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<b>Congregation:</b>	<b>First United Reformed Church</b> <b>Oak Lawn, Illinois</b> <a href="http://www.oaklawnurc.org/">www.oaklawnurc.org/</a>	More About Jesus Would I Know Lord, to Me Thy Ways Make Known O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Our Perfect, Sympathetic High Priest</b>	“Man of Sorrows,” What a Name
<b>Text:</b>	<a href="#">Hebrews 5:1-10 (View)</a>	
<b>Occasion:</b>	<a href="#">Regular Sunday</a>	
<b>Topic:</b>	<a href="#">Life in Christ</a>	
<b>Added:</b>	2022-08-27	
<b>Updated:</b>	2022-08-27	

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### **“Our Perfect, Sympathetic High Priest”** Hebrews 5:1-10

Sometimes the whole idea of the priesthood seems far removed from Protestants like ourselves in the 21st century. Perhaps if you see a Roman Catholic priest in his clerical garb, you might be reminded of their conception of the priesthood. Or when you take the challenge to read a book like Leviticus, you are reminded of the intricacies of the Old Testament sacrifices which the priests were required to make.

However, the author of Hebrews, as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit, gives us many clear pictures of the importance – not only of the Old Testament high priests – but the supreme importance of our great high priest, Jesus Christ.

As chapter 5 begins we are given a “job description” for the high priest. Verse 1 tells us that he *“must be selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God.”* Furthermore, the appointment of the high priest was not done by people, but by God. Verse 4: *“No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.”*

As the high priest represented the people before God, he would offer sacrifices for their sins. For instance, on the Day of Atonement, which was observed once per year, the high priest in the Old Testament would represent the people before God by offering a sacrifice on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant.

The ark, which was kept in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and temple, was almost four feet long and a little over two feet wide and high. The cover, known as the mercy seat, was overlaid

with gold and had cherubim with outstretched wings over the cover. Beneath the mercy seat were the two tablets of the law, along with Aaron's staff which had budded and a jar of manna. (Heb. 9:4)

The Lord symbolically dwelt above the mercy seat between the outstretched wings of the cherubim. As such, he would see the tablets of the law and know the infractions of the people against every law that was given. He would see the jar of manna and be reminded of their many complaints against his gracious providence in bringing them out of Egypt. He would see the staff of Aaron and remember how Aaron formed the golden calf and credited it with deliverance from Egypt instead of the faithful Lord who had given him power in the staff.

But when the high priest would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat, the Lord would see the blood of the sacrifice. And his righteous and proper wrath against sin would be appeased; it would be propitiated. That imagery, which took place every year on the Day of Atonement, was looking ahead to the shed blood of Jesus which makes propitiation – covers – your sins and mine and thus appeases the righteous and proper wrath of God against sin.

The ark of the covenant was kept in the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle and Temple – the “Holy of Holies.” Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and then only once per year on the Day of Atonement. And on the Day of Atonement the high priest would have to, first, in the words of verse 3, *“offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well for the sins of the people.”*

That was no easy task. Leviticus 16, among other passages, describes the requirements for the high priest to take on the Day of Atonement when he went into the Most Holy Place. He would slaughter a bull and offer it for his own sin and the sin of his household. Then he would put on sacred garments. Because they were sacred, he had to bathe himself before putting them on. He would then enter the Most Holy Place – “the Holy of Holies” – through a tall thick curtain which separated it from the rest the tabernacle or temple. He would enter with incense so that the smoke would initially hide the ark of the covenant from his impure eyes and spare him from death.

He would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant; the blood was from a bull and a goat that had been sacrificed. The high priest would cast lots over two live goats brought to him by the people. He would kill one of the goats as a sin offering for the Israelites and sprinkle its blood inside the Most Holy Place. He would place his hands on the head of the live goat and confess the sins of the people before God. Then he would send the live goat – the scape goat, (Azazel) – away into the wilderness.

I'm so thankful that as a pastor I don't need to go through all those rituals of the Old Testament high priest! But what I'm even more thankful for is that Jesus has entered the Most Holy Place of heaven, and he points to his perfect sacrifice for us on the cross.

All those Old Testament ordinances and sacrifices point to our crucified and risen Savior. When our faith is placed in his redeeming work, we have full assurance that we are forgiven. We have full assurance that we will enter the Most Holy Place – heaven itself – where we will live in perfect harmony with our triune God forever.

In fact, our triune God graciously assured us of our access into the Most Holy Place when Jesus was crucified. At the very moment of his sacrificial death, the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. It was a dramatic portrayal of how Christ has opened the Most Holy Place – the Holy of Holies – the very gate of heaven – for all who have saving faith in him alone.

Like the Old Testament high priests, Jesus was selected from among men and appointed by God to represent them in matters related to God. But instead of offering a sacrificial bull, he offered himself. Instead of sending a scapegoat off into the wilderness, he became our scapegoat – our sin-bearer – as he was crucified outside the city gates of Jerusalem and bore our sins away.

Although Jesus is like the Old Testament high priests in that he offered *“gifts and sacrifices”* – both terms meaning essentially the same thing – an offering for the sins of the people, he was unlike the Old Testament high priests in some specific ways.

