

The High Priesthood of Jesus Christ

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 5:1-10
Preached on: Sunday, January 8, 2017

It is my great privilege to minister the word of God to you this morning and to do so I would invite you to take your Bibles and turn to Hebrews 5 where we will be examining verses 1 through 10 with respect to the issue of the high priesthood of Jesus Christ and I'm confident that there will be much that we can apply to our lives as we examine this text this morning.

Let me read it to you. Hebrews 5, beginning with verse 1,

1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; 3 and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You"; 6 just as He says also in another passage, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." 7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, 10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

You will recall in our study of chapter 4, verses 4 through 16, the author described the superiority, the sympathy and the soul care of our great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, and in that exposition, we examined in great detail many of the specific functions of the priestly office in an effort to demonstrate the superiority of Christ. And here the author expresses some of the same ideas in this passage because the priestly role was of supreme importance to the Jewish people and it should be to us as believers as well as we understand how that role has been fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Under the old covenant, God appointed priests to be the mediator of his relationship to men. God appointed them to speak to man on his behalf and to speak to God on man's behalf and all of this was pictured in the Levitical priesthood, all of the sacrifices and

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cleansings and rituals and symbols, but what was pictured ultimately became a reality in Christ. What was promised was fulfilled in the perfect great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his sacrifice, our sins can be forgiven and we have access into the presence of God and this is really at the heart of the epistle to the Hebrews as we are going to see in chapters 5 through 9. And I wish to examine the text before us under three headings that I hope will be helpful to you, not just in your understanding but even more importantly in understanding how you can really enjoy your life in Christ. We're going to look, first of all, at two essential qualifications of a priest. Secondly, their perfect fulfillment in Jesus Christ. And finally, the application to the believer.

First of all, in this text we see the author speaking of two essential qualifications of a high priest. Beginning in verse 1 he says, "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." By the way, the concept of gifts here refers to the bloodless offerings of grain or meal that were given in situations pertaining to dedication and for thanksgiving. So first we see that the priest had to be a man appointed by God. Now, although the Jews worshiped angels, they understood that a priest could not be an angel and the reason for that is because an angel knows nothing of the temptations and the sufferings of men, and this is why Jesus was such a problem to them. The claim that he was not only God incarnate, that God would become a man, but then to say that he could become our priest, I mean, how could such a person be sympathetic with the great struggles of humanity if he was God? How could he understand what we deal with? Well, obviously the answer is that he, the Lord Jesus, took upon himself the nature and the body of a man so that he could be tempted and he could suffer in the ways that we do and be our substitute on the cross of Calvary.

And like all priests, God himself appointed him, appointed the Lord Jesus. Now, they never ran for office. They were never voted in like we would vote in a legislator or a president. You will recall in Numbers 16, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, remember those guys? They tried to implement such a system saying that, "The priesthood should be open to all Israelites, not just you, Aaron and the rest of you guys. It should be open to everybody." So they enlisted 250 chiefs of the congregation, well-known men of Israel, and they assembled themselves together against Moses and Aaron in a magnificent showdown and God's response was rather straightforward. He said to Moses, "Gather Korah, Dathan and Abiram along with their wives, sons and their little ones," and he caused, "the earth to open its mouth and swallow them up and their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all the goods." And if you read the rest of the text, you see that God sent fire down from heaven and consumed the 250 co-conspirators.

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So God made it abundantly clear that he is in charge, not man, and that he will be the one to appoint his priests, not men. By the way, as a footnote, the same principle holds true for the privilege of serving God in pastoral ministry. The pastorate is not a career, it is a calling. Men are set apart, they are gifted by God to shepherd his people, Ephesians 4:11 and following is one of the key texts regarding that. And like in verse 4, like the ancient priests of Israel, no one takes the honor to himself but receives it when he is called by God even as Aaron was. And frankly pastors should never be self-appointed. God himself should call that man into that particular service. And then to verify that calling on the basis of one's character and conduct and the spiritual fruits and giftedness of that individual, that person must be affirmed and ordained by other mature and proven shepherds. And when these qualifications and this process are neglected, churches will suffer greatly and people will be banished to an island of spiritual infancy and tares will eventually come into the church and choke out the wheat.

