

**Sermon Notes & References**

**“Qualifications of a Priest”**

**Hebrews 5:1-4**

**June 8, 2014**

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<sup>A</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4, Hebrews 2:17, 3:1, 4:14-15

<sup>B</sup> 1 Samuel 1:17

<sup>C</sup> Leviticus 5:17-18, 6:1-3, 9:7, 16:6, 16:15

A. Introduction

1. What Is a Priest?

- a. depending upon your background you may have quite different answers to that question
- b. We have the children of a couple of Egyptian families that attend our Awana and their mothers often stay to listen to the Bible teaching. They persist in calling me ‘father’ and referring to me as the priest because that is the term for a minister or pastor in their church
- c. If you are brought up Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, or Anglican you might also use the term priest for the pastor
- d. one reason for the use of that term is that in some of these churches the observance of the Lord’s supper is considered to be a “bloodless sacrifice” and the priest as conducting that sacrifice
- e. another reason is that the priest is understood to be a mediator to whom confession is made, and through whom forgiveness is given:
  - (A) the boys used to gather at one of the parks because it was a great place to play all sorts of sports on an unorganised (some might say, ‘disorganised’) basis – baseball, hockey, basketball
  - (B) when they took a rest from playing, just to gather – perched on benches or bicycles or whatever – and to talk about all the things that boys talk about: sports, cars, perhaps girls; and religion
  - (C) the Catholic church was kitty corner across from the park and the priest there got to know this group of boys and talk to them
  - (D) one day, coming along, he addressed one of the boys by name and said, ‘I didn’t see you at confession.’
  - (E) ‘No father,’ replied the boy, ‘and I don’t think I’m coming.’
  - (F) ‘Why’s that,’ asked the priest.
  - (G) ‘Well,’ said this absentee, ‘the guys have been telling me that I don’t have to confess my sins to you; I can confess them right to God and He will forgive me.’
  - (H) The priest thought for a moment and before leaving said, ‘If you believe that is what you can do.’ – in other words, that while he acted as a mediator, there was no reason to stop a person going directly to God and finding forgiveness. —{2}.

f. but all these are examples in the Christian tradition;

## 2. What Is a Priest to A Jew?

a. let us remember that this book of Hebrews,

(A) both on account of the predominance of Jews in the NT church

(B) and as shown by the subject and arguments it uses

(C) was principally addressed to those who had either come out of Judaism into Christianity, or perhaps, were considering doing so

b. already, to a people whose confession was, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4), the writer of Hebrews has convincingly introduced the truth that God's final self-revelation to mankind has been through His Son, Jesus the Christ

c. but he has also begun to introduce another truth, which will be the subject of the next several chapters, that Jesus is also their High Priest

d. this was radical

(A) for the past 1500 years the requirements and process for being a priest had been closely defined

(B) foreign – and sometimes national – rulers over the past 200 years had sought to interfere with those but not without raising a strong opposition and anger from faithful among the Jews

(C) so that in fact – because of the OT Scriptures that were in today's text and Scripture reading – many had come to the conclusion that there were to be two Messiahs – Christs – Anointed Ones

(1) the kingly Messiah descended from David

(2) the priestly Messiah descended from Aaron

e. but Hebrews has been speaking of this Son also being High Priest

(A) "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." (Hebrews 2:17)

(B) Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; (Hebrews 3:1)

(C) "14 Therefore, since 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 One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:14-15)

- f. how can this descendant of David – of the tribe of Judah – qualify as a priest, when God has established that priests were to be Aaron’s descendants – of the tribe of Levi?
- g. to answer this, the writer of Hebrews first answers the question

