

A Sympathetic High Priest.
Hebrews 5:1-5

Revelation 5
Romans 12:1-18
Responsive Psalm 103:1-10

Once again due to circumstances being what they are, its been a few weeks since we were able to gather together around the word of God. Today we will be looking at the last few verses of Chapter 4 of Hebrews and into chapter 5, which actually is a continuation of what we looked at when we last were together. Since its been a while, I want to just go ahead and read chapter 4 in its entirety again for a refresher and to help put in to context our passage for today. (read chapter 4-5:4

After putting forth his evidence and proof of Jesus being our great high priest, the one who is greater then the high priests of the old covenant, he then tell us here how such a reality should effect our lives. It is a continuation building upon the importance of being sure that we have entered into the promised rest of God, and what that looks like in the life of the believer. The reality of Christ's superiority over all things is not just some esoteric doctrine talking of the nature of God, but it has true implications into our lives, and not just our lives as followers of this gospel, but all lives in general. By that I mean, just as Paul wrote in Romans about the sovereignty of the creator to not only be able, but also justified to do with his creation has he sees fit, according to his purpose and plan for his glory. With out the reality of God's sovereignty, without the reality of the doctrines of Christ's superiority over all things it would erode any sense of meaning, or purpose in this life. For we would be born, live, and die, with the cycle of life repeating for all eternity for what ends?

The sovereignty of God over his creation gives purpose and reason to this thing we call life. And that purpose and reason, is for his glory. As Paul says, Does not the potter have power over the clay to make some for honor, and some for dishonor. Being glorified in both the redemption of those set aside for honor, and glorified in the condemnation for those set aside for dishonor. Showing his mercy, and grace, but also his righteousness, and justice. In the end reconciling all things to himself, those who he has prepared for honor to worship him, and those he has prepared for the day of judgment for the glory of his sovereign justice. This of course rises up the question of man's will, mans autonomy, and ability to control his own fate. To which each and every one of us know that we have the power to make our own decisions, with one caviat, if we are to believe the bible, it says that mankind does not have the power to believe upon Christ for redemption without first being given a heart and mind that is able to comprehend, and that is able to believe. We can not believe unless we have heard, and we can hear unless we have been told, but even if told, we can not hear and believe unless first being granted the ability to hear and believe. It is exactly this very thing that we saw in the book of Mark through Jesus' ministry and why he told his disciples that he taught in parables. So that only those who it was given to understand would understand.

And before you begin to exercise your natural mind in this process of belief, saying that there being a sovereign God who wills and chooses who lives and who dies is unfair, and unjust. I refer you again to what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans, does not the one who created the thing have power to do with it as he wills? It is the same with us, if we create something, we have the power, and the ability to exercise our will and desire on that thing that we have created, how much more so the one who created all things, and for whom all things exist to show his great power, and his great mercy. It is on this basis of God's sovereignty that hinges the entire structure of this faith.

If God is not sovereign in all things, especially pertaining to salvation then the reality is that there is no hope for mankind, and there is no purpose. This doctrine of God's sovereignty can not be circumvented either, for if you do what you end up with is a hopeless man centered faith relying on your own natural fallen nature to garnish enough favor with a pure, and holy God. So with all of that being true, it shows the arguments that the Author here in Hebrews has been laying out is nothing more than the logical outcome and understanding of a God who is sovereign, a God who is the creator, and the implications, and responsibility of us as the creature to such a holy, and just God. Without his provision, without his grace and mercy, once again our life would be hopeless. One of the major purposes of the writing this letter to the Hebrews is to point out this very thing, and it isn't just applicable to them, but is just as applicable to us today reminding us, and instructing us about God's nature, and his purpose. We as mortals, whose earthly walk is experienced day by day, moment by moment having no knowledge of what is to come, and little recollection of what was behind tend to what to believe in the things which we can see, the things which are tangible to us. So we are always in danger of being lead astray to finding a hope, or a rest in something that we can see, and feel.

