

Hebrews 5:1-10 “The Humble High Priest”—part one**

Main Idea: In Hebrews 5:1-10 we learn about the humility of our high priest, Jesus Christ. His humility is exhibited in two ways.

I. We see the humility of our high priest in His calling (1-6).

A. Think about what is true of high priests in general (1-4).

1. They're human, yet they have access to God (1).
 - a. This privilege is received.
 - b. This privilege is for the good of others.
2. They understand human weakness (2).
3. They offer sacrifices (3).
4. They are called by God (4).

B. Think about what is true of Christ (5-6).

1. He did not glorify Himself (5a).
2. He did not initiate His priesthood (5b).
3. He received the glory of His priesthood from His Father (5c-6).
 - a. This is confirmed by Psalm 2.
 - b. This is confirmed by Psalm 110.
4. He lives in submission to His Father's will and word.
5. He will serve as a priest forever.

II. We see the humility of our high priest in His suffering (7-10).

Implications: Since we have a humble high priest...

1. We, too, ought to be known for humility.
2. We, too, ought to live in submission to God's will and word.
3. We, too, ought to use our positions to serve others for God's glory.
4. We ought not turn away from this high priest.
5. We ought not do anything that would bring dishonor to Him.

A few years ago I visited the home of a family that had been attending our church for a few months. I was actually there to pick up Keith, and we were going to play golf together (actually Keith was graciously trying to teach me to play golf, but that's another story!). Before we left for the course I went inside the house and visited with the rest of the family for a few moments, which included Keith's wife and their two young children.

The following week Keith's wife said to me, "Our son was really surprised by something when you visited the other day."

"What's that?" I asked.

"You were wearing a sweatshirt," she replied. "He'd never seen a pastor in a sweatshirt before."

I chuckled as I thought about the situation from the perspective of that seven year old boy. It made sense. Every time he had seen me (which was always on a Sunday), I was wearing a suit. I guess when he heard his pastor was playing golf with his dad, he expected me to show up wearing my pinstripe, white shirt, and tie, with a golf bag over my shoulder!

Some words just don't seem to go together. For that boy, *pastor* and *sweatshirt* didn't belong together.

I want you to give you two words right now. See if you think they belong together. Here are the words... *humble* and *high*. Those words don't seem to relate, do they? After all, James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." The Greek verb for *humble*, *tapeinos*, in its basic sense means "to be low." To be humble, this verse indicates, is to make oneself low, and it's that person whom God then *lifts up*.

Can a person be both humble and high at the same time? It's kind of like asking, can a person be both dry and wet simultaneously, or hungry and full, or rich and poor? The adjectives are opposites. *Humble* and *high* don't seem to belong together, do they? But, of course, they do belong together, and for Jesus they certainly did.

This morning we're going to begin to ponder Jesus as *the humble high priest*. That's how He is revealed in Hebrews 5. Last time, in Hebrews 4:14 we learned that Jesus is a "*great high priest*," so great that through Him we may approach God's throne with confidence to find help in time of need. But as we open our Bibles to Hebrews 5 we see that the *great high priest* is also a *humble high priest*.

What does that mean, and what is the significance of it for our lives? God's Word answers both of those questions for us, as we'll see. In Hebrews 5:1-10 we learn about the humility of our high priest, Jesus Christ. His humility is exhibited in two ways. We're going to focus primarily on the first way this morning, mention the second way and investigate it next time, the Lord willing.

I. We see the humility of our high priest in His calling (1-6).

We have a problem that we must address at this point. The problem is that we're not familiar with *high priests*. That wasn't the case, of course, for the first readers of this epistle. For the previous fourteen centuries, Israel had had high priests, and for 1,400 years the Jews had been raising animals, and taking those animals to the tabernacle (and later to the temple) in Jerusalem so that the priests could offer those animals as sacrifices to God.

Have you ever raised a lamb or a calf? Have you ever tried to transport an animal? Have you ever had to kill an animal? Most of the readers of this letter could probably answer those questions *yes*.

I raised 4-H calves while growing up. It's one thing to see a cow out in a field somewhere—"Look, there's a cow!" But if you raise a calf, it's not just "a cow," but a part of your life. I gave them names: Boog, Babe, Buster, and so on. And transporting a several hundred pound animal is no small task. And knowing that when you reach your destination that animal is going to be killed is no small thing either.

The Jews had been experiencing this for centuries. They knew about animals, and they knew about priests, too. They knew what a high priest was and did. Since we're not familiar with high priests, we need to take time to consider the first four verses carefully.

A. Think about what is true of high priests in general (1-4). We learn four things about high priests from this

text.

