

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 5:1-10
Notes From Class on September 29, 2009
Last Revised on (October 1, 2009)

Good evening everyone!

Welcome to our continuing study of the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

Before we begin I would like to make sure that you have everything you will need.

Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

And if you are using an English translation of the Bible other than the English Standard Version ("ESV") then it may help you to have the handout which I have prepared, which has the ESV text of Hebrews, Chapters 1 through 6.

There is coffee and tea at the back.

Please get what you need and, then, let's get started....

Review

OK. Last time (two weeks ago) we finished reading Chapter **4**.

Detailed notes for all of that have been posted to the Google group site.

Nevertheless tonight, as usual, let's begin with a brief review.

Hebrews is a document written in Greek around the end of the First Century A.D

It is perhaps best thought of as the text of **sermon** intended to be heard by a particular church, one which the preacher knew.

This church apparently consisted of people who had confessed their faith in Christ long **before**.

One of the author's main objectives was to encourage them to **hold fast** to their confession of faith,

their confession of faith in **Jesus Christ**.

Please turn to the beginning of Hebrews and follow along with me as we quickly review the first four chapters.

Chapters 1 and 2 speak of the **unqualified supremacy** of Christ:

he is greater than everything in all of creation, even the angels.

At the end of Chapter 2 we are reminded that it is not the **angels** whom Christ helps, but **us**!

Chapter 2, Verses 17-18

Would someone please read the last two verses of Chapter 2 in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

Thank you. Now would someone please read these same two verses in English (ESV)

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

This idea of **Jesus** as our High **Priest** is almost unique to the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

It is first introduced **here**, at the end of **Chapter 2**.

It is then resumed in the last three verses of **Chapter 4** (the final part of our lesson from last time).

These thoughts are further developed in tonight's reading in **Chapter 5** and beyond, in **Chapters 7 and 8**.

But before we dig into the idea of Jesus as High Priest, let's quickly finish our review of what we have already read.

In basically all of **Chapter 3 and the first 11 verses of Chapter 4** (between the first two references to Jesus as our High Priest) the author turns our attention to **Moses** and to the **people** that he led out of slavery, but who did not believe God and, so, disobeyed Him, and failed to enter into the Promised Land.

That was a complicated passage that we spent quite a lot of time on in this class,

but the **moral** of that story is clearly summarized in Chapter 4, verse 11.

Chapter 4, Verse 11

Will somebody please read Hebrews, Chapter 4, Verse 11, in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku).

Thank you. Now will someone please read that same verse in English (ESV)

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

"Let us therefore." Verse 11 draws a moral lesson and an admonition from what has gone before: the sad example of the generation who followed Moses out of Egypt and died in the wilderness,

The lesson is clear enough: **believe God and obey him.**

The **promise** extended to those who believe and obey God is symbolized by the Promised Land

The **penalty** for disbelief and disobedience is symbolized by failure to enter the Promised Land.

That the Promised Land is a **symbol** of something greater is proven, by the author of Hebrews, through his exegesis of Psalm 95, in Hebrews Chapter 4.

This is a complex symbolism, as we have seen:

Moses failed to enter the Promised Land but he certainly did **not** fail to enter what the Promised Land symbolized. At the same time, not all who later entered and occupied the Promised Land believed and were nearly so obedient as Moses was!

Clearly what is in view here is the "**heavenly calling**" referred to in Chapter 3, Verse 1

And the "**world to come**" described in Chapter 2, verse 5

And the many sons of God being **brought to glory** referred to in Chapter 2, Verse 10.

And what the author of Hebrews is saying to us here in Verse 11 is, in effect, "let us **strive** to enter that **perfect eternal rest** by listening to God and trying to understand and obey him, and by admonishing one another to do likewise!

It is because we **are** the sons and daughters of God, being brought to glory by Christ, that we **can** strive.

For the same reason we **must** strive,

because this is our new **nature**.

Our **striving** is the **evidence** of our salvation

Is everyone comfortable with our reading of Hebrews up to **Verse 11** of **Chapter 4**?!

OK, then...

At this point, the author to Hebrews is finished with the particular **example** of the Exodus generation in Israel. He does not return to it again in this sermon.

His attention now turns to the underlying issue: the struggle that constantly goes on in every human heart.

Or at least in the heart of every human to whom God has spoken.

This was our lesson the last time we met (the week before last)....

Hebrews, Chapter 4, Verses 12-13

Will someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 4, Verses 12-13 in English (ESV).

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Thank you. Will someone please read those two verses in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku). Thank you.

Remember once again that marvelous introductory clause of Hebrews: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, **God spoke** to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son," (Hebrews 1:1-2a)

Anyone who has properly **heard** and **believed** God's word, has been **saved** by it, and **changed** by it.

It is all one thing!