One clear and obvious point of difference is that he is sinless. The Old Testament high priests had to offer sacrifices for their own sins. But not Christ Jesus. He has always been, and ever will be, totally sinless.

But that doesn't mean that he isn't sympathetic to sinners. Verse 15 of the previous chapter tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, yet is without sin. And because he faced every temptation you and I have faced, he fully sympathizes with us when we are tempted.

Yet, in addition to the temptation that Jesus faced, he also lived in a human body just like yours and mine. He was just like you and me in that he knows what it is like to be tired. He knows what it is like to experience physical pain, to be hungry, to be thirsty. He knows what it is like to have a cold, to lose your voice, to have a sore back or a stiff neck. He knows every facet of the human experience, from the minor irritations to the agony of death. He has experienced it all.

Because of the temptations he faced, and because he knows the human experience of weakness and suffering, he is, as verse 2 notes, *“able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and going astray.”* He is the Great Shepherd who seeks out the wandering sheep. He may use his rod and staff to forcefully bring the wandering ones to their senses and back to him. But then he deals gently, for he understands temptation's power and the fragility and hardships of human life.

### **An Eternal, Sympathetic High Priest**

Another way that Jesus differs from Old Testament high priests is that he has an eternal priesthood, not after Aaron, but Melchizedek. The priests in the Old Testament were from the lineage of Aaron. But in both verse 6 and in verse 10 we read how Jesus is a high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Some of you may recognize Melchizedek as the unique figure in the early history of the world. We read briefly about him in Genesis 14. In verse 18-20 we read how when Abram returned from defeating the kings who had taken Lot as their captive, he was met by Melchizedek. We read: *“Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said,*

*‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Possessor of heaven and earth;  
and blessed be God Most High,  
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!’*

*“And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”*

The author of Hebrews will tell us much more about Melchizedek in chapter 7, but in the context of these verses the significance of Jesus being a priest in the order of Melchizedek is this: Melchizedek is unique in that he has no genealogy. He has no recorded beginning and no recorded end.

The point that the author of Hebrews is making is that Christ is the Alpha and the Omega. Our great high priest is not like those in the lineage of Aaron, who lived to be 123 years old. Rather Christ eternally represents us. He is always there at the Father's throne of grace to represent weak sinners who come to the Father through faith in him. Like Melchizedek, the eternal Christ has no

genealogy, even though his human genealogy is traced back to Abraham. Yet he is – in a concept beyond our ability to grasp – eternally begotten of the Father.

In Hebrews 7:24 the Holy Spirit drives that truth home. We read there, *“Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.”* And then in Hebrews 7:25 we read how crucial the eternal high priesthood of Christ is: *“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”*

Because our salvation is based on the eternal priesthood of our Lord and Savior, we are filled hope and encouragement. Hebrews 6:19 and 20 declare: *“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”* Because Jesus is an eternal high priest in the order of Melchizedek, we who have saving faith in him do indeed have an anchor for our soul, firm and secure through the turbulent storms and roaring breakers of this life.

The passage before us also teaches us that Jesus is our perfect high priest, not only in his sacrifice and intercession, but in his sympathy. For instance, he knows what it is like to pray with tears. And he has experienced “the closed door” in prayer. Verse 7 describes how *“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”*

That verse covers the prayer life of Jesus throughout his entire time on earth. But it zeros in on his heart-wrenching prayer in the Garden at Gethsemane where he prayed, *“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Yet, not my will but yours be done.”* (Luke 22:42)

The cup of which he spoke, was the cup of God's righteous and proper wrath at your sin and mine. That cup was not removed. Jesus had prayed *“with fervent cries and tears,”* yet he experienced the closed door. He experienced the so-called “unanswered” prayer.

I'm sure that you have experienced that closed door in prayer. Perhaps you pray for healing, but the healing doesn't come. Or perhaps you pray for resolution in a relationship full of jagged edges – a relationship that just doesn't fit together the way it should – yet attitudes aren't changed as you pray that they would be. Or perhaps you've experienced a time of unemployment, and all the prayers that you and your loved ones offer up don't seem to be answered. We call those “unanswered prayers” even though we realize they are clearly answered by God, and that his answer is “No”, at least at this time in our life. And we realize that God's answer of “No” is for our good.

When you and I are in that situation, we can be sure that our great high priest, Jesus Christ, is sympathetic. He knows what it's like to pray with tears and he knows what it's like to have the so-called “unanswered prayer.” That is part of how he was *“made perfect,”* in the words of verse 9.

It is not as though Jesus Christ was ever imperfect. He has always been perfect and ever will be, but by his experience of suffering here on earth he was perfected in understanding the human experience. He is perfect in every way, including that he fully understands what it is like to be a human being of flesh and blood in a fallen, sinful world, facing disappointments of every kind, even the seemingly unanswered prayer (though as many point out, his prayer was ultimately answered through his resurrection from the dead).

