



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 21st October 2018

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Hebrews Chapter 5:1-6

Subject: Part 11, Qualifications for High Priest

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. ³ Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. ⁴ And no man takes this honour to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." ⁶ As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever, According to the order of Melchizedek";

The famous reformer Martin Luther said of verse 1 of this chapter -

"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 these men for whom Christ was appointed high priest".

I believe that this sets the tone for this morning. You see, it's very easy to become lost in the history of a passage or chapter, or to understand the argument that the writer is making to the Jew, but not see, or understand the great treasure of truth that the Holy Spirit is revealing to your heart and mind.

Many bibles have given these verses, in particular, verses 1 to 4, the title – Qualification for High Priesthood but as we read down through these verses, we see that they are less about the desired resumé and more about the functions and characteristics of the High Priest.

We being to see this clearly in Verse 1 –

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.

This chapter begins by reminding the reader of the office of the High Priest and the comparisons of an everyday High Priest and Jesus, the greatest High Priest. In Exodus 28, it explains how Aaron became High Priest –

“Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to Me as priest, Aaron and Aaron’s sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. And you shall make ^{holy} garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.

The High Priest was selected by God, he was from the tribes of Israel, he was sent to minister unto God and he was set apart even in his garments. Aaron, the first High Priest was not only chosen by God but ordained by Moses. Verse 1 of our text points out the significance that every high priest is appointed. The passive voice implies that he did not appoint himself, and therefore that it is an office compatible with humility and service, not pride and ambition. This theme is developed in verse 4 of this chapter.

Regardless of the era, to become a High Priest, he should be a descendant of Aaron. As verse 1 of our text this morning, tells us that the High Priest had to be *‘taken Phy*. No angel would be or could be fitted for this office. After Eleazar and Ithamar (Numbers 3 verse 4), the sons of Aaron, we are not told about any successive High Priests in particular until we get to the new testament where the priesthood had been diluted from the original order. Neither are we told about the specific process in the Old Testament that a High Priest underwent to be called of God, but by the time we get to the New Testament things had changed. The High Priest in the New Testament times seemed more like Political appointments because it was King Herod the Great who actually appointed them, although we do know that God is Sovereign. In Luke 3, we see that there were in fact two High Priest (not one as originally ordained by God) named Annas and Caiaphas. They were both alive during Jesus' ministry

and were instrumental in causing his murder (John 11:51, 18:12-14, 24, etc.). Caiaphas was also instrumental in the persecution of Christians after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 4:6, 5:17, 21). He aided a young Saul by granting him authority to persecute Christians in foreign lands (Acts 9:2). Years later, one of the High Priests presided over a council that tried the Apostle Paul (Acts 22:5, Acts 23:4).

Originally under Levitical law, the High Priest had to be physically perfect, as much as a human-being can be, and also ethically as well as morally righteous. Their primary function was to minister unto God. He was responsible for the upkeep of the Tabernacle or Temple. It was only the High Priest who could enter into the Holy of Holies and therefore he was solely responsible for the most important sacrifice each year which took place on the Day of Atonement. For on this Day of Atonement, His function was to act as a mediator, not between man and man, but as man's representative before God.

The High Priest offered gifts and sacrifices before God on behalf of the nation of Israel. The expression "gifts and sacrifices" we find in verse 1, is best understood here as a general description of all the offerings which the high priest officiated over. Every sacrifice was initially a gift that was brought to the place of sacrifice, whether it was an animal or fowl sacrifice or not, such as grain or wine, only after it was handed into the hands of the priest did it become a sacrifice. The purpose of these gifts and sacrifices were offered for sins and secondarily for thanksgiving and praise. The high priest was something far more than a cultic or liturgical individual. His office was concerned, above all, with the fundamental problem of human sinfulness and People's need for reconciliation with God.

He was never involved with the anointing of people for kingship or political stuff. He was responsible for selecting, ordaining and anointing priests alone when they reached the age of 30. He did so by anointing these men with a special oil which made them Holy and set apart from the people of Israel (see Exodus 30). He set them apart for service and made sure that they didn't offer any sacrifice until they reached the age of 33 (have you notice these ages? Exactly like the age of when Jesus' ministry begin and when he became the sacrificial lamb) . A high Priest was provided for but could not inherit like the rest of Israel. The High Priest was allotted land and part of the tidings that the people made went towards supporting him and his family as this was his sole source of income, it was not just a 9 to 5 position.

