

"Our Great High Priest"

Part 3

Hebrews 4:14-8:5

Introduction: Last week in our study of the book Hebrews we finished working our way through chapter 4. At the end of the chapter the writer launched into a thought which is going to carry us the entire way through Hebrews 8:5. Now the subject which the writer of Hebrews is entering into is "Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest".

Notice Hebrews 4:14-16

These 3 verses are the start of the longest section of the book of Hebrews. Before we get into chapter 5 there are some thoughts we need to consider to help us grasp this section focused upon our Great High Priest.

This letter is written to Hebrew believers but we must keep in mind it would have been read by Hebrew unbelievers also. We must also keep in mind that it would be God's will for all who read this letter to be saved. We see this in what Peter recorded about the will of God.

2 Peter 3:9

⁹ *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

Therefore, knowing that this letter would be read by unsaved as well as saved Hebrews we need to consider some questions which the Hebrews would have asked about Christianity. Let us remember the original group who received this letter was struggling with stepping away from Judaism. Under the Old Covenant the worship of God depended greatly upon the service of the high priest. Now that they have come to Christ, and keep in mind there are others who are not saved who are considering Christianity, one of the questions would have been concerning a "high priest". Under the Old Covenant it was impossible for the average man to come to God. The high priest would be the man who would represent man to God. He would be the one who would offer the sacrifice for sins. He would be the one who would enter into the Holy of Holies. Without the high priest there was no way to God nor was there a way to worship God. So since the New Covenant was superior to the Old

Covenant the Hebrews would have wanted to know who would serve as a high priest? They would have wanted to know how this New Covenant would be superior without a high priest.

This is exactly why we have the section that is before us. Keep in mind that as these Hebrews stepped from the Old Covenant to Christianity everything they were accustomed to under the Old covenant had come to a sudden stop. There was no longer a need for a sacrificial system. There was no longer a need to have a "man" serve as high priest to continually offer sacrifices on their part. That was all behind them now. Jesus Christ was now their Great High Priest. He had made the greatest sacrifice of all by giving His life as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. When He died God tore the veil from top to bottom. That veil represented the sin barrier between man and God. The death of Jesus Christ had now made a Way into the presence of God. Therefore as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ they could come "boldly/confidently" unto the throne of God to receive mercy and grace in their times of need.

Notice Hebrews 4:16

Therefore, with Jesus death on the cross He did what all the priests of the Old Testament could not do. He opened the way for man to come into the presence of God.

So the Hebrews understood that the key to the Old Covenant was the high priest. Now if Jesus Christ had the title "The Great High Priest" then the Hebrews would have wanted to know how Jesus could possibly qualify to be "the" High Priest. They could have pointed out that He was not of the tribe of Levi, and He had no formal training. In their minds they would have struggled to see Jesus as the Great High Priest.

This now brings us to the longest section of the book of Hebrews in which the writer will show how Jesus qualifies to be our Great High Priest.

i. The Qualifications of the High Priest.

As we approach Hebrews 5:1-4 the writer is going to take us back into the Old Testament to show us the qualifications of the high priest under the Old Covenant. He will then present Jesus Christ and show how He meets every one of the qualifications.

1. He was appointed by God.

Notice Hebrews 5:1a

Here we see that every man who served in the Aaronic Priesthood had to be "ordained" by God. Let me show you how Vines defines the word "ordained".

"to appoint a person to a position". In this sense the verb is often translated "to make" or "to set," in appointing a person to a place of authority...

This means that a man could ONLY be a high priest under the Old Covenant if he was **appointed**, **set** in the position, or **made** a high priest by God. No man could say, "I have decided I want to be a high priest", and then step into the position. No man was voted into the position by his fellow Israelites.

This was a position that was highly guarded by God and when someone attempted to step into the position of high priest the consequences were severe. Let me show you a situation where people who were NOT appointed by God attempted to do the service of the high priest.

Numbers 16:1-3

Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men:

² And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown:

³ And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?

Now let me show you what these men really desired.

Numbers 16:8-10

⁸ And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi:

⁹ Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?

*¹⁰ And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: **and seek ye the priesthood also?***

Korah and his followers sought to be priests but they were not APPOINTED by God.

Now let me show you the challenge.

