospel According to John.” Are you conscious of your frailty and weakness and sin? Are you troubled and burdened and perplexed? Then remember Heb. 7:25, which might well be called a brief summary of the epistle,

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

“To the uttermost” includes your every need! It includes your unsaved loved ones; it includes your financial burdens, your wayward boy or girl, your longing to win souls. Your Great High Priest “ever liveth” to pray for you. And His prayers “before the throne of grace” avail!

“Who Is Worthy?”

As we have read these first four verses of the fifth chapter of Hebrews, we have turned aside to show how the Lord Jesus fulfills every qualification and every duty of a priest in Israel. But now let us try to put ourselves in the place of the Hebrews, to whom the epistle was written. To them the Holy Spirit, in these verses, was merely stating the qualifications and duties of a human priest; He was preparing the ground for what follows. Where was the guilty Israelite to find one worthy to be a perfect priest? Aaron had failed; all had sinned; Zacharias did not believe the Angel Gabriel at first; and therefore was dumb until his child was born and taken to the temple in fulfillment of the Law of Moses. Where could God find a priest who could meet the human qualifications, yet be without sin; one having divine authority as the “called of God”? Where could the representative man be found, the God-Man?

Later, on the Isle of Patmos, John saw a heavenly vision, and wept much because he heard the angel ask, “Who is worthy?” “Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?” (Rev. 5:2.) For whom were they looking in heaven? For a representative Man, one to represent the human race before a holy God. Then John was told to look upon “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” who is the “Lamb” of God (Rev. 5:5, 6). As such, He is the God-Man, altogether “worthy” to be Israel’s Great High Priest and the Advocate of sinners of every race and tongue. To prove that He meets every qualification and fulfills every duty of a priest in Israel, the Holy Spirit wrote Heb. 5:5-10. Let us read on to see how much is pressed into a few words, as recorded in these six verses.

“The Man Christ Jesus”—“Called of God”

It is noteworthy that the order set forth in verses 1-4 is reversed in verses 5-10; that is, the Holy Spirit first writes of our Lord’s having been “called of God” before He proves His perfect humanity, in that He was “taken from among men.” Indeed, He was “called of God a priest forever” long before He “was made flesh.” We shall read verses 5 and 6 from the Revised Version:

“So Christ also glorified not himself to be made a high priest, but he that spake unto him, Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee; as he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever After the order of Melchizedek.”

This is the second time in this epistle that the Holy Spirit has quoted this passage from the second Psalm, telling us that, from all eternity, the Father said to the Son, “Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee.” And the quotation from Psalm 110:4 is written three times in the fifth and sixth chapters of Hebrews, while all of chapter seven enlarges upon the message it bears, telling us the Father’s words to the Son, from all eternity, concerning His call by the Father to be a Priest, “Thou art a priest for ever After the order of Melchizedek.”
Every devout Hebrew was familiar with these quotations from his own Old Testament. And now the Holy Spirit applied them to Christ, proving that He fulfilled the requirement of Jehovah that a priest had to be "called of God." The quotation from the second Psalm establishes the eternal deity of Christ, "the only begotten Son" of the Father; whereas the quotation from the one-hundred and tenth Psalm proves that, as a Man, He "glorified not himself to be made an high priest." Indeed, as a Man, He shrank from becoming the Sin-Bearer of the world, even as He prayed in Gethsemane, saying:

"Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt (Matt. 26:39).

This fact becomes all the more significant as we remember that His Priestly work began at the cross. As a Man, His holy soul shrank from becoming "sin for us," because He "knew no sin." As a Man, He "sweat as it were great drops of blood," knowing that on the cross He would have to be forsaken by His Father in heaven. As a Man, He did not seek the priesthood; He "glorified not himself to be made an high priest." As a Man, He was "called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:10).

Even in His humanity our Lord was eternal God. He was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. He thought His equality with the Father not a thing to be "grasped after" (Phil. 2:6); He knew that deity was ever His by right. Even when He laid aside His glory to become our Great High Priest, He did not lay aside His deity. If He had been less than God, He could not have been our sinless Priest! Godless men, many of whom stand in our pulpits today and rob our Lord of His deity, fail to see the eternal verity of Scripture—that none other than the sinless Son of God, the "Man Christ Jesus," is worthy to represent us before the court of heaven. They are like Eve, who grasped at equality with God; they deify man and humanize God. But Jesus, the eternal Son of God, the "only begotten Son" of the Father, did not need to "grasp after" deity; He always was and ever shall be equal with the Father and equal with the Holy Spirit.