So, first the priest had to be a man appointed by God, secondly, he had to be sympathetic with those to whom he ministered. Notice verse 2, "he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness." The two words "deal gently," a fascinating concept in the original language, metriopatheia, it's a fascinating term. It can be translated "have compassion." But this really only describes this idea of dealing gently only describes part of what this term really meant. It carried the idea of a virtue that maintains the middle ground or, shall we say, the mean between two extremes. In other words, a priest had to manifest in his character a balance between, for example, excessive grief and utter indifference; between extreme patience and harsh condemnation. There had to be a balance and he could not be, for example, overly sympathetic to the point of being naïve or saccharine, which means excessively sweet or sentimental. But he also had to avoid the opposite extreme of being impatient and hardhearted. He had to be able to deal gently. You see, being overly sympathetic could result in giving bad counsel to the people that came to him. It could result in offering to God offerings that were unwarranted, offerings that were inappropriate. And being excessively austere or harsh, unapproachable, too severe, could drive people away. It could crush their spirit. So priests had to be balanced. They had to be able to show moderation. They had to be approachable and compassionate and patient and discerning in order to give wise counsel and able to effectively comfort and console individuals but they couldn't be so sympathetic that they were unable to say the hard things that would need to be said, to offer rebuke and call men to repentance and even pronounce condemnation and judgment on the most obstinate and rebellious. They had to show great forbearance and yet they had to be able to speak forthrightly. This was the idea of dealing gently and like each of us, the priest had to find that middle ground between being indifferent to sin and angry with sinners.

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Whenever I go to the mall, I look around and I see, for example, many of the young people and my heart goes out to them. I have sympathy toward them. They need to be dealt with gently and what that means is there needs to be pity in our heart for them but they also need to be told the truth that would probably be painful. You look at them and they've got the morals of an alley cat and the mindset of an orangutan. They just have never thought beyond their nose about anything. They are completely, utterly lost, and unless they come to Christ, they will perish. They need to be dealt with gently and hopefully you can see the balance there.

So the priest in verse 2 had to deal gently with, notice, "the ignorant and the misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness." Let me talk about this for a moment. The concept of ignorant here refers to people who sin because they don't know any better and it can also refer to those who sin because they don't know what they're doing is wrong. They just don't see it. I think of Paul's past sin. Remember he described it in 1 Timothy 1:13, he said, "formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor and insolent opponent, but I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

You see, there was no sacrifice that could be made, no sacrifice appointed for willful high-handed sin committed with an utter disregard for the law. We read, for example, in Numbers 15:28, "The priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who goes astray when he sins unintentionally, making atonement for him that he may be forgiven. But," in verse 30, "the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people." And so sins committed in full rebellion against light and knowledge were to be punished by death and all other sins were to be confessed and expiated with the sacrifices that the priest would offer. Though that refers to the ignorant but he also speaks of the misguided. The King James translates it, "them that are out of the way." Those who are out of the way because they have been diluted, for example, by Satan's lies or by their own sinful flesh that hungers after all manner of personal folly that will cause us to wander away from the straight and narrow way of faith and obedience. I'll speak more on all of this in a minute but the point here is that God appointed priests who could deal gently with these kinds of people which covers everybody, the ignorant and the misguided. We all fall under those headings.

And one of the primary reasons that they could effectively minister to the people is because by God's convicting grace they were intimately aware of their own sinful proclivities. They were aware of their own ignorance, their own propensity to stray out of the path of divine blessing and cross over into the realm of disobedience that inevitably will lead to the forfeiture of blessing and even divine chastening. They were aware of

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their own weaknesses. That's why it says, "since he himself also is beset with weakness." In other words, he would know it by experience and if we are honest, we all know it by experience. I do.