B. What Qualified Jewish Priests? . . . . . 5:1-4

1. Qualifications Summary (v 1)

- a. "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;"
- b. their humanity
  - (A) this first qualification is perhaps so obvious that one might feel that it need not be stated – ‘taken out of mankind’ (Lit.)
  - (B) angels are, perhaps, the most powerful of all of God’s creations – yet the role and work of being a priest is beyond their ability
  - (C) those words ‘on behalf of men’ or ‘mankind’ which are further used to define the priest’s responsibility, shows that those duties are such that only a human is capable of devotedly carrying them out
- c. their appointment
  - (A) is from outside of themselves: it is not a profession that they were to choose for themselves
  - (B) their being taken, is an act of selection; their appointment, an act of God, as becomes evident in verse 4
  - (C) there is no place in this appointment of what took place in the upper middle class in Britain in the 19th century, where the first son went into the military, the second into law or medicine, and the third into the church, not a very spiritual selection of vocation
- d. their responsibilities
  - (A) in this verse there are two phrases introduced by the Greek word from which we get our English prefix, hyper, meaning ‘over’
  - (B) the priest is ‘over men’ and ‘over sin’ and the word in both cases indicates their having not so much

jurisdiction over, but a duty over that particular aspect

- (C) the first is that the priest is appointed 'over men to the things pertaining to God' – representing God to mankind: declaring the will of God unto man, giving the blessing of God to mankind, communicating God to man. In this respect, I can point out Hannah, that after explaining her prayer to Eli, received his authoritative blessing "Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him." (1 Samuel 1:17), which event proved to be the case.
  - (D) the second is the priest is appointed 'over sins to offer gifts and sacrifices' – representing mankind to God, both collectively as a nation and individually, bearing man's offerings into God's presence in order to deal with their sin
- e. to each of these qualifications, the verses now speak

## 2. Humanity (v 2)

- a. "he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness;"
- b. those words, 'deal gently' really reflect the ideal parent's treatment of their child; not over-indulgent on the one hand, nor over-harsh on the other, but rather steering the moderate middle course between them
- c. what equips the priest for this is the fact of his own human weakness
- d. that he knows how difficult it is to live a life pleasing to God, how easy to do some wrong or to neglect to do what is right
- e. so that he can mediate for such sin before God, as in the next verse

## 3. Responsibility (v 3)

- a. "and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself."
- b. for such who are unknowing and who wander from the path, he is to offer up their sacrifices for the forgiveness of their sins
- c. one can just be unaware and thus sin: "Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment. He is then to bring to the priest a (an offering) ... " (Leviticus 5:17-18)
- d. or he can sin in rashness of self-interest: "When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the Lord, and

deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him, or through robbery, or if he has extorted from his companion, or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do ..." (Leviticus 6:1-3), he is to make an offering and restitution for forgiveness

e. but all this while, it was necessary for those OT priests to recognize their own sinfulness, and so it was necessary that they offer up sacrifices on their own behalf:

(A) "Moses then said to Aaron, 'Come near to the altar and offer your sin offering and your burnt offering, that you may make atonement for yourself and for the people; then make the offering for the people, that you may make atonement for them, just as the Lord has commanded.'" (Leviticus 9:7)

(B) and, on the day of atonement every fall: "Then Aaron shall offer the bull for the sin offering which is for himself, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household." (Leviticus 16:6)

(C) and only "Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat." (Leviticus 16:15)

(D) the first century record of the high priest is that: "he put both his hands upon the bullock, and confessed, and thus he said: I beseech thee, O Lord, I have done wickedly, I have transgressed, I have sinned before thee, I and my house; I beseech thee, O Lord, pardon the iniquities, transgressions, and sins, which I have done wickedly, transgressed, and sinned before thee, I and my house." —<sup>{3}</sup>.

f. so the high priest had the responsibility of seeking forgiveness by means of sacrifice, for himself, his family, others and the nation

#### 4. Appointment (v 4)

a. "And no one takes the honour to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was."

b. the honour being spoken of here was that of being a priest, and specifically the high priest

c. office of an overseer or bishop in the church in the NT was one to which a person might aspire (1 Timothy 3:1), but that was not the case in the office of a priest, as some incidents show

(A) Korah, a Levite but not a priest, claimed with others the right to carry out the priestly services: the

earth opened up and swallowed him up, and heavenly fire destroyed his followers

- (B) Saul, impatient for Samuel's arrival, offered up burnt offerings: and Saul's kingdom would not therefore endure
- (C) Uzziah, overcome with pride, entered into the temple and he was turned into a leper, banished from the temple, and surrendering his kingdom to his son
- d. no, the office of the priest required the specific calling an appointment from God, and, more specifically being descended from Aaron to whom the office was first given
  - (A) indeed, up until the appointment of Aaron, the priestly functions within the nation of Israel, were carried on by the first-born of the family – by which, perhaps, we are meant to understand the clan, i.e., the extended family unit
  - (B) this we understand from there being priests in Israel in Exodus 19 which was even before the giving of the law, and the fact that in lieu of these first-born the Levites were taken as a tribe to be the appointed servants of God