There is no Justification without Sanctification and no Sanctification without Justification (Calvin).

If we are truly saved, we **will** be striving to accomplish all that **God** purposes to accomplish in us.

Remember Ephesians 2:10 "For we are **his** workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared **beforehand**, that we should walk in them."

But at the same time, we who **have** heard and believed the word and are most diligently striving to obey it, realize most acutely how hopelessly **weak and sinful** we are.

Christians understand better than anyone else how **wicked** we are and how in need of God's **mercy** and **grace**.

It is in this connection that Christ's **priestly** role is such a **comfort**.

Verses 14-16

Can someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 4, Verses 14-16 in English (ESV).

14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Thank you. Can someone please read it in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku). Thanks.

Our **reason** for holding fast to our confession of Jesus, **is** JESUS, our great high priest.

He is **able** and **willing** to provide all the help we need to hold fast!

Remember John 18:9: "This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost **not one**."

And Philippians 1:6: "And I am sure of this, that he who **began** a good work in you **will** bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Jesus is the Son of God, verse 14 tells us, and He has passed through the heavens.

Remember what we read in Chapter 1, verse 3: "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Surely passed through the heavens on his way from Earth to the right hand of God.

But that trajectory started down here! Beneath the angels.

And while he was down here, he was tempted as we are in every respect, but without sin. (v.15)

So his **greatness** as a high priest lies not just in his unlimited **power** and **access to God**, but, also, in his **sympathy** with **our weakness**.

And we remember that he is the **exact** imprint of God's character (1:3), so we know how **God** is by how Jesus is!!

Thus we can **approach** God with confidence (Jesus is with God! and Jesus is God) and receive all of the mercy and grace that we need in time of need.

It is this **priestly** function of Jesus that we first saw at the end of Chapter 2 and will begin to examine more closely today in Chapter 5.

This is the end of our review of previous lessons.

Does anyone have a comment or question before we move on?

Hebrews, Chapter 5, Verses 1-10

Will someone please read Hebrews Chapter 5, Verses 1-10 in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

Thank you. Will someone now please read those verses in English (ESV)

1 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.

2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.

3 Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.

4 And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

5 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";

6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.

8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,

10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Thank you. The overall purpose of these 10 verses is to help us better understand the "office" of Christ.

Not just **who** Christ is in himself: the Son of God and God

But who Christ is **for us**.

Who Christ is for us has many aspects: Lord, Savior, Prophet, Teacher, Brother, Friend, and Priest.

But here the author of Hebrews is interested in the ways in which Christ is for us a kind of a **priest**.

His purpose is to use priesthood as an **analogy** for the purpose of teaching us things about Christ that we need to understand better.

His purpose is **not** to explain or even to suggest that there is an exact or complete correspondence between the Christ and Levitical Priests.

We need to be careful about trying to push the analogy too far.

And we also need to remember (as we discussed several weeks ago regarding Moses) that ordinary priests are not in the same **category** as the Son of God. They may dimly reflect some of his glory, but he is subject to none of their defects and shortcomings!

There are essentially three aspects of the Levitical priesthood that the author wishes to explore here: **(1)** Their role as intercessors for the people before God, **(2)** what their character must be like if they are to be effective in this role, and **(3)** the fact that only God can appoint them.

These three points are developed in that order in verses 1-4.

Then starting in verse 5, these same three points are addressed in reverse order as they apply to Jesus.

Let's go through them now, one by one.

(Verse 1)

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.

Here the author of Hebrews is reminding us of what a priest **is** --- indeed of what the **word** priest means as we understand the meaning from all that is written in the Old Testament.

The first high priest was **who**?

Aaron, Moses brother.

It is worth remembering that **Moses**, who did not formally hold the office of high priest, was a **better** high priest than his brother Aaron, and this is kind of the point that is being developed here.

It is an argument from the lesser to the greater: if we can understand what a proper high priest looks like, then the best of them will still be less than Moses and this character Melchizedek who, in turn, are infinitely less than the Son of God.

Anyway we are talking now about ordinary high priests, of whom **Aaron** was the first and from among whose **descendants** the other rightful priests and high priests were appointed according to the word of God.

One thing they all had in common was that they were all ordinary living **men**. (i.e. no animals, no angels, no disembodied spirits, no wizards or sorcerers, etc.)

Another is that their job was to act **on behalf of all the people**,

They did not act on behalf of only some of the people or on behalf of themselves as private individuals.

They acted on behalf of the people **not** on **all** matters, but in their relation to **God**.

How they mainly did this was by **offering gifts and sacrifices** for sins.

All of this was so, because that is how **God** ordained things.

I mean it was God **Himself** and God **alone** who decided **what** a priest is and does and **who** can be a priest and **how** they should do their job.