Verse 3, "and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself." So he had to be a man appointed by God, verse 4, "And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was." And then, secondly, he had to be a sympathetic priest with sympathy with those to whom he ministered and as a result, then he could offer the gifts and the sacrifices to God.

Think about that. Think how they lived, those priests. Day after day, month after month, year after year, they made sacrifices for the expiation of sins. Expiation is the idea of taking away guilt through the payment of a penalty or the offering of an atonement. They did that day in and day out. But isn't it interesting even with all of that, nothing could remove that proclivity or tendency to sin. But what is amazing is in the atoning work of Christ on the cross, there was both substitution and satisfaction of God's offended holiness. So at the cross, something far greater than expiation took place, in other words, far greater than the mere taking away of guilt. There was also propitiation and propitiation had to do with satisfaction and had to do with appeasement. Think about it, on the cross Jesus' atoning work brought about a change in God's attitude toward the sinner so that he moved from being at enmity with us to being for us, and because of this even though in our unredeemed humanness we continue to sin, through the process of propitiation we are restored into fellowship with God, we are restored into his divine favor. 1 John 4:10 tells us that God "loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

And you see, dear friends, all of these sublime and blessed truths are wrapped up in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect high priest, to which the entire Levitical priesthood ultimately pointed. And to be sure, these were staggering claims to the Jews. They had to wrestle with all of this as they considered Jesus as their Messiah and their high priest.

So two essential qualifications: he had to be appointed by God and, secondly, he had to be sympathetic with those to whom he ministered, allowing him then to offer gifts and sacrifices. And secondly what we see here in the text is that this was all perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Notice verse 5 and here we see he was appointed by God. "So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'" And here the inspired author presents his case in a very compelling way by taking the Jews all the way back to the Old Testament in Psalm

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2:7. And you will recall that this is obviously what happened, God the Father said this to Jesus at his baptism, a clear statement affirming his divine appointment to the priesthood.

In verse 6, he goes on, "just as He says also in another passage," and here he quotes Psalm 110:4, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Now, folks, you must understand this was a powerful revelation to the Jews. It must have really shocked them because they knew that for centuries the high priesthood in Judaism had been filled by the impulse of human leaders, not by God. Human rulers used them like political appointees who would essentially help a leader advance his own personal and political agenda and they cared nothing about the will of God or of trying to ensure that a priest was a descendant of Aaron and so forth. The Jews knew that.

But here we learn that Jesus is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Now, the author is going to expand upon this in chapter 7 but I believe a brief explanation is in order. You see, in the days of Abraham we are told in Genesis 14, mainly verse 18, and this was long before the Aaronic priesthood was ever established, there we learn that Melchizedek who, by the way, his name means "righteous king," surprise, surprise, Melchizedek was King of Salem and Salem was ancient Jerusalem. And we learn in that text that he was a "priest of God most high." Now when we come to Hebrews 7:3, we learn that his priesthood was unending, it was eternal unlike that of Aaron which began in the days of Moses but then ended in A.D. 70 when the Romans came in and destroyed the temple. So Melchizedek was a type of Christ, in other words, an Old Testament person that pictured or prefigured a superior antetype which was the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect and eternal priest. And though Melchizedek is in no way the equal of Christ, his unique priesthood and even his name typify Jesus Christ and his work in a number of significant ways and when we get to Hebrews 7, we will examine those. So the idea here is that Melchizedek's priesthood elevated the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ even beyond that of Aaron. That's the argument. Verse 10, he was "designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek."

So Jesus was not only appointed by God but we know that he was also sympathetic with those to whom he ministered. Why? Because he became a man so that he could identify with our sufferings and our temptations yet without sin, and ultimately be our substitute on the cross.