Jesus our great High Priest, was not someone simply chosen by God but He is in fact God who chose to become a man and therefore our kinsman redeemer, a man for mankind. Yet Jesus was humble and came to serve not to be served (Matthew 20:28). Jesus spoke not just of His relationship to the Father but also of the motives by which He is guided, and of His consciousness of the power and spirit in which He acts. As Andrew Murry, a prolific writer once wrote: *“Though the word humble does not occur, we shall nowhere in Scripture see so clearly wherein His humility consisted. In Jesus we shall see how both as the Son of God in heaven, and as man upon earth, He took the place of entire subordination, and gave God the honour and the glory which is due to Him. And what He taught so often was made true to Himself: “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” As it is written, “ He humbled himself, therefore God highly exalted Him.”*

Part of Jesus’ ministry is not only to pray for us, but on earth he became the perfect sacrifice, the completed atonement necessary for our eternal good and reconciliation with God. That all important once and for all sacrifice which was sealed with the cry of victory – “It is finished!” This made Him the perfect and only mediator between God and man. Like the Jewish High Priest who ordained priests, Jesus also ordains us to be priests unto God – Revelation 1:6, and when Jesus ordains, He make us fit to enter into the Holies of Holies. We are His temple, and we know that He continual looks after us and maintains us – 1 Corinthians 6:19, Ephesians 2:21. He has anointed us with the Holy Spirit, prepares us for His service and we are set apart from the world. Ephesians 1 tells us powerfully of our position in Christ as He give us the gift of sonship as well as the many other gifts.

As we move on to Verses 2 and 3 we see more about our High Priest -

He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. ³ Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins.

These verse are continuances of what we examined last week in chapter 4 verse 15 in relation to Jesus our Great High Priest being able to sympathise with our weaknesses. These verse tell us that the incumbent High-Priestly office in general, can deal compassionately with those for whose sakes he ministers, since he himself is beset with weakness. Sympathy, compassion, and gentleness in dealing with others go together; and this compassionate gentleness springs from a community of weakness. As we have seen, Christ experienced temptation in His

human nature, yet without sin unlike the ordinary high priest. Christ did not share in our sinfulness but this does not in any degree invalidate His feeling for us and with us in our weakness. The difference between Jesus and us is that He consistently overcame temptation, whereas we have been over-come by temptation.

What we, and even the High Priests under Levitical Law need, is not a fellow loser but a winner; not one who shares our defeat but one who is able to lead us to victory; not a sinner but a Saviour! By reason of its very inadequacy, the old order awaited the appearance of the perfect and final High Priest who would offer up the perfect and final sacrifice.

What is lovely in verse 2, is that not only is the High Priest compassionate, but He is competent to deal with those who are in this verse described as ignorant and wayward. This encompasses those who have sinned whether through offending in ignorance of the divine law or through wandering away from the path of the will of God which had been set before them. The perversity of the human heart is such that, even if it were possible for a person to be free from sins of waywardness, no man can claim to be free from sins of ignorance or negligence. You can read more about sacrifices required in the Levitical system for unwitting sin in Leviticus chapter 4.

This is an important point because there are those who belong to a category quite distinct as they sin presumptuously or wilfully because they rebelliously excluded themselves from the grace and blessing of God, therefore, they were ordered to be cut off from among God's people (Numbers 15:27; Psalm 19:13). For such there was no offering prescribed, or prescriptible, they are beyond help because they don't want any help in the first place. The high priest's atoning sacrifice was offered accordingly, for all the sins of the people except the sin of rebellion or apostasy, which was a defiant renunciation of the divinely given covenant.

Now as we come to Verses 4 to 6, we can see how its ties back to verse 1 to some degree -

*And no man takes this honour to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.
⁵ So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." ⁶ As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever, According to the order of Melchizedek";*

As we have already seen in verse 1, the high priest was originally chosen and appointed by God.

