

## The Better Priest Hebrews 5:1-10

### **Slide 1**

As Christmas is quickly approaching, the gifts of the wise men remind us that Jesus is the better Prophet, Priest, King, and Sacrifice. Today, I'm going to focus on what it means for Jesus to be our better Priest.

When you hear the word priest, some people will point out that the Catholic and Episcopal Churches have priests. They say it's just another word for preacher.

God set up a system for priests as He formed the nation of Israel. Moses's brother Aaron and his descendants were set apart to act on behalf of men to come into the presence of God to worship.

The priest was needed to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin, first for themselves, then for the rest of the community.

It was expected that the priest would be the one to help the ignorant and wayward because they'd be able to handle the difficult people with gentleness.

As the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches formed their leadership structure, they chose to continue this idea that the common person needed someone to go to God on their behalf.

This separation of priests from the common person created a power system within these churches that God never intended. However, Peter tells us that all believers now have the status of being priests.

1 Peter 2:4-5 and 9, *“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*

## **Slide 2**

So why does Jesus fill this role better? The key reason is because He never sinned. He doesn’t have to make sacrifices on His own behalf in order to serve mankind.

He’s the best example we have of how to focus on the needs of people. Think about how He responded to people.

Those who were often looked at as outcasts and sinners, Jesus treated with compassion and respect. This allowed Him to challenge them to turn to God.

It was those who thought they had it all together that Jesus dealt with harshly when needed.

Of course, Jesus offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for all sin, therefore we no longer have to offer sacrifices to God.

Because of how Jesus filled the role of priest, we’re able to come directly to God and ask forgiveness for our sins.

Hebrews 5:4-6, *“And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was. In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” And he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”*

Did you catch how the author of Hebrews points to Aaron as the example of how one qualifies to be a priest. One of the first qualifications to be a priest is to be called by God.

For Aaron, that happened as God directly instructed Moses to appoint Aaron to be the first high priest.

Other qualifications to be a Jewish priest, beside a calling, included being a male descendant in the tribe of Levi, and to be the high priest you had to be able to trace your ancestors back to Aaron.

Priests could only serve in their role between the ages of 30-50 and had to demonstrate that they had a godly marriage and family.

Spiritually, they had to be careful not to allow themselves to become unclean by what came into their presence.

Physically, their bodies had to have no blemishes since scars, missing body parts, or other wounds would disqualify them from service. In addition, they had to maintain a proper beard and head of hair.

While men would choose the next priests based on these qualifications, God Himself called Jesus to the priesthood.

The author of Hebrews quotes two verses from Psalms to show that God Himself called Jesus to be high priest.

*Psalm 2:7, "I will proclaim the Lord's decree: He said to me, "You are my son; today I have become your father."*

This verse shows us that Jesus isn't only a priest like others who have come before Him, He is God's Son.

*Psalm 110:4, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."*

This verse helps us to see that Jesus isn't simply a priest like the Jewish priests. He comes from a higher order, an eternal priesthood, like that of Melchizedek.

I believe the reason that God gave the physical and spiritual conditions for priests that He did was because He doesn't allow sin to enter His presence.

Notice how similar these conditions are to those of the Passover lamb. That lamb could have no blemishes; it had to be physically perfect and prepared in a specific way so that it remained spiritually clean.

To accomplish this, other priests had to offer sacrifices to cover their own sins, but Jesus was already perfect. He was already clean. He was already fully qualified to fulfill His duties.

Jesus qualifies as the better priest.

### **Slide 3**

Jesus also fills the perfection of priest better.

*Hebrews 5:7-10, "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. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek."*

I've mentioned this a couple times already, but the Jewish priests had to sacrifice on behalf of themselves before they could sacrifice for others because they were imperfect. They were human. They had sin in their lives.

Being both fully God and fully man, only Jesus was able to live life perfectly, making Him the perfect priest.

Since priests were chosen from among men, God chose to draw from a higher order of priest, the order of Melchizedek. Now, we don't know much about Melchizedek. In fact, his entire story is contained in only four verses.

*Genesis 14:17-20, "After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."*

Abraham's nephew, Lot, had been taken captive during a battle involving nine kings. When Abraham found out, he gathered his men and defeated Lot's captors.

Upon his return, he's not only met by the king of Sodom, who desired to get his people back, but Melchizedek, who's identified not only as the king of Salem but also as priest of God Most High.

This Melchizedek preceded the Jewish priests, in fact he's the first priest mentioned in the Bible.

He was also the king of Salem, which is interesting because David eventually conquers Salem and renames it Jerusalem, where the temple of the Most High God would be built.

I believe God included Melchizedek here as a reminder that He is God of ALL people, not just the Jews.

Paul also talks about the fact that God has revealed Himself to all people in Romans 1:18-20.