And He to whom the Father said,

"Thou art my Son,
This day have I begotten thee,"

was also "called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek." The Father chose the Son to be our Priest. He looked down upon His virgin-born Son, and said of Him,

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Then the world crucified Him and covered Him with shame. But the Father reached down and took Him out of the grave, and set Him at His own right hand—to be our Priest! There He sits today, your Representative and mine, my Christian friend. And He will never lose a case in the court of heaven!

In our study of the first chapter of Hebrews we considered in some detail this quotation from the second Psalm, referring also to its place in the thirteenth chapter of Acts. We saw that, as "the only begotten Son" of the Father, He was born of the Virgin Mary; and we saw also that Paul quoted this second Psalm in connection with His resurrection from the dead. (See Acts 13:33-39.) We shall not repeat all of the discussion here. But let us bear in mind the fact that in His birth and in His resurrection our Lord is called the "only begotten Son" of God. In His birth He was born of the Holy Spirit; in His resurrection He was the "first-born" from the dead by the spirit of God (Heb. 1:6).

Now when did the Father say to the Son, "Thou art a priest for ever"? It was when He raised Him from the dead. As a Priest He died for sinners; and in His resurrection the Father declared, before men, angels, and demons,

"Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

Indeed, Heb. 5:10 might be translated, "Saluted of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek." In other words, our Lord's resurrection was essential to His priesthood; and as the risen Lord ascended into heaven, the Father "saluted" Him as our eternal Priest.

In our study of the first chapter of Hebrews we also looked back to the first verse of this Psalm 110. There we heard the Father saying to the Son,

"Sit thou at my right hand,
Until I make thine enemies thy footstool."
And we recalled that David said, “The Lord said unto my Lord” these wonderful words. Jehovah, the Father, said to the Lord Jesus, away back in the past eternity, the message of this Psalm. When Christ was upon earth, He asked the unbelieving Jews how David’s Lord could be David’s Son; and they would not answer Him, because they would not admit that Jesus of Nazareth was the eternal Son of God and Lord of lords. They knew He was David’s Son, because He could prove His genealogy, as a Man, from David’s line; but they denied His eternal deity. Yet the Scriptures remain unbroken! David’s Lord and Creator is David’s Son, the “Man Christ Jesus.”

And when did the Father say to the Son,

“Sit thou at my right hand,

Until I make thine enemies thy footstool”? It was when the Son of God “passed through the heavens” and sat down on the right hand of God, there to intercede for His own their Great High Priest. All heaven must have missed the Son of God for thirty-three and one-half years! And what a welcome home He must have received! It is but faintly suggested by this Psalm 110. As the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord, He had entered upon His ministry as Israel’s Great High Priest and as the only “Mediator between God and men.”

“A PRIEST FOREVER AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK”

The Melchizedek priesthood is explained in detail in chapter seven; whereas it is only mentioned twice in our lesson for today; therefore, we shall not go into this deep, yet wonderful study just here. It seems as though the Holy Spirit were about to enter upon a discussion of this profound theme, but turned aside for another long parenthesis, recorded in 5:11-6:20; then resumed the discussion in chapter seven. Why? Why the long parenthesis? Because some of the Hebrews addressed were mere “babes in Christ,” and could not grasp the deeper spiritual truths concerning the Person of the Lord Jesus, as typified by the Melchizedek priesthood. Others were not even born again, though convinced of the right of the Lord to His Messianic claim. And the long parenthesis is given to warn, to encourage, and to exhort.

Although we shall not enter fully upon the story of Melchizedek in our lesson for today; yet we shall mention briefly the purpose of the twice-quoted passage from Psalm 110:4, recorded in Heb. 5:1-10. Just as Melchizedek was greater than Aaron; so Christ, of whom Melchizedek was a type, is “better than” Aaron, Israel’s first and possibly her greatest earthly high priest. And if Christ is superior to Aaron, He is superior to all of Aaron’s sons, “better than” all the Levitical priesthood.