1. *They're human, yet they have access to God (1).* “Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”

God is in a class all by Himself. He is the Creator of all things. He is our Creator, which means we are His creatures. God created mankind to live in relationship with Him, but sadly, due to Adam's disobedience, mankind lost that fellowship. In His grace, however, God provided a way for sinners to reconnect with Him. Do you remember what He did for Adam and Eve? He killed animals and gave their skins to the first couple for a covering. Animals died so that human beings could live and live in ways that please Him.

Years later God graciously gave something else to sinful men and women. At Mount Sinai He gave them *priests*. In the Mosaic Law, He revealed elaborate and detailed instructions for building a tabernacle, for offerings that were to be given in that tabernacle, and specified who could sacrifice those offerings.

Notice the prepositions in verse 1. Every high priest is selected “from men” and represents men “in matters related to God.” If you take time to read the Pentateuch you'll discover that God gave Israel many priests, but one high priest. The high priest entered the holy of holies once a year on the Day of Atonement, to offer a sacrifice in behalf of God's people.

How does a person become a high priest? Does he volunteer? No. From verse 1 we learn that...

a. This privilege is received. He *is selected* and *is appointed*. And why is this man given this honorable position?

b. This privilege is for the good of others. He represents others *in matters related to God*. What matters? Verse 1 says, “to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”

There were five major offerings prescribed in the Torah: burnt, grain, fellowship, sin, and guilt offerings (Lev. 1-7). And while the common person brought the offering, only the priest could give it to God, and he did so in behalf of the people.

Verse 1 says he offers “gifts” and “sacrifices.” Is there a difference? Gromacki suggests the difference may be in the sweet savor offerings (burnt, grain, fellowship offerings) and non-sweet savor offerings (sin and guilt offerings). He explains, “The former were voluntary, whereas the latter were obligatory.” Then Gromacki adds, “Another possible difference may be that the gifts were nonbloody offerings (grain and wine) and the sacrifices were bloody, requiring the death of the victims (animals and birds).”^[1]

But don't miss the purpose for offering gifts and sacrifices. It was “for sins.” Sin is our biggest problem, beloved. Sin separates us from God. The only way to get rid of sin is to utilize the means that God in His mercy provides. That's why He established the position of high priest. High priests are human, yet they have God-authorized access to God.

2. *They understand human weakness (2).* “He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness.” In verse 1 we learned that every high priest was selected from *among men*. That meant a high priest, by God's design, was human. And being human meant the high priest was able to relate well to other humans since he himself was *subject to weakness*.

Here we learn why we need a priest in the first place, because as sinful human beings we are “ignorant” and “going astray.” Commentator Raymond Brown suggests that ‘the ignorant’ refers to those who did not know the way and those ‘going astray’ refers to those who knew it but ignored it.^[2] That's our twofold problem. We don't know what pleases God, and even if we do know, we're prone to ignore it.

William Barclay offers this helpful insight, “By the sin of ignorance the Jews meant more than simply lack of knowledge. They included the sins committed when a man was swept away in a moment of impulse or anger or

passion or mastered by some overmastering temptation and the sins followed by repentance. By the sin of presumption they meant the cold, calculated sin for which a man was not in the least sorry, the open-eyed disobedience of God.”^[3]

It’s worth noting that under the Law there was no sacrifice that could be offered for a sin of presumption. For a sin of ignorance, yes. For high-handed sin, no. The writer of Hebrews may have that in mind here. He’ll have this to say in Hebrews 10:26-27, “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”

As sinners we need a high priest. A high priest can understand human weakness. What’s more, verse 2 says he can “deal gently” with sinners. What does that mean? Barclay says the Greek verb ‘deal gently’ (*metriopathein*) is really untranslatable, and offers this explanation:

“The Greeks defined a virtue as the mean between two extremes. On either hand there was an extreme into which a man might fall; in between there was the right way. So the Greeks defined *metriopatheia* (the corresponding noun) as the mean between extravagant grief and utter indifference..., the mid-course between explosions of anger and lazy indulgence... It means the ability to bear with people without getting irritated; it means the ability not to lose one’s temper with people when they are foolish and will not learn and do the same thing over and over again. It describes the attitude to others which does not issue in anger at their fault and which does not condone it, but which to the end of the day spends itself in a gentle yet powerful sympathy which by its very patience directs a man back to the right way. No man can ever deal with his fellow-men unless he has this strong and patient, God-given *metriopatheia*.”^[4]

This was a critical trait for a high priest. He was constantly dealing with the sins of other people. He needed the balance between the extreme of sympathetic *over-involvement* on the one hand, and on the other hand cold, distanced professionalism.