Another way that Jesus is perfect as our great high priest is that he understands it isn't always easy to submit to his Father's will. In his prayer in Gethsemane, after praying that the cup of wrath would be taken from him, he added, *“Yet not my will, but yours, be done.”*

That is another way in which Jesus is our sympathetic great high priest. He suffered, not only in the afflictions brought on by sinful people around him, but he suffered in the sense of his submission to the task – the will – of his heavenly Father. He knew that his Father's will is always, in the words of Romans 12:2, *“good, pleasing and perfect.”* But submitting to that will is not always easy.

And Jesus understands that. When the door is closed in answer to your prayers, when God's will is not to remove your thorn but instead to extend his grace to deal with the thorn, your great high priest knows how you feel. He has been in that same situation.

Verse 8 describes how Jesus *“learned obedience from what he suffered.”* Jesus was obedient in every way: to his parents, in his conduct with others, keeping every jot and tittle - every iota – of the law. But his greatest act of obedience was his willingness to suffer unspeakable pain and sorrow in his crucifixion. As Philippians 2 explains:

*...Christ Jesus who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God  
something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6-8)*

Because Jesus was obedient, even to death on the cross, we who believe in him are saved from our sin. Our great high priest represents us perfectly. And his obedience reflects his perfection as the second Adam. The first Adam plunged all humanity into sin by his disobedience to God's command. But Christ, as the second Adam, through his obedience to be crucified – as well as his perfect obedience to every aspect of the law – redeemed his people from their sins.

In every way that Adam failed to be obedient - and in every way that you and I, descendants of Adam, have failed to obey - Christ obeyed perfectly. In the Garden of Eden, Adam disobeyed God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus obeyed his Father's will to bear the sins of his people, even at the cost of his life. Romans 5:19 sums up the difference this way: *“For just as through the disobedience of the one man – Adam – the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man – Christ Jesus – the many will be made righteous.”*

### **The Only Source of Salvation**

Verse 9 gives us another application as it teaches that Jesus *“became the source of eternal salvation.”* He is the only source of salvation. As Peter declared in Acts 4:12, *“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* And as Jesus himself said, in John 14:6, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

How are we to respond to such a great high priest? How do we respond to the sinless one who offered himself as a complete atonement for all of our sins? How do we respond to the one who has fully experienced life in a fallen world in order to become our perfect, sympathetic high priest?

Our response is obedience which flows from saving faith. Did you notice in verse 9 how it says, *“He became the source of salvation for all who obey him.”*? Wherever there is true saving faith there is also obedience. Not perfect obedience, but a growing obedience, a growing desire to live

according to the words of the God who saved us from our sin. Romans 1:5 describes that obedience as *“the obedience that comes from faith.”*

The Heidelberg Catechism also addresses the obedience that comes from faith. After teaching us the meaning of each one of the ten commandments the catechism asks, “Can those who are converted to God keep these commandments perfectly?”

Answer:

No.  
In this life even the holiest  
have only a small beginning of this obedience.

Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose,  
they do begin to live  
according to all, not only some,  
of God’s commandments. (Q&A 114)

Does that describe you? And does that describe me? Do you and I truly have saving faith in Christ alone? If so, then out of gratitude for what Christ has done, is doing, and will do throughout all eternity, do we eagerly and joyfully strive to live in obedience to him? And is the knowledge of his love and his obedience – even to death on the cross – an anchor for your soul and mine in all the troubles and trials of our lives?

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Sometimes the whole idea of the priesthood seems far removed from Protestants like ourselves in the 21st century. You might see a Roman Catholic priest in his clerical garb and be reminded of their conception of the priesthood. And whenever you take the challenge to read a book like Leviticus, you are reminded of the intricacies of the Old Testament sacrifices which the priests were required to make, sacrifices pointing ahead to the bloody and perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

But how thankful you and I should always be for the work of Jesus Christ, our great high priest! He is perfect in every way, sympathetic to every temptation and trial we face. He is always willing to intercede on our behalf, even offering himself as the perfect sacrifice for sinners so that one day all those who truly believe in him alone for salvation, will enter the true Holy of Holies, the Most Holy Place of heaven itself! Amen.

sermon outline:

*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. – Hebrews 5:1*

### **“Our Perfect, Sympathetic High Priest”**

Hebrews 5:1-10

- I. The author of Hebrews stresses the importance of the high priesthood of Jesus Christ:
  - 1) Like Old Testament high priests, He was *“selected from among men and appointed to represent them in matters related to God,”* which was done by the *“offering of gifts and sacrifices”* (1, 4)

- 2) Unlike Old Testament high priests, He is sinless (4:15) and has

an eternal priesthood, not after Aaron, but Melchizedek (5:6, 10)

II. Application: Jesus is our perfect High Priest, not only in His sacrifice and intercession, but in His sympathy (4:15):

1) He knows what it is like to pray with tears; He has experienced “the closed door” in prayer though “*He was heard because of His reverent submission*” (7, Matt. 26:38)

2) He understands that it isn’t always easy to submit to His Father’s will (8; Matthew 26:39) even though God’s will is “*good, pleasing and perfect*” (Romans 12:2)

III. Our response:

1) Saving faith in Him alone, knowing He is the only source of salvation (9; John 14:6; Acts 4:12)

2) Obedience (9) which flows from true saving faith (Romans 1:5)

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