We can safely say that the priest-hood of Israel, in general, suffered greatly throughout history. As we go through the Old Testament very little is mentioned about the High-Priests. There was national apostasy and turning from God. No doubt the office and its standard plumbed to the lowest point. The nation was dispersed numerous of times because of their sin and rebellious against God. After Babylon's captivity, it was just a matter of time before certain idolatries practices and tradition for tradition sake, all crept back in. Like all offices and positions, the natural man wants them, not to advance the cause of God.

Like many today the position of authority is a badge of achievement or having 'arrived!' Nothing to do with the leading of God, or following the example of Jesus. So many have made spiritual shipwrecks because of what they wanted and not accepting what God had for them. How different the situation is when the Lord is in things. The High Priesthood in the time of Christ had become a completely different entity as already discussed. They were appointees of the worst kind, man by nature at its worst. How verse 4 reflects back in time, when God was central to everything. When people wanted only what God had to give and the difference it made. The history of the Roman Catholic Church had its serious problems regarding families (nepotism) and power seekers, buying positions. During the reformation a believer noted the conditions of his day, by commenting about Priests *"is not appointed for the sake of glory, nor for the sake of amassing riches, nor for the sake of enriching his relatives"; and added that "if anyone inquires how he is going to profit his attitude is not pastoral but mercenary."*

During the dark days of the papacy, Herveus relates what is said here in verse 4 to the abuses of his day, as follows:

"Those who are eager to seize ecclesiastical honours to which they have not been divinely called are struck down by this statement; for he who puts himself forward and seeks his own glory does not achieve honour if he becomes a bishop or cardinal in the church, but usurps a right that does not belong to him and makes plunder of the grace of God; and therefore he receives not blessing but cursing."

Luther also offered some pointed comments: *"The office of a bishop is nothing if it be not a work—and, moreover, a 'good work,'" he says, with 1 Timothy 3:1 in mind, "not a life*

of idle luxury. The others who climb to the top, and let us be honest about it, in the desire for a life of idleness and pleasure and high office—nay rather who lust after these things—these are they who 'take the honour upon themselves.'"

This piece of advice, would do well for some people today who call themselves ministers of the gospel, leaders of churches, pastors of flocks, culturally aware and profit making bishops or pastors.

Verse 4 is pointing to someone so completely different. Christ comes no-where near this but is far above and beyond it all. Ambition and self-seeking is no were found here. It is God from start to finish.

You know, the other side of the coin is how people respond to God's appointees. They are not always what we would call 'the obvious' choice. 1 Corinthians 1:20 - *Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

We have to be careful, when someone has been appointed by God. We see this in the old testament after the divine appointment of Aaron was confirmed, at the time of the revolt of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram who accused him of having exalted himself to a position of prominence and whom Moses rebuked with these words:

"It is against the Lord that you and all your company have gathered together; what is Aaron that you murmur against him?" (Numbers 16:11).

Subsequently, the sprouting of Aaron's rod alone among the rods of the leaders convinced the rebellious Israelites that he was indeed the man whom God had chosen and not one who had assumed the high priesthood to himself (Numbers 17:1; Hebrews 9:4). We need to follow always the biblical pattern and guidelines, and we need to also be watchful that our church leaders are following the biblical patterns, standards and guidelines.

In conformity with this pattern of humility and calling, Christ did not exalt Himself to be made a high priest, or, as the NEB renders it, *"He did not confer upon Himself the glory of becoming high priest,"* but, in accordance with His calling, was appointed by the Father. This is the reality of the situation to which Christ Himself bore consistent testimony. For example, He declared:

"If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies me" (John 8:54).

The sayings of Christ recorded in John's Gospel make it categorically plain that the glory which the Son sought with intense singleness of purpose was only the glory of the Father who had sent him. **The following verses makes this point and it is important that you look them up. (John 7:18; 8:42; 9:4; 10:18,25,38; 11:42; 12:28,44,49; 14:7,9,13,24,31; 15:8,23; 16:27; 17:1,4)**

Indeed, if one thing is stressed throughout the New Testament it is this, that Jesus in assuming the office of Saviour and High Priest, was far from exalting and glorifying Himself. He accepted it knowing full well that it meant for Him to experience the darkest depths of humiliation, rejection, agony and death. His mission was far removed from self-glorification. To put it simply, there was nothing in it for Him, only the certainty of unutterable anguish, alienation and immolation (that is to be offered up as a human sacrifice), suffered vicariously for our redemption.