And we have pretty much the perfect example of that in our wider society today, for both the believer and non-believer putting their hope, and faith into something that they feel that they can control. Look at the chaos that is our political climate today, either party demonizing the other, and believing that their way is the only salvation for our nation. During this entire presidential election fiasco either side has put their hope that their candidate of choice will bring about a sort of redemption in our wider social, and economic woes. People are getting caught up into a trap, putting hope and faith in a mere person, when the reality is that our only hope lies in the one who as the bible says, raises up kings, and tears down kings for his own purpose and glory. I think that this is something that we as Christians should keep foremost in our hearts and minds as we engage in the society around us. We first are a people of God, members of his holy nation, and we must conduct ourselves as such not losing hope, because our hope is in Christ, and nothing else. It is in Christ that we rest, not on any mortal system, or person but in Christ alone.

Look at verse 12 of chapter 4 again, speaking of the power of God and his word, the very thing in which our hope and rest is established. "For the word of God is living and powerful, it is not just some pages on an old dusty book that has faded with time, his word is living, it is powerful, just as powerful today, as it was when he created this very world with his word. It is with this power, with this living word that is sharper than any 2 edged sword. That God judges, and redeems mankind. A sword can pierce the mortal skin, it can kill the body but the word of God strikes to the division of soul and spirit. The word of God has the power to send a soul to everlasting death, or to give everlasting life. And this is why mankind is unable to be justified outside of God's sovereign grace and mercy, for his word pierces beyond the physical, and goes to the very heart and soul of the individual. As it says here in verse 12, his word is "the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The fact that God is not merely looking out our conduct, but at our thoughts, at the intents, at our reasons and purposes for what we do and it is on that which he judges is just another implication to the reality of his sovereign nature.

We can look at the actions of another person and deem them selfless, or generous, or even pure, but we are not able to discern the heart and mind and reason for those actions. An easy example of this is any charitable donation by a celebrity. Some people put much importance into the perceived generosity of someone with money, being impressed with their donations to causes, or charities, but the reality is, this is not a selfless act as it appears on the surface, but rather ends up being a tax write off benefiting the one who is giving. My point being, we are not the judge and discerner of mans heart, God is.

Man can appear moral, or just, but have the darkest issues of sin in their heart and mind. Just like the example of charitable donations, while it may seem pure, or impressive to us, to God who sees to the very heart and soul can see the selfish, sinful reasons and intentions of people's actions. No one can escape the cut of the double edged sword of God's word. It does not matter if you believe in God, or if you are an atheist, makes little difference in the end for all are pierced, and laid bare before God. As verse 13 says, "And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him whom we must give account. Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."

This puts weight in what we believe, as I have said this faith, this religion is not just some esoteric belief system passed down through the generations, but is bound in the blood of the Son of God, the most holy Lamb of God, the great high priest. Who has verse 15 says, can sympathize with our weakness for he was tempted just as we are, yet was victorious in overcoming those temptations remaining without sin so that he may be a worthy sacrifice for us.

Moving to chapter 5, 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." The logical connection here with verse 15 of chapter 4, is the necessity of Christ incarnation. Without being one like us, just as the high priests were taken from among the people and appointed, he would not be worthy to have served as our high priest. Becoming one, like us, able to sympathize with us, with our weaknesses and temptations is a necessary qualification for one to function as a high priest. The high priests who were appointed in the old covenant functioned as the mediators between God and man, as verse 1 says, offering both gifts and sacrifices for sin for the people of Israel. They themselves not being holy and righteous and just, of themselves but also needing to cleanse themselves by the same sacrifices and offerings before approaching God on behalf of the people. With Christ we see instead of the coming from a place of sinful man offering sacrifices and such to approach God, we see he comes from God, but must take on the flesh of man to be an appropriate mediator. This is just one reason why he is superior to those priests of old, for he already being just and holy, was born, and lived as us, and remained just and holy throughout his life and ministry.