Numbers 16:16-19

¹⁶ And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the LORD, thou, and they, and Aaron, to morrow:

¹⁷ *And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censer.*

¹⁸ *And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron.*

¹⁹ *And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation.*

Moses was saying to them, "Since you desire the office of the high priest gather your censers and perform the highest function of the high priest which is to offer incense." Now let us see the consequences.

Numbers 16:22-33

³² *And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods.*

³³ *They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.*

That day they all died therefore we can see that the office of high priest was an office that was highly guarded by God. If a man was not appointed he did not qualify.

Notice Hebrews 5:1 again.

There is something else here that we need to see. The writer tells us that every high priest was taken from "among men". That means the high priest had to be a man. This statement seems to just be a casual statement by the writer. But this statement is very important. Let me remind you that one of the "stumbling blocks" for the Jews was the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In other words they had a difficult time with the fact that God became a Man. They struggled with the Truth that Jesus was God in the flesh.

John 5:18

¹⁸ *Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*

The point which many of the Jews missed was that Jesus was God in the flesh and that God had to take upon Himself a human body in order to qualify to be our Sacrificial Substitute. God had to become a Man in order to die for men. He had to take upon Himself the nature of man in order to be the sacrifice for man. This Truth is what is known as "The Mystery of the Cross". Man had sinned against God and God required that all sin had to be paid for. God also required that in order for sin to be paid for a sinless sacrifice

must die and the sacrifice would need to be of the same nature or in other words the sacrifice would need to be a man. But no ordinary man qualified because we are all born into sin and God required sinless perfection in the sacrifice. The only ONE who would qualify would be God Himself but God is a Spirit and a spirit cannot die. You see death takes place when the BODY is separated from the SPIRIT. Therefore a spirit cannot die. So God took upon Himself a human body known as Jesus Christ so that He could come here and die for our sins.

Now because Jesus was a Man He therefore qualified to be our Great High Priest. So here in Hebrews 5:1 the writer, in a subtle way, points out that the high priest had to be of the human race.

Notice Hebrews 5:1 again.

This verse tells us that the high priest was taken from among men, he was ordained by God and the verse tells us he was ordained FOR MEN. I just want to remind us that the high priest was the man who represented man to God. He was the man who went to God on behalf of man and he interceded on behalf of people of Israel. This pictures the very service of our Lord on behalf of us.

Hebrews 7:24-27

²⁴ *But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.*

²⁵ *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.*

²⁶ *For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;*

²⁷ *Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.*

Jesus intercedes for us on a daily basis thus fulfilling the office of our Great High Priest. We will come back to the end of verse 1 as we move through this section.

Now let us notice the next qualification of the high priest.

2. **He had to be able to feel compassion for those he sacrificed for.**

Notice Hebrews 5:2

I want you to see how Vines defines the word "*compassion*" here because this will help us.

"to treat with mildness, or moderation, to bear gently with". The idea is that of not being unduly disturbed by the faults and ignorance of others;

Now let me explain what this means. The high priest was a man who was to be able to have compassion upon those who were facing difficulties in their lives. In other words he was NOT to be a man who was critical of the people NOR was he to be a man who really did not care what someone was going through. He was to be a man who could feel the pain and the hurt of the people and at the same time be someone who provided stability for them in the midst of the storms. Back to Vines definition, he had to be able to "GENTLY BEAR" the burdens and the faults of those whom he ministered for.

I need to take a moment and apply this to our Great High Priest Jesus Christ. The word "**compassion**" here in 5:2 now causes Hebrews 2:17-18 to take on an entirely different thought.

Hebrews 2:17-18

¹⁷ Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

¹⁸ For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Jesus is so tenderhearted toward you and I that when we fall to temptation He does not criticize us but He instead comes to our aid to restore us. That is a Merciful High Priest. We see this in action with Jesus and Peter.

Luke 22:31-32

³¹ And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

*³² But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art **converted**, strengthen thy brethren.*

The word "converted" means "to turn around".

Matthew 26:73-74

⁷³ And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.

⁷⁴ Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

Luke 22:61

⁶¹ *And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.*

Matthew 26:75

⁷⁵ *And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.*

Peter was broken because of his sin. Now let me show you what happened after the resurrection. Now notice the words of the 2 Emmaus disciples.

Luke 24:33-34

³³ *And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,*

³⁴ *Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and **hath appeared to Simon.***

Conclusion:

There was a private meeting between Peter and Jesus after the resurrection. It was a meeting with the Great High Priest and He restored Peter. This is our Great High Priest.