He created the **Levitical** priesthood to reconcile sinful man with himself through the giving of certain gifts and sacrifices, which he also specified.

Clearly God did not **need** the gifts, since everything belongs to him in the first place.

So this sacrificial system and priestly class could only have been for **man's** benefit.

OK. So that's what a Levitical priest was and did, for the benefit of sinners, in Israel.

(Verse 2)

He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.

The priest himself had **no** power to do anything about sin.

Indeed the priests themselves **also** sinned; they were sinful humans like everyone else.

To be a priest was **not** to be superhuman; it was just a **job**.

So long as the priests remembered that, they could **do** their job properly.

The phrase translated "**deal gently**" in the ESV can be translated alternatively as "bear responsibly" or "deal considerately"

The idea is that of treating the ignorant and wayward with just the **right** amount of concern and indulgence, of neither ignoring them nor losing one's temper with them.

The Bible tends to view Aaron as such a high priest (Numbers 14:5, 16:22 and Psalms 106:16) despite his obvious lapses.

Moses is a better example (Numbers 12:3) although he was not formally a high priest as has been said.

None can compare with Jesus who, as we have already seen in Hebrews 4:15 is described as "**sympathetic**"

This is a different word group than is used here to describe an ordinary priest who can "**deal gently**" and the difference is significant.

The author of Hebrews is ultimately teaching that none can compare to Jesus, who is the very ideal of High Priesthood to which not even Moses or Melchizedek can compare!

It is significant also that during the 250 years or so preceding the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and at many other times in the history of Israel, the character of the priests in Israel was not as it should have been.

Priests thought themselves above the people and busied themselves with issues unrelated to their jobs before God.

Finally, please notice that almost no provision was made under the Law or the administration of the Levitical Priesthood for sins that were committed **intentionally** or with open **contempt** for God.

The priest is supposed to "deal gently" with the "ignorant" and "wayward" which probably should be taken to mean those who sin out of **ignorance** or, as it were, **by accident**.

(Verse 3)

Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.

The Law **helped** good priests to remember their proper station, by requiring that priests offer sacrifices for their **own** sins, just as they did for the people.

What is in view here is the sacrifice which the priests offer for their own sins on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16.6)

 This should have been sufficient to remind them that they were no different than those for whom they sacrificed.

 Again we see that Jesus cannot be compared simply to the Levitical priests, since he had no sins of his own for which to offer sacrifices.

 This very important point will be developed fully in subsequent chapters.

 But here we are still only talking about ordinary priests and the point is that their hearts should be humble and well disposed to dealing gently with those who sin, because they themselves sin, and because God himself has given them ample reminder of this through the Law, including those ceremonies that require priests to offer sacrifices for their own sins.

(Verse 4)

And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

Finally, no man can just **decide** to be a priest.

 The word "**honor**" here refers to the **office** of the Levitical priesthood.

 Priesthood is a **job** that only properly exists at the behest of God Himself.

 This is obvious if you think about it: how would any man intercede with God against God's will?!

 So if there ever are any priests, it can only be because God **Himself** appointed them.

 Aaron and Aaron's descendants **were** appointed by God to do this job in Israel.

 This continued until about 250 years before the destruction of the temple when men appointed priests according to their own designs and were manifestly and in many ways not true priests of God.

 For more than 200 years prior to the birth of Christ there properly were no priests in Israel and there will be no true priests other than Christ in Israel or anywhere else ever again,

 How could there be? The ultimate and permanent sacrifice for sins has been offered once for all.

 There is nothing left for a priest to do.

 That is a point that is being developed here.

 OK, then, now that we have considered what an ordinary Levitical priest is and does, we turn to contemplate Christ.

(Verse 5)

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 is a pivotal verse in the whole of Hebrews to this point.

If you will remember, back in Chapter 1, the author listed a series of **seven** scriptural proofs of the unqualified supremacy of Christ.

The very **first** of these was from Psalm 2, Verse 7: "You are my Son, today I have begotten you."

That verse is quoted here once again.

Please recall that the first **verse** of Hebrews begins to contemplate the **speech** of God, first to the fathers by the prophets and finally by a son.

Here in verse 5 our attention is again directed to the One who **spoke** these words of announcement and appointment concerning the son.

Of course an overarching theme of all that we have read and will read in Hebrews is the **sonship** of Jesus.

So this is structurally a heavy verse, bringing to mind most of what we have read so far in Hebrews.

Someone might object that God did not say anything about Jesus being specifically a "**priest**" but that would be to misunderstand completely the point of the analogy

Jesus **IS** the great High Priest (c.f. 4:14) of which the Levitical Priesthood was a very dim foreshadow.

His priesthood is inseparable from the glory of his Sonship.

(Verse 6)

as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

Furthermore the appointment of Jesus **as** specifically a priest **was** proclaimed by God.