C. Did Christ Qualify? . . . . . 5:5-10

1. The Qualifications of Christ

- a. now, to do justice to the next six verses, it is my intention to come back to them next Lord's Day, to see that Jesus Christ was indeed rightly qualified to be our High Priest, even though he was not a descendant of Aaron, and never offered the temple sacrifices
- b. next week we shall examine, Lord willing, more closely the matter of His appointment, humanity and carrying out of His duties
- c. but let us take a moment to consider some of what has already been said in those verses we read that come earlier in Hebrews; look at
- d. 2:17 – "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."
  - (A) we see in this verse evidences of His appointment and duties
    - (1) He was assigned the responsibility 'in things pertaining to God' which is the God to man aspect of priestly responsibility
    - (2) He was 'to make propitiation for the sins of the people' which is the man to God aspect of

priestly responsibility

- (B) of His humanity
  - (1) He was made human for the purpose of being High Priest
  - (2) that He be merciful and faithful – one gentle to sinners
- e. 3:1 – *Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;*
  - (A) if He be the object of our confession as Apostle – the One sent from God – then He is likewise and at the same time established as our High Priest, also the object of our confession
  - (B) you cannot accept Him as one and not the other
- f. 4:14-15 – *Therefore, since 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 One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”*
  - (A) the passing of Jesus into heaven and acceptance there – into the reality of which the high priest entering the earthly temple was but a type and illustration – is at the same time His ordination as our High Priest by the Majesty on High
  - (B) His humanity – His understanding of our nature – means that more than any son of Aaron, He can deal with us gently when we come to Him for forgiveness from our sin
  - (C) (and because He is without sin) His sacrifice on our behalf is infinitely better than every sacrifice that was ever made in the OT

## 2. The Application of This Truth

- a. If the Jewish high priest, selected and appointed by God, needed to offer up a sacrifice first for his own sin, how much more do we! And Jesus Christ is able to perfectly meet that need for us:

There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus–

No, not one! no, not one!

None else could heal all our soul's diseases–

No, not one! no, not one!



Did ever saint find this friend forsake Him?

No, not one! no, not one!

Or sinner find that He would not take Him?

No, not one! no, not one!

Jesus knows all about our struggles,

He will guide till the day is done;

There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus—

No, not one! no, not one! <sup>-{4}</sup>.

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|------|--|
| ASV  | American Standard Version of 1901  |
| AV   | Authorized (King James) Version of 1769  |
| NAS  | New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition) |
| NIV  | New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society                          |
| NKJV | New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers                                 |
| WEY  | The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth                               |

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

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| Barnes – | <i>Notes on the New Testament, et alia</i> , by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh  |
| BM –     | <i>Biblical Museum</i> , Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870   |
| EBC –    | <i>The Expositor’s Bible Commentary</i> , © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan<br><i>Hebrews</i> , by Leon Morris               |
| EGT –    | <i>The Expositor’s Greek Testament</i> , Hodder & Stoughton<br><i>Hebrews</i> , by Marcus Dods   |
| Gill –   | <i>Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament</i> , by John Gill, D.D.   |
| Kerux –  | The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, <a href="http://www.holwick.com">www.holwick.com</a> . |
| NICNT –  | <i>The New International Commentary on the New Testament</i><br><i>The Epistle to the Hebrew</i> , by F. F. Bruce                          |
| RWP –    | <i>Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament</i> , by Dr. A. T. Robertson   |
| TYN –    | <i>The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</i><br><i>Hebrews</i> , by Donald Guthrie  |

2. A memory from his childhood by a long-time friend.
3. Misna Yama quoted in Gill *in loc*.
4. ‘No, Not One!’ by Johnson Oatman, Jr (1856-1922)