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Sermon Notes

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The Office of High Priest Described and Fulfilled

Hebrews 5:1-10

I have been across some amazing bridges in my life, and as an engineer, I often marvel at their construction

The longest bridge I have ever seen is the Seto-Ohashi bridge in Japan connecting Takamatsu and the main island of Honshu... it cost Christi and I approximately \$100 as a toll to drive our car across that bridge!!! It is almost 8 miles in length and took us about 25 minutes to drive across... it is the longest two-tiered bridge in the world

The most terrifying bridge I have ever crossed was also in Japan; an ancient vine bridge called the Kazurabashi in Iya Valley on Shikoku; it was made of twisted vines and it sagged and swayed as you walked across it; it was high above the rocky riverbed below in a deep mountain gorge... I carried Nathaniel across that bridge

Oftentimes, the image of the bridge is used to speak spiritually as well

The relationship between a Holy God and a sinful people is frequently spoken of as an infinitely wide gap... like the Grand Canyon

We the sinful people on one side; God the Holy One on the other; As much as we may yearn to cross, we cannot

The Latin word for “priest” is “pontifex”... it referred in their pagan religion to the men who smoothed the way between the gods and men with their rituals and their sacrifices... typical of all pagan, man-centered religions, it assumes that a bridge can be constructed by man to cross over to the territory of the gods; the most important of the priests was called the “pontifex maximus”... the great priest, the highest bridge-builder

In actuality, Almighty God deeply desires that the infinite gulf between Himself and sinful men be crossed, but only in His own way, at His own initiative... by His own bridge-builder...

God’s “bridge-builder” is none other than Jesus Christ... and Hebrews 5:1-10 establishes that Jesus Christ is the perfect fulfillment of the symbolic priestly ministry established in the Old Covenant by the Laws of Moses

Priestly ministry established at Mount Sinai

I. The Duties of the High Priest

Hebrews 5:1 Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

A. Represent the People to God in Prayer

1. Though prayer is not openly spoken of in Hebrews 5:1, yet it is clearly mentioned in verse 7 as a part of Jesus' perfection of the priestly ministry
2. Aaron and Moses frequently stood in the gap to pray for sinful Israel
3. Aaron the High Priest was to wear the names of the tribes of Israel on a golden plate over his heart

Exodus 28:29 "Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the LORD.

4. So he was to bear on his lips the names of the people of Israel, to represent them in matters related to God
5. At the heart of this must be a faithful prayer ministry

B. Offer Gifts and Sacrifices for Sins

II. The Qualifications of the High Priest

A. Human: Selected from Among Men

Hebrews 5:1 Every high priest is selected from among men

B. Chosen by God... Not Taking the Honor Upon Himself

Hebrews 5:4 No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.

C. Able to Deal Gently with Sinners

Hebrews 5:2 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness.

1. The word "gently" means "not easily angered"
2. The people the priest represents are SINNERS

- a. If they were perfect, they would not need his priestly ministry
 - b. Their sinfulness is described in particular as linked to their ignorance and their wandering hearts
 - c. In effect the author says “wandering through their ignorance”
 - d. The priest is supposed to be a faithful expounder of the law of God
 - e. But no matter how faithfully he expounds, the people will continue to wander, continue to go astray
3. Though the Jewish priests may have been tempted to be frustrated with the constant sinfulness of the people, they would have been restrained

III. The Imperfection of the High Priests

A. They Were Imperfect Themselves: They Had to Sacrifice for their Own Sins

Hebrews 5:2-3 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. ³ This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

1. Subject to weakness
2. Implication: ignorant and going astray
3. Examples from Scripture

B. They Offered Imperfect Sacrifices: They Had to Sacrifice Animals Endlessly

1. This point will be developed more fully later
2. Animals themselves were imperfect substitutes for sins
3. The sacrifices were ineffectual... they had to be repeated endlessly

Summary: The Law of Moses appointed imperfect men to an imperfect ministry... YET it was a helpful preparation for the coming ministry of Jesus

IV. Jesus: The Perfect High Priest

Hebrews 5:5-10 So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." ⁶ And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." ⁷ ¶ During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made

perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ¹⁰ and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Jesus' High Priestly ministry developed only here in the Book of Hebrews

Other books focus on Jesus as King and as God Incarnate...

