

A Perfect High Priest

Leviticus 8:1-10:20, Hebrews 4:14-16, Hebrews 5:1-10, Hebrews 7:23-28

Slide 1

Have you ever been in a situation where you needed someone to step in on your behalf? Maybe you found yourself in a legal mess and needed a lawyer who knew the system.

Maybe you were traveling in a foreign country, struggling with the language, and needed a translator.

Or, maybe it was something simpler, like finding yourself in a conversation where everyone seemed to know what was going on, and you were lost... until a friend stepped in and helped you catch up.

Sometimes, no matter how hard we try, we need someone with access, knowledge, or authority we don't have.

Now, imagine needing access, not just to a courtroom or a foreign country, but to God Himself.

Imagine standing outside the very presence of the Creator of the universe, knowing you don't belong, knowing you can't go in on your own. That was the reality for Israel.

Last week, I asked the question: How can sinful people dwell in the presence of a Holy God? The reality is that we can't.

Sin doesn't just make us imperfect; it completely separates us from God.

It breaks our relationship with Him because He's holy, and we're not. If we're ever to stand in His presence, something must be done about our sin.

That's why God established the sacrificial system—to deal with that separation.

Yet, even with the sacrifices, even with all the rituals, cleansings, and ceremonies, the people still couldn't just walk into God's presence.

The tabernacle, the place where God's presence dwelt, was off-limits. The Holy of Holies, the place where God's glory rested, was behind a thick curtain, a veil of separation.

No one could enter except for one man, the High Priest, and then he could only enter once a year.

He was the mediator; the one chosen to stand before God on behalf of the people, but even he couldn't just walk in. He had to go through an elaborate process of purification.

In Leviticus 8, we see that he had to be consecrated, set apart. He had to offer sacrifices for his own sins before he could intercede for anyone else, and he could only enter beyond the veil once a year.

One man, one day each year, entering God's presence on behalf of an entire nation.

Millions of people were dependent on the actions of one flawed, sinful man standing in God's presence for just a few moments on a single day of the year.

Which brings us to a problem. The priests were just as unholy as the people. They could represent the people before God temporarily, but they could never bring the people into God's presence permanently.

Their sacrifices had to be repeated over and over because they could never truly take away sin. The entire system left a lingering question: *"If the high priest wasn't truly qualified to bring people to God, who could?"*

That's not just an Old Testament problem, that's our problem, too, because sin still separates us from God. Just like Israel, we can't fix that separation on our own.

We can't just walk into the presence of God, not in our sin. We need a mediator. We need someone who is truly holy, truly sinless, truly able to bring us near, and that's why Jesus came.

1 Timothy 2:5, *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."*

Jesus didn't just offer a sacrifice, He was the sacrifice. He didn't just serve as a priest, He is the eternal High Priest.

Because of Who He is and what He has done, our access to God is no longer temporary. If we're in Christ, we have permanent, eternal access to His presence.

That's the core truth we need to hold on to today. Jesus, our perfect High Priest, secures our place in God's presence forever.

God had given the Israelites the priesthood, a system designed so he could mediate between God and His people, but the very men chosen to represent them before God were flawed.

They were meant to stand in the gap, but they carried the same weaknesses, the same struggles, and the same sin as everyone else.

Slide 2

Before we dive into this first point, let's turn to God's Word to set the foundation. Turn to Leviticus 8, starting at verse 5. This is where God established the priesthood through Aaron and his sons.

Leviticus 8:5-12, "Moses said to the assembly, "This is what the Lord has commanded to be done." Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water. He put the tunic on Aaron, tied the sash around him, clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him.

He also fastened the ephod with a decorative waistband, which he tied around him. He placed the breastpiece on him and put the Urim and Thummim in the breastpiece. Then he placed the turban on Aaron's head and set the gold plate, the sacred emblem, on the front of it, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and everything in it, and so consecrated them. He sprinkled some of the oil on the altar seven times, anointing the altar and all its utensils and the basin with its stand, to consecrate them. He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him."

Now turn to Hebrews 5:1-4. This passage helps us understand both their role and their limitations.

Hebrews 5:1-4, "Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was."

The priesthood began with a moment of great significance. Leviticus 8 describes how Aaron and his sons were consecrated—set apart for their holy work.

They were washed with water, a symbolic cleansing. They were dressed in priestly garments, a visible sign of their role. They were anointed with oil, setting them apart for sacred service.

The altar was prepared, and sacrifices were made. Everything about this moment pointed to the seriousness and the significance of their calling, but there was one glaring reality: being set apart didn't make them sinless.

From the very beginning, we see that the priesthood was instituted by God. It wasn't something man came up with; it was God's design. It was His way of providing a mediator between Himself and His people.

But there was a problem. The priests were just as sinful as the people they represented. No matter how holy they were set apart to be, they were still weak, still flawed, and still in need of atonement themselves.

Look again at Hebrews 5:2b-3, "*...since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.*"

Did you catch that? The high priest was "*subject to weakness.*" Not just physical weakness, but spiritual weakness. Not just human frailty, but human sinfulness.

They stood before God on behalf of the people, yet they themselves needed atonement. And it didn't take long for that weakness to be exposed in a devastating way.

Leviticus 10:1-3 records a sobering event. Aaron's own sons, Nadab and Abihu, entered the Lord's presence with "*unauthorized fire.*"

They ignored God's instructions and approached God on their own terms, in an unworthy manner.

This showed contempt and dishonor for God, and because of that, fire came from the Lord and consumed them.