I want you to notice more of what is said about our precious Savior here in verse 7, "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from," or literally out of, "death, and He was heard because of His piety." I want you to notice the words "loud crying." In the original language, we see this to be a very significant term. It doesn't refer to a cry a man would

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choose to utter on his own but rather it speaks of a cry that is extracted from him, that is pulled out of him, that is forced out of a man as a result of just excruciating anguish. That's the loud crying that accompanied our Savior with his prayers and supplications in the garden when he prayed to the Father. By the way as we see even here in verse 7, he didn't pray to avoid the cross, he prayed to be resurrected from the dead. He came to die on the cross. He prayed to be resurrected as it says, "from death or out of death." And you will recall that great text in Luke's Gospel, according to Luke an angel from heaven was sent down to minister to the Lord and to strengthen him there in the garden. In Luke 22:44 we read, "And being in agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood, falling down to the ground." You see, his distress brought him to the very threshold of death. And folks, when you examine the life and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, you see that he was indeed a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. He experienced the full spectrum of human suffering and temptation even beyond what we could imagine, making him eminently qualified to be our sympathetic high priest.

Verse 8, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered." Isn't it interesting what we read here is the Father didn't give his Son a pass on suffering. He was given no exemption from all of the sorrow and the pain associated with the human condition. And because of his perfect obedience to the will of the Father, he ultimately experienced an ignominious and horrifying and excruciating death, death on a cross. So, folks, there is nothing that we can experience that he has not experienced far greater, and for this reason he can be affirmed as our sympathetic high priest, the one that can deal gently with us.

Verse 9, "And having been made perfect." Let me pause here. Obviously he was perfect, he was holy, so this isn't speaking of some metaphysical perfection but rather in terms of his function. In other words, having completed all that was necessary to make him perfectly fitted to become our Savior and priest, he became to all those who obey him the source of eternal salvation.

Verse 10, "being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek."

So, my friends, this was the inspired argument given to the Hebrews to prove the superiority, the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. And from here I would like to spend our final minutes applying this to each of us. You know, these are just astounding, blessed, glorious truths that should animate each of our hearts to more resounding praise for who Christ is. And I think especially of this idea of how Christ is sympathetic to the ignorant and the misguided because I've got my picture next to that, don't you? Categories in

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which we all find ourselves. Think of the concept of ignorance. I mean, who among us is fully aware of his sin? Who among us is fully aware of the deceitfulness of our heart? How our selfishness and arrogance and rebellion and tendencies of the flesh play themselves out? What we can see, dear friends, is just the tip of the iceberg, and even when we see the tip, we barely deal with the snowflake on the top of the tip, right? For this reason David prayed in Psalm 19:12, "Who can discern his errors?" The idea is no one can. Then he prays, "Acquit me of hidden faults." "God, forgive me of my blind spots, those areas of rebellion that only you can see. I can't even see it." Yet here's the point: our great high priest has compassion for us in that state. Oh, what grace. He patiently and gently deals with us.

Furthermore, thinking of ignorance, who among us can really understand our Creator God? You know, we all live in the twilight of his glorious light, right? We just see a little of it. I mean, do we really understand his attributes? Can we fully explain his purposes? His Providence? His omniscience? His omnipotence? His omnipresence? His transcendent holiness? Do we not all struggle to understand how he is even at work in our lives? Yet we all say with Paul in that great doxology, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and unfathomable his ways." We're ignorant, aren't we? We're just so ignorant and yet like ignorant little children, our Lord Jesus has compassion on us. He deals gently with us and it's as though he sets us on his knee and he teaches us.

Some are ignorant because they are a new convert. Maybe that's you. They only know the most basic elements of the Gospel, the ABCs of the faith, yet with that they have been saved by his grace and he ever lives to make intercession for them. Are all of us that believe?