The author quotes from Psalm 110, at verse 4, the passage in which God proclaims Jesus to be a priest forever.

Psalm 110 is a profoundly Messianic psalm all of which we have covered in this class before.

You may remember that the first verse of this same Psalm is the one about Jesus sitting at God's right hand, which was the **seventh** and final scriptural proof offered in Chapter 1.

Here by quoting verse 4 of that same Psalm, our author makes his point about Jesus having been appointed by God as a priest and, also, he introduces Melchizedek, about whom he has very much to say.

Does everyone know who Melchizedek is?

Please turn to Genesis, Chapter 14, verses 18-20.

This is the first place in the Bible where we read about Melchizedek. It reads as follows:

18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)

19 And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;

20 and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

The second place in the Bible where we read about Melchizedek, is in Psalm 110:4, which is where the author of Hebrews quotes from.

The only other places in the Bible in which Melchizedek is mentioned are in Hebrews itself.

He is mentioned in Hebrews a total of 8 times by name: twice in our present Chapter 5, once in the very last verse of Chapter 6 and then 5 times in Chapter 7.

His name, Melchizedek, means something like King of Righteousness.

He is said to be King of Salem, which means King of Peace, and probably Salem was the city of Jerusalem.

In addition to being a king, he is also said to be a priest of God Most High.

His exalted status is best communicated by the fact that he blessed Abraham,

And by the fact that Abraham paid a tenth of his spoils from the recent battle,

Both of these things suggest that Melchizedek was greater even than Abraham, which is very great.

So (Coming back to Verse 6, of Hebrews 5) we understand that Jesus was proclaimed by God to be specifically a priest

and not merely a Levitical priest, but something better.

a priest more like Melchizedek --- the best example we can find in the Old Testament --- who was both a priest, and a king, and superior to all men, even Abraham,

more than that, he is a priest **forever**.

So what kind of priest is he?

The only things we know about Melchizedek's **character** is what we can infer from the three lines we just read in Genesis!

(Verse 7)

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.

What we know about Jesus' character, we know from his life **on Earth** among us.

Which are here called the **days of his flesh**.

Our author reminds us, as we know from reading the rest of the New Testament, that Jesus **prayed**.

But the amazing thing is that these prayers were said with loud **cries** and **tears**.

In our Bibles we can read of such emotional prayers particularly in connection with the passion: in Gethsemane and on the cross. (Mt. 26:39, Mt 27:46)

But I am also reminded to the tears Jesus shed when he raised Lazareth from the dead.

And the author of Hebrews may be aware of other times when Jesus prayed with loud cries and tears.

The important thing to notice here is that Jesus prayed, and that he really prayed, and from this we must take away two things:

First, Jesus understands from **experience** the fear and other emotions out of which we pray.

Second, Jesus' example removes all **excuses** for us not praying.

If the **Son of God** needs to pray, how much more do **we** need to pray.

He prayed to God and was **heard**. This much is totally clear.

God is here described as "**the one able to save him from death**."

Surely God is that. In what **sense** Jesus feared death is less clear: was it the actual fact of death, or was it knowing or not knowing what he would face on the other side of death, etc. People discuss that a lot.

In what sense he was **heard**, is also much discussed. Certainly we know that God heard his prayers (and ours) and that God's answer --- though perhaps not immediate or matching our expectations --- is always more beneficial than we can imagine.

*Anyway Jesus **knows** what it is like to be weak and in need of God's help, and now he is on the other end of the line when our prayers go out: **HOW COMFORTING!***

(Verse 8)

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

We know that Jesus is the **eternal** son of God.

We know that at every moment of his life and in eternity He is **inclined** to obey and perfectly **does** obey God.

So, it could never be said that he needed to learn "**how**" to obey God. That makes no sense.

But during the days of his flesh (i.e. his life on earth) he learned what the **experience** of perfect obedience **is like** for a man, from the inside out.

As a true man, he naturally wished **not** to die and **not** to suffer.

Yet he **preferred** death and suffering in obedience to God to the life and comfort that his flesh naturally desired.

Because he learned through actual experience the cost of obedience, he can truly sympathize with those who seek to follow him in obedience!!

Furthermore, because we know that his suffering was greater than ours and suffered on our behalf, we have more reason to follow him.

(Verse 9)

And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,

As we have discussed before, the Son of God is eternally perfect.

But part of his eternal perfection was what he accomplished, learned, and demonstrated in the days of his flesh.

He **canceled** the disobedience of Adam with his perfect obedience.

Making our salvation **possible**.

But if we want his obedience to benefit us, we must **copy** it.

This we cannot do without his help.

(Verse 10)

being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

We need an eternal high priest, after the order of Melchizedek.

Thank God, he has designated one for us.

Jesus Christ.

The author will return to the figure of Melchizedek in Chapter 7.