If you’ve ever done any counseling, you understand just how vital this balance is. Recently, someone came to me and told a heart-wrenching story about their childhood. They spoke of an abusive step-parent, of incredible pain, not just physical, but the kind of pain that goes deep. What did that person need from me? They didn’t need some emotional outburst, and they certainly didn’t need a disinterested yawn. They needed *metriopatheia*.

That’s what a high priest had the potential to give. I say *potential* because not all high priests did so. Many abused their position for selfish gain, and that’s because like the people they represent, high priests by nature are “ignorant” and “going astray.”^[5] That’s why, by God’s design, even the best of high priests did the following...

3. *They offer sacrifices (3)*. “This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.” He *has to* offer sacrifices, says the text. He’s obligated to do so. And why is that? In our age we have a low view of sin. In fact, we don’t even like to use the word ‘sin.’ But sin is a big deal, not just because the consequences of it messes up our lives—that’s a secondary issue. The fundamental problem with sin is vertical—it offends God and separates us from God.

That’s why the high priest *had to offer sacrifices*. He had to *for sins*, for His own sins and for the sins of the people. “The wages of sin is death,” declares Romans 6:23. When there is sin, the consequence is death. There must be death.

Yet in His grace God accepts the death of a substitute. That’s why He gave the sacrificial system to Israel, and accepted the death of a lamb in the place of a sinner. That’s what Moses told Israel’s first high priest, Aaron, in Leviticus 9:7, “Moses said to Aaron, ‘Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the LORD has commanded.’”

And so, by the Lord’s command, high priests did so in Israel, year after year, century after century. They offered sacrifices to cover sins, their own sins and the sins of others.

4. *They are called by God (4)*. “No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as

Aaron was.”

Note the final words, “Just as Aaron was.” 1 Chronicles 23:13 states, “Aaron was set apart, he and his descendants forever, to consecrate the most holy things, to offer sacrifices before the LORD, to minister before him and to pronounce blessings in his name forever.

Why did Aaron become a high priest? It wasn’t his idea. God called him. Quite frankly, the notion of God’s call doesn’t sit well in our self-promoting hearts. We’d like to think we have some say in such matters.

Do you remember the names Korah, Dathan, and Abiram? These three men came to Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16 and said, “Why do you set yourselves above the LORD’s assembly? We are *all* holy (see 16:3).” They didn’t like the fact that Moses and Aaron were Israel’s leaders. They wanted the position. Their self-seeking actions cost them their lives shortly thereafter when God opened the earth and swallowed them alive.

In the very next chapter, God reconfirmed Aaron’s role as high priest. The Lord told the Israelites to take twelve staffs and engrave the names of the twelve tribes on them, one per staff. Then the Lord said in Numbers 17:5, “The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites.” Moments later, the staff with Aaron’s name on it budded, bloomed, and produced almonds!

Sadly, it wouldn’t be the last time someone tried to usurp the position of priest. King Saul once offered a burnt offering and lost his kingdom for it (1 Sam. 13). Later King Uzziah in his pride entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense. 2 Chronicles 26:17-18 records what happened, “Azariah the priest [the high priest] with eighty other courageous priests of the LORD followed him in. They confronted him and said, ‘It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God.’” The result? God struck King Uzziah with leprosy and he lived in isolation the rest of His life.^[6]

God made it pretty clear, didn’t He? He chooses His priests, and He chose the line of Aaron. To restate, by God’s design high priests were human, yet had access to God. They understood human weakness. They offered sacrifices. And they were called by God.

Now think about why the author of the book of Hebrews took the time to say all this. Think about his purpose. The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish men and women who had professed faith in Messiah Jesus. But some, due to intense persecution, were considering going back to Judaism. Why? Here’s one reason: “We used to have a high priest. For centuries our people have had a high priest, but we left our high priest behind. Maybe we should go back.”

Notice the first words of verse 5, “So Christ.” The fact is, we do have a high priest! His name is Jesus Christ! Leon Morris points out that no other New Testament writer speaks of Jesus as a high priest. But this New Testament writer did. Jesus Christ is many things to His people. He is a shepherd. He is a Master. He is a husband. And He is a *high priest*.

What kind of high priest is He? Let’s find out!

B. Think about what is true of Christ (5-6). We learn five things here.

1. *He did not glorify Himself (5a).* “So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest.” That’s an amazing statement. Christ is God, the second person of the triune Godhead. At the beginning of this letter He is identified as “the Son” who is “the radiance of God’s glory” (1:3). As God, Christ deserves glory. As the Son, He manifests glory. But here we’re told that He did not take upon Himself the glory of becoming a high priest.