So, as we see, one of the requirements of a high priest is that he must be chosen from among men, so only one who is himself man, is fitted to serve as the representative of his fellow men before God. Therefore, no angel, or other heavenly being is capable of fulfilling this role, to encapsulate what we have been studying so far in this book, this makes none other than Christ himself worthy of such worship. Another requirement of a high priest, is that he is appointed, he is chosen by someone outside himself. It must therefore be an office that is defined by humility and service, not one of pride and selfish ambition. We see a lot of the later it seems, we expect such in the world with those of power vying for more power, using any means necessary to do so, but sadly, we see the same in the churches as well, authoritarian pastors and teachers who are not servants of the flock, but rather dictators who lord their power over the flock.

This is one of the problems with how our system of calling pastors into our congregations is flawed. It is treated more as a vocation, then a ministry. Many seem to be in it for the prestige, or money and it can be hard to weed out such ambitions when the pool of those you have to seek from are those who are seeking the job itself. I have been told by a few pastors that I respect highly, that the role of the minister, and shepherd of the local flock should be one from within.

And as we all know, after our years of pastoral searching I think that they were right and that is very sound advice. But not only sound, as we can see here in this text, it is biblical. Those who are set to be shepherds of the local flock, servants of the people, should be appointed from among the people, not hired from a pool of eligible people like you would if you were running your own business. Thomas Aquinas said pretty much the same thing in relation to this verse here, talking about the church in his day, which some things sadly never change, the high priest, or head of the body “is not appointed for the sake of glory, nor for the sake of amassing riches, nor for the sake of enriching his relatives. If anyone inquires how he is going to profit, his attitude is not pastoral, but mercenary.” So we can see the important distinction and requirements then for the high priest to be appointed, from men, from those that represent the larger group. And through that the importance, and the necessity of the incarnation of Christ, that he must become like those to whom he came to represent.

Continuing this comparison between the high priests of the old covenant and the high priesthood of Christ, the Author says in verse 2, having been appointed from the people, and tying to verse 15 of chapter 4 he says, He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. This again points to the necessary character of the high priest, and one that we would not see if that high priest was self appointed, or seeking their own gain and ambition. For the high priest can deal gently with those he ministers to, since he himself suffers from the same weaknesses, he can have sympathy, or compassion, and gentleness in dealing with others. The fact that Christ did not share in our sinfulness does not in any sense invalidate his fellow understanding or feeling for us and our weaknesses. As I said before, the reality of Christ's temptations and sufferings if we were to weigh them next to ours would come out far greater than those that we suffer.

The difference between Christ as the high priest, and those men chosen to serve as high priest in the old covenant is while they being still fallen sinful man could not overcome temptations as Christ being the holy son of God can. If Christ had sinned, as we sin, he would no longer have been a worthy sacrifice for our atonement, he would have become no different than us needing atonement himself as the priests of old did. Offering for himself sacrifices, not being just, and righteous offering himself as a sacrifice for those of us who are in need of atonement of sin. We do not need a fellow sinner to represent us, to mediate for us before God, we do not need one who shares in our defeat, but rather who can lead us into victory over sin, we do not need a high priest who is a sinner like we are, but we need a perfect savior. It is this distinction that makes Christ the superior High priest, As Philip Hughes puts it, “

“By this very reasoning, the old order awaited the appearance of the perfect and final high priest who would offer up the perfect and final sacrifice. Which was perfect because, it wasn't an inadequate priest offering up some dumb and uncomprehending beast, but rather it is the fully equivalent offering of his own unblemished and victorious self, as our fellow man, and it was final because it avails for all sin and for all eternity. “

In Closing today, Verse 4 and 5, reiterates verse 1, “and no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. 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.” Christ was appointed by God, to come in the flesh and be the savior and mediator that mankind needed to draw them back to the creator God. Fulfilling all the requirements needed to be such a high priest, but not only a high priest, a fellow brother, and friend, having compassion and understanding.