Only Hebrews reveals Jesus as the Great High Priest...

Here we look more deeply into Jesus as the PERFECT High Priest... the perfect fulfillment of the symbolic priesthood set up by the Old Covenant

A. Perfect in His Person: The Son of God AND Son of Man

1. The author begins with God's statement in Psalm 2:7

Vs. 5 "But God said to him, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'"

2. Already quoted in Hebrews 1:5
3. Referred to again in the last chapter
4. The word "Today" is linked both to His incarnation AND His resurrection

a. Incarnation

Hebrews 1:5-6 For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? ⁶ And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

b. Resurrection

Acts 13:32-33 "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers ³³ he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: "'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'

5. Both of those have to do with His taking on of a human body
6. Jesus is a perfect High Priest because He is BOTH Son of God AND Son of Man
7. In this way He is the perfect bridge-builder between God and Man
8. As the Son of God, He has His Father's heart, His Father's ear... anything this perfect High Priest could ever ask His Father, the Father will MOST CERTAINLY do for Him

9. What better representative could you ever have with the King than the King's beloved and only Son??

10. So, as a High Priest, Jesus is perfect in His Person

B. Perfect in His Calling: Called by God

1. The author makes it clear that Almighty God ALONE can appoint the High Priest
2. The "glory" of being a High Priest cannot be seized by force; it must be given, or it is not valid
3. In the Old Covenant, in the Laws of Moses, the office of High Priest was established by command of God
 - a. Aaron did not one day come up with the ambition to become a High Priest
 - b. He was called by God's Sovereign will, according to His perfect plan

Exodus 28:1-2 "Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests. ² Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor.

- c. Furthermore, Aaron did not establish that this office would be hereditary, passing only to his own sons, his own descendents.... That again was God's command

4. Jesus was CALLED BY GOD to be a High Priest

Hebrews 5:4-6 No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." ⁶ And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

5. His taking up of Priestly glory and an eternal priestly ministry was done in response to a call from God

C. Perfect in His Humility: Not Seizing What is Not His

^{NAU} ***Hebrews 5:5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest***

1. This reminds me of the general and perfect humility of Jesus in every aspect of His relationship with His Father

2. Philippians 2 clearly depicts this humility concerning His heavenly glory and equality with God

Philippians 2:6-11 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

3. In the same way, Hebrews 5 makes it plain Jesus didn't take upon Himself the GLORY of being High Priest, but as we've seen, the calling came from God
4. Jesus' humility in approaching His Father is of the essence of His ministry as our High Priest... He only comes at the command of the Father to receive from the Father what the Father has already promised to give
5. Old Testament Contrast: Nadab and Abihu

Leviticus 10:1-3 Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. ² So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³ Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke of when he said: "'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.'" Aaron remained silent.

Aaron's sons were great sinners... they did not approach God as though He was infinitely holy; but they arrogantly made up their own religion, and offered to God a fiery incense that God had not commanded... God struck them dead on the spot

BUT Jesus is humble in approaching God; he would NOT seize the glory of being a High Priest if He were not called by God to the role

D. Perfect in His Priesthood: The Order of Melchizedek

Hebrews 5:6 And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

1. The mysterious figure of Melchizedek is mentioned for the first time
2. He appears suddenly in Genesis 14
3. He is mentioned in Psalm 110:4, quoted here
4. He will be developed fully in Hebrews 7

5. A foretaste: Melchizedek is both a priest and a king... a picture of Jesus
6. In His perfect humility, as we've said, Jesus would not presume to take upon Himself the role of High Priest
7. Old Testament contrast:
 - a. King Saul offered animal sacrifice instead of waiting for Samuel and was rebuked for presuming to do so... as a result, Samuel told him his kingdom would not be established for all time

1 Samuel 13:13-14 "You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

- b. Even worse... King Uzziah in his pride sought to offer incense in the temple and some priests confronted him and told him he had no right

2 Chronicles 26:16-21 But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷ Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the LORD followed him in. ¹⁸ They confronted him and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God." ¹⁹ Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. ²⁰ When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the LORD had afflicted him. ²¹ King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house--leprosy, and excluded from the temple of the LORD. Jotham his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land.