Some are ignorant because they never had an opportunity to learn. They've never been around anyone that could disciple them. Maybe they were raised in an ungodly home or a hypocritical home and they never had a good church and like many, they are just too ignorant to even know they're ignorant. Spiritually speaking, their character and conduct is still puerile, childlike, it's infantile. They are junior high at best in their spiritual life and they can't see it. But isn't it wonderful to know that our high priest receives them and he deals gently with them and lavishes his love upon them and patiently teaches them. I'm glad he does that. I think where I would be were that not the case.

Some are ignorant because they struggle with learning. For some it's going to be virtually impossible to grasp the deeper doctrines of Scripture. They will never be able to write a systematic theology of any subject in Scripture. They'll never be able to explain, for example, how they are saved but they are saved all the same. Some of the most godly

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people I know have a very shallow understanding of Scripture but they have a great love for Christ because he has dealt gently with them and he will continue to do so.

Some are ignorant because they're lazy and because they have no ambition to learn, to discipline themselves for the sake of godliness. They do not cherish the word of God. They have no appetite for it. They have no real love for Christ. They would rather feed on Facebook rather than God's book. They prefer Hollywood over God's word. They value the things of the world more than the surpassing value of knowing Christ. And yet the Lord deals gently with them, inviting them to find real life through walking with him in faith and obedience.

And some are ignorant just because they are enslaved to certain sins that they find so delicious. Maybe that is you. They entertain them in their imagination. They practice them in private and even in public. They excuse them with all manner of ridiculous rationalizations to justify their behavior. They are miserable because of them. Relationships are devastated in their life because of their sin. It even destroys their health. But they refuse to kill those things. They refuse to surrender themselves completely to Christ. Yet in his sympathy, in his great love for them, he deals gently, calling them to repentance and offering them his mercy and grace.

Notice he not only deals gently with the ignorant but also the misguided. Again, the King James says "them that are out of the way." It's pretty clear, isn't it? We all find ourselves there from time to time. This is part of our sinful nature, our depravity, our unredeemed humanness that constantly tries to assert itself in our flesh. Indeed, all of us like sheep have gone astray, right? Each of us has turned to his own way, Isaiah tells us.

Some are misguided because they have been deceived by Satan's lies. They have been a part of some phony religion. They have been taught false doctrine or weak, incomplete doctrine. Think of all those who profess Christ as Savior but want nothing to do with him as Lord. That's always just a bizarre thing to think about to me. Cultural Christianity, just kind of do the religious thing and then just live for yourself. Nothing more than practical atheism. They have been deceived.

Some are misguided because they have been seduced by some false teacher, maybe a parent, a friend, that has led them into error and immorality.

Some are misguided because they think they know everything. They can see a speck of sin in their neighbor's eye from a thousand yards but they can't see the log protruding from their own. They are quick to complain and criticize but they will not examine their own heart. And what's amazing to me because I've been there, you've been there, what's

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amazing is that Jesus deals gently with us. He will deal forthrightly and sometimes he will chasten us because he loves us, but he will deal gently with us. And he says to those who know everything, "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool."

Some are misguided because they are, to resurrect an old word, they are backslidden. By the way, that term is one that I understand very well, not just because of personal experience but because of my days working on top of a horse with a rope and cows. Sometimes you will rope a steer and he will backslide. He doesn't want to go anywhere so he goes down on his rear haunches, digs in his rear legs with his hooves and his front hooves, and it's hard to move them. A good horse will but it's hard. That's the idea. Isn't that a picture of how we are a lot of times? God says, "I want you to come over here," and we dig in our heels.

Some are misguided because of this, you know who you are, you play the religious game, you come to church occasionally, you wear your Christian smile, you sing with the rest of us, you even open up your Bible and listen to the sermon but there is no real joy in your heart because you're living in rebellion. You know nothing of the soul-satisfying joy of walking in intimate fellowship with the lover of your soul. You have left your first love, assuming you ever had it to begin with. Your Christianity is merely a public show, not a private reality. You are ruled by your lusts, by your flesh that naturally craves everything that will destroy you and you won't deal with it. As a result, like a foolish sheep, you have wandered away from the Shepherd. You have pursued a way that seems right but the end is death. You know, if this is you, I offer you good news. The Lord is tenderly calling you back. He will deal gently with you because he is a sympathetic high priest. He likened himself to the shepherd that he described in Matthew 18, remember, he left the 99 sheep to go after the one that went astray, and the text says, "and rejoiced over it more than over the 99 that did not go astray." Beloved, this is a picture of our Savior.

