

**Text: Heb 5.1-4**

Last week we talked about how we have a great high priest who grants us access to God. Since we have such a high priest, we are exhorted to:

1. Hold fast our confession (4.14)
2. Draw near with confidence (4.16)

The next ten verses (Heb 5.1-10) expound on the qualifications of our high priest with the “preacher’s delight,” a literary chiasm. We will talk more about this in the coming weeks, but we will look at it today so you can see how it is laid out.

Read Heb 5.1-10, text 1-4

- A The old office of high priest (5.1)
  - B The solidarity of the high priest with the people (5:2–3)
    - C The humility of the high priest (5:4)
      - C’ The humility of Christ (5:5–6)
        - B’ The solidarity of Christ with the people (5:7–8)
          - A’ The new office of high priest (5:9–10)<sup>1</sup>

We will focus on the first half of this this week, add in the second half next week, and then perhaps bring the whole thing together in another message the following week.

The first half of this teaching looks at the human priesthood that served in the Mosaic system. We aren’t under Moses, so we might think this isn’t particularly applicable to us.

But let me give you something I found in Westcott in his comments on verse 4, the end of our passage today:

“Of himself a man could not presume to take upon him such an office. He could not draw near to God being himself sinful: still less could he draw near to God to intercede for others. At the most he could only indicate in action the desire for fellowship with God.”<sup>2</sup>

A priest, at bottom, is an intercessor.

<sup>1</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 111.

<sup>2</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1903), 122–23.

No one would be so presumptuous, as a mere man, to simply come before God as a priest, an intercessor between God and man.

So we need someone else to be our priest. What would we look for in a priest if we were to have one? As we think of this question, we will gain a greater understanding of who Jesus is and what he does for us.

**Proposition:** We want a priest who can effectually bridge the gap between man and God.

## I. We want someone who can act for us (1)

### A. Our passage begins with a comparison

1. Our great high priest (4.14) enables our drawing near
2. We may draw near with confidence to receive mercy and grace find

This is what we want in a high priest

3. The next word (5.1) is “for” ... it introduces a comparison
  - a. Between “our great high priest”
  - b. And “every high priest taken from among men”

The author speaks generically, but his primary focus here is on the Aaronic ideal as the high priesthood was first established

### B. The actions of “generic high priest”

1. He is to bridge the gap between man and God “appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God”
2. He acts to bridge the gap by offering “gifts and sacrifices”
  - a. Terms have technical uses, distinguishing between kinds of OT offerings
  - b. Here, the two terms together sum up the whole OT system

This describes the priest in his “office” (as in our chiasm, “The old office of high priest”)

### C. The person of the “generic high priest”

1. Taken from among men

## 2. Appointed by God

The high priest must be human: no angel can function for men.

The high priest must be approved: only God makes the appointment.

When we think this far, we think, “so far, so good.” God appointed Aaron (implicit approval). Gap bridged; problem solved. ... or is it?

## II. We want someone who can act *as us* (2-3)

### A. The spirit of an intercessor (2)

#### 1. “Deal gently”

a. “Sympathy” used in 4.15 (“to feel with”)

b. The word here is “to feel in moderation,” or “to feel under control”

“A high priest could not make fitting expiation for sins which filled him, at that very time, with feelings of indignation and exasperation against those who were guilty of them.”<sup>3</sup>

1) Stoics valued *apatheo* – *apathy*: no emotion, just going through rituals

2) The *metriopathe* neither condemns nor is disinterested

3) The penitent has come, he needs someone to receive him and plead for him

2. Cause: mutual understanding — “he himself is also beset with weakness”

a. Weakness means all human infirmity

b. But weakness often ends in sin

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<sup>3</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 120.

## B. The need of the intercessor (3)

1. In his weakness he needs to offer for himself
2. He is like the people:

*“obligated to offer concerning sins, concerning the people, concerning himself”*

3. In particular, the Day of Atonement is in view
  - a. We talked about “generic human priest”
  - b. Ultimately, the author is thinking about Aaron, the first priest, the first Day of Atonement

**Read Lev 16.1-16**

The high priest must act as us (in our capacity as men and women before God) — he must be one of us

After the first point, “so far, so good” — but what if our human high priest doesn’t have the spirit of an intercessor?

What if God doesn’t accept the offering of the priest?

## III. We want someone who can act under God’s approval (4)

### A. The importance of God’s appointment

1. No one takes this honor (the position of priest) to himself

Without God’s approval/appointment, what good can it do?

2. Aaron was appointed by God: all others follow in that line

Recall the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 16

**Read Num 16.1-11, 16-19, 22-33**

### B. The folly of those tempted to go back to Judaism

1. All the priests from Aaron to (roughly) the Maccabees were of Aaron’s line

## 2. After the Maccabees, the priesthood became political

“With the fall of the Hasmonaean house the high priests were appointed successively by Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.), Archelaus (4 B.C.–A.D. 6), Roman governors (A.D. 6–41), and members of the Herod family (A.D. 41–66). The last high priest, Phanni, son of Samuel, was appointed by popular ballot during the war against Rome (cf. Josephus, *War* 4.155–57).”<sup>4</sup>

a. Consider the priests at the time of the crucifixion:

- 1) Annas
- 2) Caiaphas

b. Would you want these men to stand before God for you?

In many ways, the Jewish priesthood had completely failed. The Hebrew Christians would be foolish to turn from Christ to them.

### Conclusion:

Aaron was a God-appointed stop-gap. He could *approximate* the gap between man and God, but he wasn't enough.

As time went on, it became more and more apparent that his heirs were not enough. We need a better high priest.

**Proposition:** We want a priest who can effectually bridge the gap between man and God.

Heb 7.25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce, 122 n. 19.