And who was Melchizedek? He is mentioned in only three places in the Bible: In the fourteenth chapter of Genesis; in Psalm 110:4; and in chapters five, six, and seven of Hebrews. Read the record in Genesis and in Hebrews seven, and you will find that he was a king and a priest with a very beautiful name, prophetic of our Lord’s; that he met Abraham as he was returning from the deliverance of his nephew, Lot; and that he blessed Abraham and received tithes from this father of the Hebrews. Therefore, Melchizedek was greater than Abraham; and, therefore, he was greater than Abraham’s descendants, including Aaron and all the Levitical priests. In brief, that is the story, as enlarged upon in the seventh chapter of Hebrews. To state it a bit differently, Christ is superior to Aaron in His Person, even as we have seen throughout all our studies. And, as we shall see in chapter seven, the Melchizedek priesthood is a type of the eternal, unchanging ministry of Christ, our Great High Priest; whereas Aaron and his sons died, and their priesthood was forever changing.

What does this mean to us? It means that our Lord Jesus never slumbers nor sleeps; it means that He never makes a mistake; it means that He “ever liveth to make intercession” for us, because we have believed in His one perfect sacrifice on Calvary’s Cross. It means that He “died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3, 4). According to what Scriptures? According to Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 and hundreds of other prophecies in the Hebrew Old Testament! It means that He is “alive for evermore,” and that He has the “keys of hades and of death” (Rev. 1:18). It means that the “Man Christ Jesus,” called of God, the Father, to be our Great High Priest, represents us before “the throne of
grace.” It means pardon from the penalty of sin, power over Satan and sin in this present life, and deliverance from the very presence of sin in the life to come. For our Great High Priest is the eternal God and the sinless Son of Man. He is able to save; and He loves us with an everlasting love.

**Some Proofs of Christ’s Humanity**

As if to prove that our Lord Jesus fulfilled the further qualification of a priest, in that He was “taken from among men,” the Holy Spirit dwells at length upon His perfect humanity in Heb. 5:7-9. As we read the passage, let us observe at least five proofs of His humanity: (1) His prayers; (2) His tears; (3) His trust; (4) His obedience; (5) His suffering. These are experiences of the “Man Christ Jesus.” As we read the words before us, we are treading upon holy ground; let us tread reverently; for here we are reminded of Gethsemane:

>“Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death (or ‘out of death’ in resurrection), and having been heard for his godly fear (i.e., reverential trust), though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all that obey him the author of eternal salvation” (R. V.).

Let us examine briefly each of these human experiences of our Lord during His life on earth:

1. **His Prayers.** Whole volumes have been written on the prayer-life of our Lord upon earth; and what depths of spiritual truth His prayers suggest! Before every important step He prayed. He was praying when He was baptized by the Holy Spirit, and again when He was transfigured. He prayed before He called the twelve disciples. He prayed at the tomb of Lazarus. He prayed before He went to the cross. He spent whole nights in prayer. He prayed often. Since He was the God-Man, why did He pray? Because, though the sinless Son of God, yet “even perfect humanity is dependent.” As a Man, He became subject unto His Father in heaven, obedient to His will. As a Man, He entered into our human experiences, in order that He might become our compassionate Saviour and Priest.

His prayers forever establish the fact that He was “taken from among men.”


2. **His Tears.** Three times it is written of the Lord that He wept—at the tomb of Lazarus, as He looked over rebellious Jerusalem, and in Gethsemane’s Garden. Out of sympathy for Mary and Martha, out of a heart filled with sorrow for the sin of those He loved, out of the agony of His own sinless soul as He shrank from becoming a curse for us on the tree out of the depths of His infinite love, the sinless Son of Man shed tears of sorrow and agony. We can not enter fully into the suffering of His sinless soul; for He was ever holy, and we are sinners saved by His grace. But this we know: “He suffered being tempted.” He entered into our every experience, “sin apart.” Because He wept, He can understand the tears that we shed. As a Man, He wept. What further proof do we need that His humanity is real?