Well, we have much to learn from Christ's supreme example and I wish to close with a particular focus here on the priesthood. Imagine what it would have been like. I like to put myself in those positions. I spent a great deal of time even this last week, reading what the priest would do and try to put myself in that situation, and certainly there is much overlap in pastoral ministry. But imagine all the people that the priest encountered. Imagine all the stories that they would hear day in and day out; all the sins that they had to hear; how they had to discern those things; the counsel that they had to give; the balance that they had to take between being overly, shall we say, sentimental and too sympathetic and yet on the other hand, being too harsh, a balance that they had to take. Think of all the secrets they carried in their heart. Boy, do I know that firsthand. They had

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to be men who understood what it meant to deal gently with the ignorant and the misguided. And their greatest teacher, dear friends, was an honest acknowledgment of their own weaknesses. That was their greatest teacher. Notice again, verse 2, "he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided," why? "Because he himself also is beset with weakness."

Beloved, please hear this: none of us will ever be effective in ministry until we understand this. Oh, what a great teacher we have in our trials, in our temptations, even in our sins because it exposes our weaknesses. I have learned that the more a man suffers, the more effective he will be in ministry. The greater the sorrow, the deeper the sympathy. The greater the suffering, the richer the compassion. The greater the weakness, the greater the prayer. I've dealt with a lot of inexperienced men fresh out of seminary, some that I have taught, a lot of novice biblical counselors fresh out of training, a lot of neophyte evangelists fresh on the mission field, and what I have learned that they will be of little use until by God's grace they have been brought to the end of themselves. A man who has never prayed to die has far less to say than the man who has.

My friends, we must acknowledge our own weaknesses, our own sinfulness, and learn from them and only then will we learn to be dependent upon God and not ourselves. And from that, we will develop a measure of sympathy, literally pity for the sin and therefore a willingness to deal with it appropriately. I have learned far more from my failures than I have my successes, haven't you if you're honest with yourself? In fact, I've learned that my weaknesses are my greatest ally in the fight for like Paul I have learned that God's grace is sufficient and his power is perfected in weakness. Therefore Paul said, "most gladly therefore I will rather boast about my," what? "My weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

So again in verse 2, "he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness." You see, folks, this is how the ancient priests cultivated the virtue of metriopatheia, the idea of dealing gently, the ability to maintain the middle ground or the mean between the two extremes; to be approachable, compassionate, patient, sympathetic and yet forthright and uncompromising; men who could be brutally honest and say the hard things but to do so in such a spirit of love that only the most hardened sinner would resent them. You see, the ignorant or the misguided do not need a sentimental, malleable grandmother that is easily manipulated and intimidated, nor do they need on the other hand a tough Marine drill sergeant that is going to get in their face and shout them down. They need Jesus, right?

And what about you, dad, mom, Sunday school teacher, youth worker, whatever it is, Awana worker, counselor, pastor? Ask yourself: are people drawn to me or are they

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The High Priesthood of Jesus Christ

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 5:1-10
Preached on: Sunday, January 8, 2017

repulsed by me? Are people comfortable with sharing what's going on in their life with me or do they hold me at a distance? Do they see me as a safe harbor or as a rocky shoal? Ask yourself: am I quick to confront, to pull out my favorite Bible verse and start preaching to the people? "I can't wait to impress them with my theological acumen." Are you easily vexed by the sheer stupidity of some people to the point where you lose your patience with them? If so, dear friend, you are not aware of your own weakness and how the Lord has dealt gently with you because we've all been there and until you do you'll never be able to bear the reproach and the disappointments of the ignorant and the misguided. Your sympathy will quickly turn to resentment.