This was a shocking moment. Two of Israel's first priests struck down in judgment. Why? Because even priests couldn't approach God however they pleased.

Leviticus 10:3, *"Moses then said to Aaron, 'This is what the Lord spoke of when he said: 'Among those who approach me I will be proved holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.' Aaron remained silent."*

This is a sober warning for us as well. God is holy and must be treated as such.

The world loves the idea that we can approach God however we want, but the Bible's clear—there's only one way to draw near and that's through Jesus Christ.

Do you remember what Jesus told His followers in John 14:6? Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me."*

Nadab and Abihu's failure wasn't an isolated event; it was a reminder that the priests themselves were not the solution.

They were just as sinful, just as unworthy, just as in need of atonement as the people they served. That's why they were limited in their ministry.

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Regardless how faithful the priests were, they had another problem. Their work was never finished.

Leviticus 9:7-24 describes Aaron offering sacrifices for himself and the people. Fire from heaven came down and consumed the offering. The people fell on their faces in worship.

This was a powerful moment, but what happened the next day? More sacrifices, and the day after that? More sacrifices. Their ministry could never remove sin, only temporarily cover it.

Do you remember Hebrews 10:1-4 from last week? *"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming...For this reason it can never...make perfect those who draw near to worship."*

The priests were constantly standing, sacrificing, offering, and interceding because sin was never truly dealt with. The same is true today. No amount of religious effort on our part can take away our sin.

Many people still try to earn their way into God's presence by being a good person, going to church, giving their tithes and offerings, serving in areas of ministry, and trying to do all the right things.

While all of these things are good, and even necessary, we must recognize that they're not the source of our salvation. They're the result of our salvation.

The priesthood wasn't the final answer; it was a temporary system. Every sacrifice, every offering, and every priestly act pointed forward.

The entire system was designed to show our desperate need for something greater.

The people needed a greater priest. One who wouldn't just stand before God for them, but one who would bring them into God's presence forever.

That's exactly who Jesus is. Jesus, our perfect High Priest Who secures our place in God's presence forever.

We've seen the problem of earthly priests—their corruption, their weakness, and their limited ministry. Now, let's lift our eyes to something greater.

Let's turn to the One Who is everything they could never be: Jesus, our perfect High Priest.

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Jesus stands in complete contrast to every priest who came before Him and, I might add, every priest who has come after Him.

He is everything they could never be. The perfect mediator between God and man.

That's what sets Him apart. That's what makes Him our great High Priest. He understands our struggles.

Hebrews 4:14-15, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."

Jesus isn't like earthly priests. They stood outside the veil in the temple, offering sacrifices day after day. But Jesus? He has passed through the heavens.

He's not just another human priest, He's divine. He's not just standing before God, He's seated at the right hand of the Father. He's not offering the blood of bulls and goats, He offered Himself.

Now here's the beauty of it, even though He's fully God, He was also fully man, and because He was fully man, He understands us.

Hebrews 4:15 says He can "*empathize with our weaknesses.*" That means He knows what it's like to be tired.

He knows what it's like to be hungry. He knows what it's like to feel grief, loss, betrayal, or temptation.

Yet there's one key difference, He never sinned. Jesus fully entered into our struggles, but He never sinned.

Hebrews 2:17, "*For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*"

Think about that. In all things He had to be made like us. He felt the full weight of temptation, but He never gave in.

He experienced suffering, but He never turned away from the Father. He walked the same broken world we walk, but He remained holy.

Here's why this matters. This means that when we struggle, we're not alone. When we feel overwhelmed, Jesus understands.

When we feel the weight of temptation, Jesus has been there. When we suffer, Jesus knows that pain firsthand.

And, because He knows our struggles personally, He represents us perfectly before the Father. This is the kind of High Priest we have.

Not one who is distant, but one who draws near. Because He understands our struggles, He's able to do something no earthly priest could ever do.

Slide 5

Hebrews 7:23-24, *"Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood."*

This is the great contrast between the priests of the Old Testament and Jesus. The priests of Israel? They died. One after another, generation after generation. Their ministry was always temporary.

But Jesus? He continues forever. His priesthood never ends. This means He'll never be replaced. There'll never be another High Priest after Him.

Because of that, look at what verse 25 tells us: *"Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."*

Jesus is able to save forever. Earthly priests could only offer temporary atonement. Jesus offers eternal redemption. Why? Because He always lives to intercede for us.

Right now, Jesus is interceding for us. He stands before the Father on our behalf. He's our advocate, our mediator, our defender. His intercession never stops—He always lives to represent us before God.

Unlike earthly priests, Jesus' saving work is complete. The priests had to offer sacrifices daily, but Jesus offered Himself once for all. Their work was never finished, but Jesus declared, *'It is finished.'*

They stood before God temporarily, but Jesus secured our place in God's presence forever. His sacrifice was final, His intercession eternal.

Hebrews 7:26-28, *“Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.”*

The contrast couldn't be more clear. Earthly priests? Weak, sinful, and in need of atonement themselves.

Jesus? Holy, innocent, undefiled, exalted above the heavens. His sacrifice was final. His work complete.

Slide 6

Conclusion

There's nothing more to be done! If you're in Christ, your salvation is secure. If you've trusted in Jesus, your sins are fully atoned.

You don't have to wonder if you're forgiven. You are. You don't have to work to earn His approval. You already have it.

That's why the veil was torn when Jesus died. That's why we're invited to draw near. Jesus, our Perfect High Priest, has secured our access once and for all!

Hebrews 4:16, *“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*