

## 10. Great High Priest forever

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While I was growing up in Seoul, South Korea almost a half century ago, I used to visit a big Catholic Cathedral due to the fascination for its Gothic architecture and curiosity toward an unknown religion. One thing I couldn't figure out was why those priests were walking around in a long skirt look alike instead of wearing a pair of pants. Obviously I was very ignorant when it came to the Catholic religion.

When someone says a word, "priest", it would not be abnormal for us to think of a Catholic priest. But if you are from a different country with a different religious background, you might think of someone in priest occupation.

The main function of a priest is representing the people to God. That's exactly what the ancient Jewish high priests and priests were supposed to do. The first high priest was Moses' brother Aaron. But as the time passed, it became a political position to satisfy their power trip and a tool of greed to fleece the worshippers of God for their own financial gain. Some of the priests became idolatry leaders by taking the Jews astray from the Lord to idol worship.

I am sure that you remember a high priest named Caiaphas who had organized the plot to kill Jesus. He was a son-in-law of Annas, who was a former high priest. Though they had the godly title "high priests" of God, they were anything but godly. Like the Italian Mafia, they were keeping their ungodly, unethical, and illegal family business going very strong in the temple until Jesus showed up in Jerusalem. No one ever had enough guts and audacity to do what Jesus did. He overturned the tables of money exchangers who were gauging the worshippers with exorbitant rates and drove out all the merchants who sold oxen, sheep, and doves out of the temple.

I am sure that there were many godly high priests in the ancient Jewish history. But all humans are fallible. But since the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have the Great High Priest who represents us to God the Father forever. The Book of Hebrews shows some special insights of the role of Jesus as the Great High Priest that other Books of the Bible do not. Let's dig in.

### A. GREAT HIGH PRIEST WHO SYMPATHIZES US

*Hebrews 4:14-16 Seeing then that 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 cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

For 33 years, our Lord Jesus walked on this earth as a human while He was still 100% God. He saw humans' temptations, struggles, and sins. He knew our weaknesses. There is no sin so great and hideous that our High Priest, Jesus has to turn His head.

Jesus did not become identical to us, but He did become identified with us. It was total identification without the loss of identity as He became one of us without ceasing to be Himself, being God. Jesus left heaven, lived our life, and died our death.

Then, someone would argue, "If Jesus was 100% God while He was a human and He was sinless, how could He possibly understand facing temptations like us? He

wouldn't know what it is like to be tempted." I truly beg to differ. Think with me, please. He would feel more temptations than us because He was sinless while we, humans, already have a built-in sin nature within us. He has been there so He knows what we go through.

The gods of the other religions detach from their people and could be careless. A good example of this is the Greek gods and goddesses. The primary attribute of their gods was "apatheia," the essential inability to feel anything at all. They had their own problems within their ranks just like the humans, so they didn't get involved with the measly human lives. But our God Jesus is different.

Ancient Jewish Rabbis taught that God had two thrones, one of mercy and one of judgment. For some reason, they could not reconcile these two attributes of God. They thought that perhaps God had two thrones to display the two aspects of His character. But here, in light of the finished work of Jesus, we see mercy and judgment reconciled into one throne of grace.

## **B. THE EARTHLY PRIESTS**

*Hebrews 5:1-4 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. 3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. 4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.*

The Lord God established both the priesthood and the office of high priest in the days of Moses according to Exodus 28. To simplify the qualification we can list them in three categories:

**1) To officiate, either directly or indirectly through lower-ranking priests, sacrifices unto the Lord.**

**2) To have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray and to minister the atoning sacrifices with a loving heart for the people.**

Ideally, the high priest was supposed to have this compassion because he understood that he himself is also subject to weakness.

**3) To be called by God**

Yes, all of the priests and high priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, but not every man from the tribe of Levi was a priest. They had to be called by God. When king Uzziah tried to enter the temple and burn incense, which was a part of a priest's job description, God struck him with leprosy according to 2 Chronicles 26.

Speaking of a call of God, there are some people who put Bible college degrees and seminary degrees over a call of God for a man of God to become a pastor. Without a call of God, that man will have an extremely miserable job.

In 14 years as a pastor, I've met a few men who showed off their academic credentials within 10 minutes of the first greeting. I don't know if they thought that I would be impressed. I know a person in our congregation who has three degrees, including a seminary degree, but I didn't know that he had it for a long time. I respect him for his humility.