*“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”*

No one has an excuse for not knowing God and His desire for people to have a relationship with Him.

#### **Slide 4**

Now, Melchizedek is a “type” of Christ. A type means something that points towards something else in the future.

Like Abraham willing to sacrifice his son is a type of God giving Jesus to die on the cross. Melchizedek, serving as a priest of the God Most High, is a type of Jesus as our high priest today.

Notice some of the similarities: Neither Melchizedek nor Jesus was appointed by people. When Melchizedek came to meet Abraham, what did he bring? Bread and wine.

When Jesus was preparing for his crucifixion, what did He give the disciples to use to remember the sacrifice He was about to make? Bread and wine.

Hebrews 5:7-10, that I read earlier, outlines this idea of how Jesus became the perfect High Priest.

Verse 7 tells us how, in His humanity, Jesus offered up prayers on our behalf and describes the pain He felt on our behalf. John 17 gives us the details of this prayer that took place in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Knowing what He was about to suffer, Jesus began praying that He would have the strength to carry it out for the glory of God.

He prayed for His disciples, knowing the trials they would face as they established the church. He prayed that they would have the strength they would need to carry out their mission in the face of persecution.

He prayed for future believers, that includes us, that we would have the strength to push for unity in our faith. Luke described the pain mentioned by the author of Hebrews in Luke 22:42-44.

Jesus prayed for an alternate solution to the sin problem but submitted Himself to God's will, *"you can take this cup from me, but not my will but Yours be done."*

God sent an angel to comfort Him, but as Jesus continues to pray Luke describes how the anguish He was going through caused His sweat to appear as drops of blood. That's some intense praying on our behalf.

Verse 8 goes on to tell us how Jesus went on to learn obedience through suffering.

Now, this wasn't just some *"my friends won't stop picking on me"* kind of suffering. The Gospels tell how Jesus was tortured and beaten so badly He couldn't be recognized.

Verse 9 tells us that Jesus became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him and John 19:30 describes that moment.

When the time came for Jesus to surrender His life, He declared it is finished, and breathed His last breath. But we know His story doesn't end there.

They buried Him in a tomb and God raised Jesus back to life three days later. Death was conquered and sin was defeated. Jesus was the perfection of priesthood.

Verse 10 declares that Jesus is a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. We see no human origin for either in their priesthood.

That's what separates them both, placing them above all other priests who have served on this planet. Therefore, Jesus fills the perfection of priesthood better.

So, what does this mean for us?

*Hebrews 10:19-25, "Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*

This passage tells us that Jesus has opened the way through the curtain to enter the Holy of Holies. What is this talking about?

When God first instructed Israel how to build the tabernacle and later the temple, He had them build a structure in which there were two main rooms- the Holy Place and the Holiest of Holies.

All priests could enter the Holy Place as a part of their service, but a curtain separated it from the Holiest of Holies.

Only the High Priest could enter through the curtain into the Holiest of Holies, and then only once each year.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell about how, when Jesus died, there was a great earthquake and the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Holiest of Holies was torn from top to bottom.

I believe they made sure to point out it was from top to bottom to make it very clear that this was an act of God, removing man's barrier to approach Him.

## **Slide 5**

### Conclusion

When Jesus fulfilled His duties as priest, He opened the way for all of us to approach God and serve Him as priests. So, what does that look like?

First, we can come to God with confidence. Accepting that Jesus, as our Lord and Savior, has washed our sins away, we no longer must conduct sacrifices in the Old Testament way to gain God's acceptance.

Instead, as it says in Romans 12:1, "*offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.*" Do all that you are going to do as an act of worship to God.

Next, we can hold on to our hope. We live in a world that's doing its best to make it more difficult to live a life of faith.

So many people want to drag believers down. They'd rather hold on to their sin than surrender their life to Jesus. Therefore, hold on to your hope.

Then we can look for ways to encourage each other to love and do good works. Our world has twisted what it means to show love. The world's love demands that you simply live and let live.

God shows us, through His love, that we don't simply let those around us fall down in their poor choices.

We encourage them to do the right thing, we hold each other accountable, and we seek ways to point people toward God through our good works.

Let's encourage each other to do good works so that when people see it, they praise God.

Finally, we must continue to meet together so we can serve one another. The author of Hebrews points out that some have gotten in the habit of missing the gatherings.

We're not told why they stopped attending, only that they did. Our church, and many others, struggled with this problem during the COVID pandemic.

Many people got used to the idea of staying home, some of them watched the service online, while others decided they didn't miss gathering for worship as much as they may have thought they would.

How can we encourage these brothers and sisters to return? Who do you need to talk with to let them know we love and miss them.

Let's be the priests we're called to be as we follow our High Priest, Jesus Christ, because He is the better priest.