3. **His Trust.** The words of our text are wonderful, as we realize their true meaning: Our Lord, as a Man, put His trust in His Father in heaven, who “was able to save him from death”; that is, “out of death,” in His resurrection from the grave. And He was heard “for his godly fear,” or reverential trust, or piety. These are human experiences. The thought expressed here does not mean that Christ trusted His Father to save Him from dying; but, rather, that He knew that the Father would raise Him from the dead. And in His reverent submission to His Father’s will, He proved His perfect humanity.

Although, from all eternity, He was Creator and Lord, yet, when He “was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” He willingly laid aside His glory; He willingly took upon Himself human flesh, with its suffering and sorrow and tears. Yet all the while, as a Man, He trusted His Father—for the work He came to do, for His resurrection from the grave,
and for His restoration to His "eternal glory" which He had with the Father "before the world was" (John 17:5). What an example in trust, to say nothing of the proof it gives of Christ's perfect humanity!

4. His Obedience. "Though he was a Son, yet learned (He) obedience by the things which he suffered." Again we are reminded of His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane; and that prayer takes us back to the fortieth Psalm, which is quoted in the tenth chapter of Hebrews concerning Christ's prayer to the Father,

> "Then said I, Lo, I am come; In the roll of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; Yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:7, 8).

Obedience is a human experience; and our Lord's obedience to His Father proves that His humanity was real. Always He did those things which were well pleasing to His Father in heaven. Never once was the perfect communion between Father and Son broken—not until the Son became our Sin-Bearer on Calvary. Then only did He utter the forsaken cry,

> "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"
> (Matt. 27:46; cf. Psalm 22:1).

The wonder of it is that He knew before He came into the world to die that He would bear that awful agony of sin and shame, that even His Father would have to turn His face away from Him when He became "sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21).

Now some will ask, "Why did the Lord Jesus have to 'learn obedience'?" Possibly a simple illustration may help us to understand why the sinless Son of Man "learned obedience by the things which he suffered." Let us suppose there lives in the city of Los Angeles a young man who is heir to his father's business and fortune. He has been reared very carefully, with servants to do the hard things for him. Whatever his father has told him to do around the house, he has cheerfully done; but he has not been asked to do anything difficult. Even in his father's office in the city the tasks given him did not seem hard.

But one day his father called him into his private office and said: "Son, I want you to learn this business from the ground up. I want you to be able to understand the actual problems faced by the workmen in the hard places. One hundred miles from here are great blast furnaces, where men stand by the fire night and day, stripped to the waist. I want you to go there and work with those men." The son knows about those blast furnaces, for he has seen the men at work there in the terrific heat, but never before has he had to perform the hard labor. He goes among these men, dressed as they are dressed. He shovels coal and toils day and night, in obedience to his father's will. "I want you to stay there a year, my son," the father had said. And he stayed a year, although the first day seemed quite enough to his tired muscles and heat-racked body. The environment was not pleasant—it was so different from his beautiful home! But he stayed on because he wanted to obey his father.

My friends, this but faintly illustrates what must have been the experience of Jesus, the Son of God, as He left His eternal home in heaven to come down to earth to suffer and die for sinners. He had been the One to receive the adoration of angels; He was the Creator; He was equal with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. But, in the eternal purpose of our Triune God, He had planned to take our place on the cross, to become our sympathetic Saviour and Great High Priest. There was only one way—the way of suffering, the way of the cross. Then He came out of "the ivory palaces." He met Satan, even as He was clothed in human flesh; He met this arch-enemy of man and defeated him forever. Never before had He experienced anything like that. Never before had He come face to face, in human form, with cursing and blasphemy and sin and shame and crime and cruelty. He had dwelt from all eternity in the bosom of the Father. But He "learned obedience by the things which he suffered," obedience to His Father's will. That is why He understands our weakness and frailty and sorrows.

> "We have not an high priest which can not be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, apart from sin" (Heb. 4:15, marginal rendering).
5. His Suffering.

“Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (I Peter 3:18).

Our Lord Jesus experienced hunger and weariness and loneliness. The Creator of the universe said on one occasion, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).

