

The Book of Hebrews

Lesson 5: A High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek -- Hebrews 5:1-14

There is a particular comfort in being understood by someone who has been where you are. The new mother in the middle of the night does not want a lecture on parenting from someone who has never lost sleep. She wants the friend who whispers, I remember those nights, you are going to make it. The recovering addict does not want advice from across a comfortable distance. He wants the person who has walked the same hard road and come out the other side. We trust people who have suffered what we suffer. And the writer of Hebrews tells us that this is exactly the kind of high priest we have.

He begins by describing what a high priest is for. Every high priest is chosen from among men to act on their behalf in things pertaining to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. And because he himself is weak, he can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward. The priest stands in the gap, one hand reaching up to God and one hand reaching down to people, and he can be tender because he knows weakness from the inside. No one takes this honor for himself; he is called by God, as Aaron was. The priesthood is not a career a man chooses. It is a calling God gives.

Then the writer says something breathtaking about Jesus. He did not exalt Himself to become high priest, but was appointed by the Father, who said, You are my Son, and, You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. And here is the part that should melt us: in the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and pleas, with loud cries and tears, to the One who was able to save Him from death. Picture that. The Son of God on His knees in Gethsemane, sweating, weeping, crying out. He learned obedience through what He suffered. Our high priest did not float above the pain of the world. He went down into the deepest part of it, and there He was made perfect, the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

The chapter ends on a more uncomfortable note, and we should not skip it. The writer wants to say more about this priesthood of Melchizedek, but he stops, because his readers have become dull of hearing. By this time they ought to be teachers, he says, but they still need someone to teach them the basics. They need milk, not solid food. It is a loving rebuke, the kind a coach gives a player with real potential who has stopped pushing himself. Spiritual maturity is not automatic. It comes through practice, through training the senses to discern good from evil. The question this chapter leaves with us is gentle but searching: are we still growing, or have we quietly settled?

Group Discussion: The writer says Jesus, though He was the Son, learned obedience through what He suffered, and was made perfect through it. What do you think it means that the sinless Son of God learned obedience, and why does it matter that our Savior suffered as He did?

Personal Reflection: The writer worried that his readers had become dull of hearing and had stopped growing. Where in your own walk with God have you settled for milk when you could be growing into solid food?

Read Hebrews 5:1-14

Study Questions

1. In verses 1 through 4 the writer describes what an Old Testament high priest was and did, chosen from among men, able to deal gently because of his own weakness, and called by God rather than self-appointed. What does this teach about the role and qualifications of a high priest?
2. The passage emphasizes that a true high priest can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward because he knows weakness himself. How does it comfort you to know that Jesus deals gently with you in your weakness, and where do you most need His gentleness right now?
3. Verses 5 and 6 say that Christ did not exalt Himself to be a high priest but was appointed by the Father, who declared Him a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. What does this teach about how Jesus came to be our high priest and why that matters?
4. Jesus did not grasp at honor but received His calling from the Father in humility. Where in your life are you tempted to exalt yourself or grasp for recognition, and what would it look like to receive your place from God instead?
5. Verses 7 and 8 describe Jesus offering up prayers with loud cries and tears, and say that although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. What does this teach about the reality of Jesus' suffering and what He accomplished through it?
6. Consider Jesus in Gethsemane, crying out to God yet submitting to His will. When you face suffering or a hard obedience, what can you learn from the way Jesus prayed and surrendered?
7. Verse 9 says that having been made perfect, Jesus became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. What does this teach about the connection between salvation and obedience, and how does it fit with salvation being a gift of grace?
8. The writer says his readers had become dull of hearing and sluggish. What are the warning signs of spiritual dullness in a believer's life, and which of them do you recognize in yourself?
9. Verses 5, 6, and 10 declare that Jesus is a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, appointed by God Himself, unlike the temporary Levitical priests who died and were replaced. Why is it significant that Jesus holds a different and permanent kind of priesthood, and what does this begin to teach about Christ replacing the old priestly system entirely?
10. Look back across the whole chapter. The writer holds together the tender high priest who suffered for us and the call to grow up into maturity. Name one specific way you will draw on the gentleness of Christ and one specific way you will press on toward maturity this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Luke 22:39–44, Jesus in Gethsemane praying with anguish and surrender; Philippians 2:8, the Son becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross; 1 Peter 2:1–3, longing for the pure milk of the word so that you may grow up; 1 Corinthians 3:1–3, the

rebuke of remaining spiritual infants; Ephesians 4:11-16, growing up into maturity, into the fullness of Christ.