A seminary degree or an ordination does not mean anything unless a man has a call of God. Look at the disciples of Jesus Christ. If you had a chance to see them before they were called by Jesus to follow Him, you'd thought that they were a bunch of criminals. The only person who had a semi-intelligent mind was Judas. That's why they let him carried the money bag which he stole money out of it for his own. With these humanly unqualified people, the Lord turned the world right side up.

### **C. THE HEAVENLY HIGH PRIEST**

*Hebrews 5:5-10 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." 6 As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek"; 7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, 10 called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"*

The very existence of a priesthood and a system of sacrifices are the evidence of estrangement between God and man. As an act of grace from God, He instituted a human bridge – the whole Levitical system until the Lord Himself became the Great High Priest. Today this system is fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus. He is both the perfect once-and-for-all atoning sacrifice and the High Priest who minister to God's people.

In v5, the author of the Book of Hebrews was quoting Psalm 2:7. Now, the English word 'begotten' gives one definition of "of men who fathered children". The cults, like Jehovah's Witness and Mormons would love to use the English definition to prove their wrong theology that Jesus was created by God or Jehovah. But it is nothing more than a fault of a limited English definition that could not properly translate the original Greek word "gennao". In the original Greek definition, you find two:

- 1) Of men who fathered children, to be born
- 2) Cause to arise

When the author was quoting a verse from Psalm 2, "Today I have begotten You", this does not refer to Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, rather His glorious resurrection from the dead.

Before you start to make an objection, hear me, please. If you keep everything in context, and you should, Jesus couldn't be a High Priest while He was alive, because His physical lineage was from the tribe of Judah as a descendant of king David. No one from the tribe of Judah could be a priest, let alone a high priest.

But this 'begotten' refers to His resurrection and ascension to heaven in a glorified body to become our High Priest at the throne of Grace. When Aaron was ordained to the priesthood, he first offered the sacrifices of animals that only covered his sin until his next sacrifice. However, Jesus our Lord, to become our High Priest, offered the sinless sacrifice of Himself and then arose from the dead.

In v6 and v10, we find a person whose name we would have a hard time pronouncing and spelling it – Melchizedek. I'd like to save the study of Melchizedek for the time when we get to chapter 7. So let's skip him for now.

Let's go back to v7:

*Hebrews 5:7-9 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*

Do you recall the location where Jesus cried out to the Father in heaven? At the Garden of Gethsemane. According to the Book of Matthew chapter 26, Jesus asked the Father the cup to be taken from Him, but Father's will to be done.

*Matthew 26:39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."*

We have a question in our heart about Jesus learning obedience by the things which He suffered. How can a perfect God, Jesus, who knows all things learn about obedience? The deity of Jesus doesn't need to learn, but the humanity of Jesus had to. We must remember that our Lord, in His earthly walk, lived by faith in the Father's will. As the God-Man in human flesh, He had to learn what was involved in obedience. By doing so, He identified with us.

I asked y'all to underline "save Him from death" in v7. He was not asking the Father to dispatch a group of the Pararescue angels to come and rescue him from the death on the cross, rather He was praying for His resurrection from the dead which the Father answered.

Men have suffered and will continually suffer for our own sin nature, but Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the whole world. The Bible never teaches that strong faith will keep a Christian from all suffering. Christians are appointed to afflictions and sufferings, so that we may become more like Jesus, less like ourselves. Our present suffering is the prelude to glorification from death to eternal life in heaven.

Listen up, folks. No matter what kind of trials we are facing, our Lord Jesus is able to understand our needs and help us. That doesn't mean that He bails us out of each and every difficulty. Sometimes He does, but in many cases, He doesn't. However, He is right there with us. Never, ever doubt that He cannot understand our situations and raging emotions within us. He is able to sympathize with us and He strengthens us.

Our Lord Jesus is the Author of eternal salvation. No OT priest ever could offer salvation to anyone, because they themselves were sinners. The phrase "having been perfected" in v9 does not mean that Jesus had to become perfected. He has been perfect before the beginning, because He is God. So, what does it mean? The Greek word of 'perfected' is "teleioo" and its definition is "completed, finished". Now your mind is running to the last statement Jesus made on the cross from John 19:30: "It is finished." As a sentence, it is "tetelestai", but the single word 'finish' is "teleo." His work for our salvation was done, finished, and completed with His resurrection

#### **D. APPLICATION**

We have our heavenly Great High Priest who knows all things, including our weaknesses. We can come to Him directly without fear. No human can forgive us of our sins on behalf of Him.