8. Jesus was perfectly humble and would never have presumed to take on priestly ministry ... BUT God called Him to do it... to be the perfect and final High Priest
9. BUT the Old Covenant forbids anyone from being a priest except a descendent of Aaron
10. AND the promise to David was that only his son would be able to sit on his throne and rule forever

11. This prophecy from Psalm 2:7 links Jesus to the promises to King David... that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, the Son of David; thus the perfect KING

Acts 13:32-34 What God promised our fathers ³³ he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: "'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'* ³⁴ *The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: "'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.'

12. Jesus received the “holy and sure promises to David”... that David’s greater son would sit on his throne and rule forever and ever
13. Therefore, the only way Jesus could be BOTH a priest and sit on David’s throne was to have a New Covenant... and at the center of the New Covenant was a new order of priest: the order of Melchizedek
14. Jesus is a Perfect Priest-King in the order of Melchizedek... which the author repeats at the end of this section:

Hebrews 5:10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

E. Perfect in His Eternity: A Priest Forever

1. The single word “forever” shows the perfection of Jesus’ priesthood

Hebrews 5:6 And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

2. The descendants of Aaron all died, one after the other
3. In fact, the death of the High Priest was built into the Law of Moses, saying that anyone who was wrongly accused of a murder and fled to a city of refuge had to stay there until the death of the High Priest
4. But Jesus’ priestly ministry is eternal... because He can never die again
5. He stands in our place forever, representing us to God... He does not grow weary presenting us to God, neither does He age or become feeble
6. His ministry is perfect because it cannot end... on the basis of it, we will spend eternity in the presence of a holy God!!!

F. Perfect in His Intercession: Fervent Prayer to God, Heard by God

Hebrews 5:7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

1. The two great ministries of the High Priest are the offering of sacrifices and making of intercession for sinners
2. Jesus is the PERFECT High Priest when it comes to intercession... He is the perfect prayer warrior because His pleas are always according to the will of God and always heard
3. This passage clearly refers to Jesus' prayers while on earth
 - a. Despite being beset by great weakness in the mortal flesh, He was mighty in prayer
 - b. The author speaks of the days of Jesus' life on earth
 - i) Note the use of the name "Jesus"
 - ii) He is not ashamed to speak this name... the name "Christ" is a title in the Jewish religion, like the title of "King"
 - iii) But the name "Jesus" refers to the specific man, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the son of Mary, Jesus who died on the cross... that Jesus
 - c. While He lived on earth, His intense prayer life was on display
4. Prayers made with INTENSITY:
 - a. "prayers and petitions": the repetition shows the comprehensiveness of Jesus' prayers
 - b. "with loud cries and tears": these words refer to the passion and intensity of His requests... they poured forth like molten lava from a heart on fire
 - c. How many human pastors and priests have defiled the act of prayer with the coldness and formality of their prayers... prayers intoned, prayers droned, prayers that are as dead and lifeless as we fear their hearts to be:

Thomas Brooks:

"As a painted fire is no fire, a dead man no man, so a cold prayer is no prayer. In a painted fire there is no heat, in a dead man there is no life, so in a cold prayer there is no power, no devotion, no blessing. Cold prayers are arrows without heads, as swords without edges, as birds without wings, they pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven. Cold prayers do always freeze before they get up to heaven. Oh! That Christians would chide themselves out

of their cold prayers and chide themselves into a better and warmer frame of spirit, when they make their supplications to the Lord"

d. Not so, Jesus!!! He made prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears...!!

