

Study 5: Jesus our great High Priest

Throughout the book of Hebrews, Jesus is compared to a range of aspects that the Hebrew Christians would be familiar with under the Law of Moses.

In this study, we see Jesus compared to *the High Priest*.

Why is Jesus positioned as our great High Priest (4:14)?

How does the writer say that we should approach God (4:16)?

What qualifications were required of the High Priest (5:1-4)?

How is Jesus proposed as one who meets these requirements (5:5)?

How long is Jesus' Priesthood to last?

How was Jesus made perfect through sufferings?

What is a requirement of our salvation in Jesus?

The Hebrew Christians had a problem accepting what the writer says – what is it?

Homework:

Read the notes, and reflect on what has been said about Jesus' Priesthood.

Read Chapter 5:11 – 6:20 in preparation for next week.

- What was their problem?
- What did they need to do about it?
- What implications is the writer making”?

Study Notes for: Study 5: Jesus our great High Priest

Throughout the book of Hebrews, Jesus is compared to a range of aspects that the Hebrew Christians would be familiar with under the Law of Moses.

In this study, we see Jesus compared to *the High Priest*.

One of the major insights of this letter is that Jesus is our great High Priest. The author proceeds to reinforce his exhortation to enter the rest with a reminder of the character of our High Priest. Jesus is one with his people, and for them he offers the perfect sacrifice. This is seen largely in terms of the Day of Atonement ceremonies in which the role of the high priest (and not simply any priest) was central. (NIVBC)

Why is Jesus positioned as our great High Priest (4:14)?

As in the previous chapters, the writer continues building his arguments: “*seeing therefore...*”

He has already mentioned twice about Jesus being our High Priest (2:17; 3:1), although he has not yet built a conclusive argument to establish it. His argument here is really “see how great Jesus (who is our High Priest) is!” rather than “because Jesus is such a Great High Priest...”

Jesus is great because of His exalted position in the heavens (“God’s right hand man”). The arguments that he is about to build are now to establish Jesus’ credentials as High Priest.

Importantly, Jesus is not stand-offish, but is sympathetic with our weaknesses, because He has been through all of the things that we have been through.

But His greatness is further exalted by facing the trials and temptations that we face – and yet He did it without succumbing to the temptations resulting in sin.

How does the writer say that we should approach God (4:16)?

“...we may approach boldly...” This is in contrast as to how the Jewish people would approach God – they would not even say His name (because of this, we really don’t know how the word *YHWY* -generally Yarway, from which we get Jehovah – was pronounced). The writer contrasts this with Jesus, who is “our man in heaven”.

The writer introduces here that it is through our approach to Jesus that we obtain mercy. This is a direct contrast to the mercy seat, which sat on top of the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple. It was at the mercy seat where the High Priest would come on the Day of Atonement to seek mercy for the sins of himself and for the people. But with Jesus, His throne is the true mercy seat, and one to which we all have free access “*with boldness*” or “*confidence*”.

What qualifications were required of the High Priest (5:1-4)?

1. He was to represent humans (men and women – the use of *men* is generic) to God. They were taken from amongst the people, and therefore were conversant with the conditions in which the people lived. As a result, he was in a position to make intercession to God on their behalf.
2. His responsibilities were to offer *gifts and sacrifices* to God on the people's behalf. The sacrifices that the author has particularly in mind, are those offered "*for sins*" which would particularly reflect the yearly sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.
3. He needs to be mindful of the ritual requirements of the position and the sacrifice, but he must also particularly be mindful of and compassionate towards the people who are sinning and going away from God. His status as a man should remind him of this, because he also is inflicted with the same weaknesses.
4. He is required to offer sacrifices for himself, and also for the sins of the people. There are many examples in the OT of the priests (even the High Priests) who were inept in their service towards God. Perhaps one notable one is Aaron, who created the golden calf because they thought Moses had died on the mountain. His excuse was that he told the people to remove their golden jewellery, and then threw it into the fire, and out came a calf!

At the Day of Atonement, before Aaron could offer sacrifices for the people, he first had to make a sacrifice for himself and his family (Lev 16:6).

5. No person can establish himself as High Priest, but he has to be appointed by God, (just as Aaron was). (Ex 28, Lev 8, Num 18, Num 20:23-).

How is Jesus proposed as one who meets these requirements (5:5)?

1. He did not appoint himself, but He was appointed by God (Ps 2:7, Ps 110). In the latter quote, the writer now introduces Melchizadek. He will build a strong case on this a bit later in the letter, and the pattern that Jesus fulfilled as a Priest like him.
2. He is able to sympathise with those he represents. Because of His earthly life, and the sufferings that He went through, He knows what we go through, and what we feel. Therefore He is able to represent us before God just as the OT High Priest did.
3. Even though He was the very Son of God, He was not exempted from learning obedience, and He did that through suffering.

How long is Jesus' Priesthood to last?

“...a Priest ***forever*** after the order of Mechizedek...” Jesus' Priesthood is here shown to be better than the OT priesthood – after the same kind as the priesthood of Melchizedek. The priests (and High Priests) under Moses and Aaron served for a time (or for life), but were then replaced by another and another etc. But Jesus is contrasted as *a permanent priesthood*.

None of the OT priests (even Aaron) could claim this! How much better is Jesus than Aaron, or any of the other priests!

How was Jesus made perfect through sufferings?

Was He *imperfect*, so that he could *become* perfect? Jesus was always perfect, but the idea here is one of completeness. Jesus mission and purpose was that He would come and pay the price for us (Jn 12:23-33). He could never be the intercessor between us and God if He had not felt the trials and tribulations that we feel, and go through them without being defiled by sin. As such, He showed His perfection, but also He became fully equipped (complete = perfect) to represent us and make atonement for us.

Because of this, He became *the author of eternal salvation*. As the Saviour, He was able to pay the price to bring us back to God, and to make a perfect and complete sacrifice. Not like the sacrifices under the Old Testament, but rather a one-time sacrifice that could achieve what they could never achieve (more on this later).

What is a requirement of our salvation in Jesus?

“...to all who ***obey*** him...” It is not enough that we simply *believe* in Jesus, but we must *do what He says*. In fact, our faith is demonstrated by our actions. If we say that we believe, and yet do not do what He says, then we really don't believe at all. Lk 6:46 “*Why do you call me Lord, Lord, but do not do the things that I say?*” (Jn 14:15) “*If you love me, keep my commandments*” If we are to be pleasing to God, then we must put our religion into *practice*, and not just hold it in our head!

The Hebrew Christians had a problem accepting what the writer says – what is it?

They were dull of hearing. They had closed their ears to what God was saying. In the next study we will have a closer look at their problem, and what they needed to do about it.