Yet the cross of Christ is also the glory of Christ. This moment of His solitude and self-sacrifice is also the moment when He was glorified, not self-glorified, but glorified because in Him God is glorified, and the divine purpose for the redemption of the world was accomplished (John 12:23; 13:31; Hebrews 10:9). The awesome glory of His humiliation is followed by the magnificent glory of his exaltation, and not self-exaltation, when raised to the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The calling of Christ as our High-Priest is noted in verse 5 and 6 as having been prophetically proclaimed in two passages from the Psalms. The first of which is Psalm 2 verse 7 - *"Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee,"* which finds its full significance in Him who is now enthroned on high. While the second from Psalm 110:4, *"Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek"* is virtually to become the theme-text of the central part of our epistle (see 5:10; 6:20; 7:1,11,15,17,21).

The comparison of these two Messianic affirmations shows how closely within the perspective of the history of redemption, the Sonship and the Priesthood of Christ belong together. This corresponds to the combination of deity and humanity, or as it is put in theology terms the *anthropic* person of the Mediator. This union of Sonship and Priesthood

is, indeed, implied in the opening paragraph of the epistle see 1:2, it is precisely the Son who is spoken of as having, like a priest, "made purification for sins."

The Son's proper place is to reign in glory which we see in Psalm 110:1 – *The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."*

We see this in the first chapter of Hebrews verse 13 which points to Jesus as the incarnate Mediator and who officiates as our great High Priest (Psalm 110:4). The royal and the priestly offices are united in Him eternally. The author of our epistle is, in effect, emphasizing the truth that there is but one Messiah, unique both in His sonship and in His priesthood.

Historically speaking, by contrast, the adherents of the Dead Sea Sect - The Essenes, looked for the coming of two messianic figures like many Jews. They looked for a lay and royal Davidic personage and a priestly Aaronic personage. If indeed, the author of Hebrews had the Qumran teachings in mind, his instruction here and in the chapters that follow demonstrates, on the basis chiefly of Psalm 110:4 that they were wrong in two important respects:

Firstly, because there is only one messianic personage, both King and Priest.

Secondly, His priestly category is that of Melchizedek, not Aaron. Of course, under the Qumran scheme a descendant of David, who belonged to the tribe of Judah, and a descendant of Aaron, who belonged to the tribe of Levi, could hardly be expected to coincide in one person.

It is especially significant then, that in the one person and category of Melchizedek, who was both king of Salem and priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18; Psalm 110:1, 4; Hebrews 7:1), there is a union of the royal and priestly functions. The significance of the priestly order of Melchizedek is developed at length in chapter 7. For now, it is sufficient to mention, that Melchizedek represented a non-Jewish, universal priesthood. In relation to the priesthood, He occupied the position which Abraham occupied in relation to the Covenant. But the immediate purpose of the two quotations given here from the Psalms is to corroborate the doctrine that Christ's high-priestly office was not from Himself but from God.

There is a lot here in these verses, to take in as indeed it was for those, whom the Holy Spirit was addressing. As we take our time, the pieces of Holy Write coming together to reveal to us the glory of Christ Jesus our Saviour. It is the purpose of the Holy Spirit not just to open our minds to these wonderful truths but our heart in praise to our wonderful Saviour, getting to know him more fully, even in his offices of care.

More than that, it is to strengthen us in our faith. It is to give us the confidence that no matter what the circumstances we find ourselves in, we can hold fast to what we have learned from Scripture and not to be so easily moved by whim of doctrine even if it is accompanied by signs and lying wonders.

It is also to give us knowledge to worship God which of course is the chief end of man. Worship is to show reverence and adoration for our Creator, our Saviour, and we could go on and on. But it is all about doing it rather than knowing what it is. And doing it with the heart.

Amen.