5. The Mystery of Gethsemane

a. I believe the author is referring to Jesus' time of intercession in Gethsemane

b. He says His prayers were made to the **"one who could save him from death"**

c. So Jesus, the night before He died, went to Gethsemane with His disciples

Mark 14:32-36 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ³⁴ "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." ³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

d. Jesus' prayer was occasioned, I believe, by an overpowering revelation to His mind of the experience that was awaiting Him at the cross...

e. Jesus would be our substitute, taking our defilement on Himself and become sin for us, though He Himself had committed no sin

f. Jesus would stand under the blazing, fiery, intensity of the wrath of God for our sins...

g. He would be offered the cup of God's infinite and terrifying wrath and would drink it to the very bottom, to the bitterest of dregs

h. In Gethsemane, I believe, God the Father revealed this to Jesus at a level His human flesh could scarcely withstand...

i. Implicit in the revelation was the question: "Will you do it? Will you obey?"

j. The experience in Gethsemane was so overpowering, His face was sweating great drops of blood

Luke 22:44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

- k. This is a picture of the kind of intercessor we have... a High Priest who stands at the right hand of God and prays for our final salvation with this kind of intensity

6. And what of the success of His prayer?

“He was heard because of His reverent submission...”

7. We want a High Priest whom God will HEAR...

- a. A sinful priest cannot get a Holy God to hear His prayers

Isaiah 59:1-3 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. ³ For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things.

- b. Jesus, the Perfect High Priest, has the ear of God forever:

Hebrews 7:24-26 Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. ²⁶ ¶ Such a high priest meets our need-- one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

Jesus is the perfect intercessor whose prayers God ALWAYS HEARS... and why?

G. Perfect in His Piety: Obedient, Reverent Submission

Hebrews 5:7-8 he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered

- 1. Jesus was heard because of His “reverent submission...”
- 2. Other translations:

KJV: “and was heard in that he feared”

ESV “and he was heard because of his reverence.”

NASB “and He was heard because of His piety.”

- a. At its root, the word has to do with a perfect, godly FEAR of the LORD
- b. The Fear of the Lord is pure, having to do with the infinite worth of God’s throne and His lofty position in the universe
- 3. Jesus came to His Father in perfect submission, wanting only to do what the Father commanded Him

4. Though it would cost Him His life in infinite torment, He said

Luke 22:42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

5. That perfect piety, absolute surrender to the will of God, makes Jesus a perfect High Priest

6. The passage says Jesus “learned obedience from what He suffered”

a. Here is the infinite mystery of the incarnation

b. Jesus, fully God, was omniscient

c. YET, He learned, developed, grew as a normal child

d. AND He continued to grow and develop to the end of His life by what He experienced

e. He EXPERIENCED the wrath of God in all His sufferings

f. And by that He was MADE PERFECT as our High Priest

g. “Made perfect” does not imply imperfection or flaws in Jesus that were purged out by suffering

h. Rather it means that Jesus perfected or completed the salvation plan the Father had laid out before Him right to the end

John 17:4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing (perfecting) the work you gave me to do.

John 19:30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished."(perfect) With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

i. And thus he was QUALIFIED (“made perfect”) by what He suffered

H. Perfect in His Sacrifice: The Source of Eternal Salvation

Hebrews 5:9 once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

1. When Jesus died on the cross, He perfected the salvation God had laid out for Him to perfect

2. He made purification for sins by His perfect blood shed on the cross

Hebrews 1:3 After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

3. He died in our place, once for all time, a perfect sacrifice acceptable to God to cover our sins
4. He rose from the dead and ascended through the heavenly realms; He offered at the right hand of God His blood for our sins, and based on that perfect sacrifice and His perfect intercession, He has become the source of eternal salvation for all those who OBEY Him
5. This is the perfection of the priestly ministry of Jesus
 - a. The High Priests who were descendents of Aaron are sinful men who have to offer imperfect sacrifices for the their imperfect lives... and after endlessly offering those symbolic sacrifices which can never take away sin, they died and were replaced by their sons
 - b. Jesus is the perfect High Priest, the Son of God and Son of Man, who was sinless, pure and undefiled; He was called by God to be a High Priest AND a King in the order of Melchizedek; Jesus humbly took that role from God; He displayed perfect prayers in Gethsemane and perfect submission to the will of God; and that perfectly qualified Him to be our High Priest; once made perfect through suffering was qualified to save us

V. Applications

- A.
- B.
- C.