He suffered cruelty from those He loved. His sinless soul shrank from Satan and his wiles; for sin is hideous to our holy God. He suffered when His own disciples forsook Him and fled. He suffered when He “sweat as it were great drops of blood” in the garden. He suffered on the cross—not mainly from the physical pain, though that was unspeakable, but chiefly from the burden of guilt of all the world.

None ever suffered as our Lord Jesus suffered. And in His suffering He proved that He was perfect Man, as well as eternal God.

“THE AUTHOR OF ETERNAL SALVATION”

“And having been made perfect, he became unto all that obey him the author of eternal salvation.”

Christ was always morally perfect; that is, there was no sin in Him; but as a Man, He was “made perfect” through suffering, in that He became a perfect Saviour perfect in the sense that He experienced suffering, triumphing over Satan and sin and the grave. He had to suffer in order to die; and He had to die in order to be our Saviour. In order to die, He had to become a Man. That is the meaning of the passage before us. Only the God of love could do that for a world of rebellious sinners!

As our Priest, Christ died; as our Priest He ever lives to intercede for us; as our Priest He gives us eternal salvation—not salvation for ten days or ten years or ten millenniums, but eternal salvation! None other can do that, my friend. He is eternal; His priesthood is eternal; His salvation is eternal. Have you received it and thanked Him for His grace?

“The Obedience of Faith”

Now some will doubtless raise the question, “Does not

Heb. 5:9, in stating that Christ is “the author of eternal salvation unto all that obey him,” not mean that a person must work the works of obedience in order to obtain salvation?”

For our answer let us read Rom. 1:5; 16:25-27:

“. . . by whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name . . .”

“Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.”

Twice in these passages we read of “obedience to the faith” and “the obedience of faith.” Thus it is clear that the obedience which God requires is faith in His Word. When the sinner believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, he obeys God. That is the only thing God requires of a man outside of Christ—that he believe in His shed blood for a full atonement for his lost soul. Many would gladly give thousands of dollars to benevolences, thus seeking to earn their salvation; some would even give their lives for the assurance of eternity in heaven; yet their stubborn hearts will not accept God’s free gift of eternal life. No man can ever earn salvation. Christ is the Author of “eternal salvation” to those who “obey him” by trusting in His Word concerning His finished work on the cross.

After the sinner is saved by “the obedience of faith,” then only does God bid him begin to work for Him—to work at the Christian’s business of winning lost souls to Him. Then God may send His redeemed child to Africa or to China or to the uttermost part of the earth as a missionary. But before God puts a man to work, He Himself saves that man’s soul by the free gift of His grace. Accepting that gift is the “obedience of faith.”

My friend out of Christ, will you not receive this gift of God’s love by “the obedience of faith” in the Lord Jesus,
the only Mediator "between God and men"? His Great High Priestly work is sufficient for your soul's eternal salvation.

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

My Christian friend, to those who are still vainly seeking a human priest, let us go forth, bearing the message of Heb. 5:1-10. Man needs no earthly priest now; for Christ is the only Great High Priest, eternal, unchangeable, omnipotent, all loving. Every Old Testament priest was but a type of Him who has now come. Besides, the Roman Catholic priests, or the Greek Catholic priests, or the pagan priests of heathen religions today did not descend from Aaron's line; and, therefore, could not even meet the requirement of the Levitical priesthood! It is a hollow mockery and an empty formalism that sets any earthly priest apart from the laity, now that Christ has come to fulfill all the types and shadows of the Levitical priesthood.

Indeed, every Christian in this age of grace is called by the Holy Spirit a member of "a royal priesthood," in the sense that he offers up the incense of prayer to God and presents to Him the sacrifice of a yielded life. Of this beautiful truth the Epistle to the Hebrews has something to say in the closing chapter. (Cf. Roman 12:1; I Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6.) But never once does God's Word tell us that, as "a royal priesthood," we have anything to do with atonement for sin!

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Great High Priest who can represent man before a holy God. His sacrifice avails "once for all." His prayers are heard and answered on our behalf. His sympathetic dealings with us meet every need. At the "right hand of the Majesty on high" He is seated, there to represent us before the court of heaven. Shall we not trust Him utterly, love Him for His own blessed Person, and make known His love for a world in sin? How else shall the lost be led to the "throne of grace," that they, too, may know Him as the ever-living, all-powerful Great High Priest?