What does that mean? The KJV renders verse 5, “So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest.” Here’s how the ESV puts it, “So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, ‘You are my Son.’”

The Lord Himself commented on this in a response to critics in John 8:54, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.” Jesus, who deserves glory, did not glorify Himself.

2. *He did not initiate His priesthood (5b)*. Notice the statement in the middle of verse 5, “But God said to him.” There’s why Christ became a high priest. He didn’t initiate it, but rather it was an act of obedience. God, specifically God the Father, gave Him the assignment. It was not His own doing. In contrast to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and so many others who have sought positions of authority for self-exalting reasons, Christ did not glorify Himself when He became a high priest. To the contrary, He actually laid aside His glory to become a high priest.

The night before His crucifixion Christ actually talked about this in His prayer to His Father recorded in John 17. Listen to what He said, particularly about *glory*...

John 17:1 “Father, the time has come. *Glorify* your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” Glory wasn’t something the Son sought when He entered the world. Indeed, He left glory in order to come. And for thirty-three years He walked humbly in the world. But now, He says, *the time has come*. What time? The time for the Father to glorify Him, and the time for Him to glorify the Father. It was time for Him *to finish His work*.

Notice the connection between *His work* and *glory*. It’s even clearer in verse 4, “I have brought you *glory* on earth by completing *the work* you gave me to do.” There’s why Christ left heaven and came to earth. He came to bring glory to His Father, and He did so by doing the work His Father had assigned Him.

He continues in verse 5, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” Notice that Christ acknowledges that He deserves glory—He asks God the Father to glorify Him, a request that would be blasphemous coming from the lips of any mere mortal. But Christ asks His Father to glorify Him, and indeed affirms that this glory is something He enjoyed with the Father prior to the creation of the world.

Answer this. Why did God send His Son to the earth? If you say, “He sent His Son to earth to rescue sinners,” you’re right, but there’s a greater reason. You’re right because John 3:16 clearly says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” But there’s a far more significant result than the salvation of sinners like us, as marvelous as that is. It has to do with *God’s glory*.

Listen to Christ as He continues His prayer in John 17:10, “All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them.” That’s the result of God’s Son coming to earth. He says that glory has come to Him *through them*. Who is ‘them’? He’s referring to His disciples.

And consider what He said toward the end of His prayer in verse 24, “Father, I want those you have given me [His disciples] to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

It’s all about His glory, beloved! Christ acknowledges that He wants His people to see His glory, the glory His Father gave Him. And that’s why He became a high priest. According to Hebrews 5...

3. *He received the glory of His priesthood from His Father (5c-6)*. The writer of Hebrews cites two Messianic psalms to substantiate this point.

a. This is confirmed by Psalm 2. “But God said to him, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’” Those words come from Psalm 2:7. It’s the same text we saw previously cited in Hebrews 1:5. When quoted in Hebrews 1, it shows that Christ is superior to angels. But what does this quote from Psalm 2 have to do with Christ’s priesthood?

Wiersbe points out, based on Paul’s quotation of Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33-34, that the phrase, “Today I have begotten You” does not refer to the birth of Christ at Bethlehem, but to *His resurrection* from the dead. Wiersbe observes, “The Son of God was ‘begotten’ into a glorious new life in His resurrection! He ascended to heaven in a

glorified body to become our High Priest at the throne of grace.”

b. This is confirmed by Psalm 110. Psalm 110 is a psalm of David. It too was cited earlier in Hebrews, back in 1:13. But that was a quote from verse 1 of Psalm 110. Here the author references Psalm 110:4. Notice verse 6, “And he says in another place, ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.’”

This is holy ground we’re treading on. Here we learn of a Trinitarian conversation. God the Father said to God the Son, “You are a priest.” It was the Father’s design for His Son to assume the role of a mediator, a representative, a *priest*. And so, in obedience to His Father God the Son became a priest. What does that teach us about our high priest? This...

4. *He lives in submission to His Father’s will and word.* He does what His Father tells Him to do. And as we’ll see next time in verse 8, what His Father asked Him to do was far from easy, for “He learned obedience from what He suffered.”

5. *He will serve as a priest forever.* “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

Who was this Melchizedek? We meet him in Genesis 14 where he blessed Abraham and Abraham gave him a tithe of all he possessed.^[8] He’s referred to as “priest of God Most High” (Gen. 14:18). His name means ‘king of righteousness.’ That’s significant. Melchizedek was both a *king* and a *priest*. There’s no record of his death in the Bible. As Wiersbe points out, “Of course, because he was a real man, he did die at some time; but the record is not given to us.” That seems to be the point in Hebrews. Melchizedek is a fitting type of Christ who indeed is a priest *and* a king, and He is both forever! The writer of Hebrews will have much more to say about this in chapter seven.