Or perhaps you are on the other extreme, you are quick to agree. I've seen this before many times. You're controlled by the fear of man, you are easily intimidated, you're afraid to speak the truth in love. I see this a lot with beginning counselors and with young pastors. Remember, Timothy was prone to this. That's why Paul said to him, "Kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you." He went on to say, "for God has not given us a spirit of timidity but of power and love and discipline." He said to him, "Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." He told him, "Preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season," when it's popular and when it's not. "Reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction." He went on to say that even when they turn away their ears from the truth, which they're going to do, he says, "Be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist," in other words one that proclaims the truth of the Gospel, "and thus fulfill your ministry."

I confess I had to learn this early on in my counseling ministry because I work primarily with very highly visible Christian leaders and artists, a lot of wealthy, powerful people, people that had never had anybody look them in the eye and tell them what they needed to hear. The joke was I worked with the up and out, rather than the down and out. I know what it's like to have to look a prominent physician in the face or a powerful political figure or the CEO of some company and say, "My friend, I need to tell you because of my love for you, that you are a brute and a bully. You are a vulgar and ungodly man and I can understand why your wife is uncomfortable with you. If I were your wife, I wouldn't want to be married to you. You need to hear this and there is nothing about you that affirms your claim that you belong to Christ. I don't see Christ in you. And the reason I tell you this is because until you come to a place where these things break your heart and you fall on your face before a holy God whom you have offended, you will never enjoy a relationship with your wife or a relationship with God."

Folks, that's what it is to deal gently with the ignorant and the misguided. I've seen men who are bullied by ungodly wives yet they refuse to take them by the hand and look them in the eye and call them to repentance. "Oh, I could never do that." Why not? "Well,

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because she would throw a fit and start throwing things at me and then run out of the house!" Oh, she has you trained well. Where is your sympathy, dear friend? Where is your pity on her sin? You must learn to deal gently with her but you must deal.

I think of Galatians 6:1 where Paul says, "if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness." Restore, a term in the original language that was a surgical term that was used to describe the setting of a bone. "This is going to hurt but it needs to be set and I will tenderly take a hold of it and do what needs to be done because of my love for you and I want this to grow properly." Folks, that's what it is to deal gently.

He went on to say that, "we are to bear one another's burdens," the idea of bearing up under someone's habitual burden of sin that they are struggling with they may not even see. And he says, "and thus fulfill the law of Christ," and what is that? That we should love one another.

My friends, we should never judge the rightness of what we do by the quality of response it will elicit. We must do what God has asked us to do and deal gently and true compassion will move a man to set aside his rabid commitment to self-protection and learn what it means to move into the life of another person and to love them enough to say maybe the hard things but do everything they can to wrap their arms around them and help them deal with their sin and and bring them to a place of repentance and restoration.

Now, to be sure there are times to say as Jesus did to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" There are times to call out the Pharisees who say, "You brood of vipers, you whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones, you hypocrites, you blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel." But even when Jesus said that, remember he had compassion on them. There's the balance. And he wept over Jerusalem and he gave his life for them as he did for each of us.

To be sure in our service to Christ, we are going to encounter those whose sin has caused them to degenerate into a level of spiritual darkness and immorality that they have just become like animals. Like swine, they wallow in the mud of debauchery and they feed upon the husks of deception with no conception of the consequences of their sin nor the forgiveness that could be theirs in Christ. But Christ has compassion on them and that's what we must have because his grace is far greater than their sin or our sin, and if we are willing to acknowledge our own weaknesses and depend upon him, he will help us to deal gently with the ignorant and the misguided. Well, I pray that we will all learn well these lessons from our sympathetic high priest.

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Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these great truths. Cause them by your grace and by the power of your Spirit to be manifested in our lives that Christ might be exalted and that sinners might enjoy the fullness of his grace. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.