The NIV, KJV, and nearly all English translations state that Christ is a high priest “in the order of” Melchizedek. But as Leon Morris observes, “This is incorrect. There was no succession of priests from Melchizedek and thus ‘no order.’”^[9] The Greek word *taxis* can also mean ‘kind’ or ‘nature.’ That’s the idea in Hebrews 5. Jesus is a high priest, not in a line of succession from Melchizedek, but *of the same kind as* Melchizedek.

But there’s something that makes Jesus different from any other high priest, including Melchizedek. All high priests offer sacrifices to God, but only Jesus *became* a sacrifice. Jesus was both the priest who offered the sacrifice *and* the sacrifice, a blood sacrifice, a lamb slain for sinners.

Yes, we have a humble high priest, and His humility is seen first in His *calling*. Allow me to mention a second way, and then we’ll discuss some implications.

II. We see the humility of our high priest in His suffering (7-10).

Verses 7-10 explain: “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, 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.”

Oh beloved! How He exhibited humility, not just in His *calling*, but in His *suffering*! We’ll ponder that further next time, but for now we must take inventory. I say we *must*. His example beckons us, behooves us, yea, demands that we take inventory.

Implications: Since we have a humble high priest...five things are true.

1. *We, too, ought to be known for humility.*

We've just come through Super-Tuesday in Ohio . We've listened to the self-touting of the candidates, "Vote for me! I can...and I will...and I have..." We live in a world that says, "If you don't promote yourself, who will?"

Brothers and sisters, we belong to a *humble* Savior and high priest. Are we giving the world an accurate picture of Him by the way we live? John Stott said it well: "Every time we look at the cross Christ seems to be saying to us, 'I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying.' Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary . It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size."^[10]

2. *We, too, ought to live in submission to God's will and word.* The Son became a high priest because it was His Father's will for Him. Is there anything that God is wanting you to do that you're resisting? If you claim to be a Christian and have never been baptized, what are you waiting for? If you are not serving in His church, why not? If you're harboring an unforgiving spirit and need to forgive someone, why haven't you? If our high priest lived in submission to the will and word of God, ought not we?

3. *We, too, ought to use our positions to serve others for God's glory.* The Father gave His Son the position of high priest, and the Son uses that position to serve others. So ask yourself two questions. First, what position has God given me? And second, am I using my position to serve others for His glory?

We all have God-given positions. For some it's the position of *parent*. If you are a parent, are you using that position to serve your children for the glory of God? Perhaps He's given you the position of *husband* or *wife*. Are you using that position to serve for His glory? Some of you are *teachers*, others are *coaches*, others are *business owners*, most if not all of us are *citizens* of this country. Are we using these God-given positions to serve others for His glory?

4. *We ought not turn away from this high priest.* That's what the first readers were considering. What about you? You've heard about the humble high priest today. What place does He have in your life? Martin Luther said it well, "It is not enough for a Christian to believe that Christ was instituted high priest to act on behalf of men, unless he also believes that he himself is one of these men for whom Christ was appointed high priest."^[11] Is Christ truly your high priest? Are you trusting in Him, and are you coming to God through Him?

5. *We ought not do anything that would bring dishonor to Him.* It's the Father's intent to glorify His Son. If Christ is our high priest, that ought to be our intent, too. Is there anything in your life right now that is bringing Him dishonor?

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

^[1] Robert Gromacki, p 88.

^[2] Raymond Brown, p. 97.

^[3] William Barclay, p. 46.

^[4] William Barclay, pp. 46-7.

^[5] If you are involved in counseling, never forget this. You are made of the same stuff as your counselees.

^[6] It's worth noting that Israel had its share of high priests who *weren't* called by God. For instance, in 174 B.C. Antiochus IV appointed Jason to be high priest. In 162 B.C., Demetrius I appointed Alcimus. Later Herod the Great appointed a high priest, so did Archelaus, and other political rulers. The last high priest, Phanni, was appointed by popular ballot during the war against Rome in A.D. 67. F. F. Bruce, p. 92.

[\[7\]](#) Wiersbe, p. 291.

[\[8\]](#) He's mentioned again only in Psalm 110 and in the book of Hebrews.

[\[9\]](#) Leon Morris, p. 49.

[\[10\]](#) John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 179.

[\[11\]](#) Quote taken from Philip Hughes, p. 175.