

CHRIST'S PRIESTLY OFFICE

BIBLE TEXT : Hebrews 3:1-6; 4:14-16; 5:1-10

LESSON 436 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house" (Hebrews 3:3).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Hebrews 3:1-6

- 1 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;
- 2 Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses *was faithful* in all his house.
- 3 For this *man* was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house.
- 4 For every house is builded by some *man*; but he that built all things *is* God.
- 5 And Moses verily *was* faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after;
- 6 But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

Hebrews 4:14-16

- 14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession.
- 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin.
- 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 5:1-10

- 1 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he

Bible References:

Notes:

Heavenly Calling

"WHEREFORE, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1).

You will find as we go on in this Epistle that there is not a word lost, not a word spoken at random. The very title that he has given them of "holy brethren" refers us to the 11th verse of the previous chapter. They were holy because they were sanctified; and they were brethren because:

"For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:11).

Can you not see how the writer had drawn his very salutation from the points that he has already made? You will find straight through that the method of this writer is one point based upon another as he goes along. That is why it is one of the most wonderful pieces of literature to be found in the Word of God.

"Partakers of the heavenly calling." He is here contrasting the Old Dispensation with the New; so he traces the calling. The heavenly calling is contrasted with the comparatively earthly calling of the Israelites under the Old Dispensation.

Men of God like Abraham, Moses, and Joshua, who walked with God, saw the spiritual beyond the material. Nevertheless the blessings to Israel were largely material. Someone has even suggested that there was a thought of this kind to be drawn out in the fact that God told Abraham that his seed would be as "the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered," and "as the stars of the heaven"; the sand of the sea being Israel according to the flesh, and the stars of the heavens being Israel according to the Spirit.

Apostleship of Christ

The writer of Hebrews says, "Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." That word "consider" means to study earnestly, deeply. It is put in the most emphatic form. His Apostleship and Priesthood are two subjects which form a large part of this Epistle, especially His Priesthood. It has already been suggested in what has gone before. Now he brings it out as His announced subject.

An Apostle is one who is sent. It comes from the Greek word "**apostello**" which means "to send." In the Scriptural sense it means one sent by God. Jesus has much to say about His Apostleship. It is not put under that specific title, but throughout the Gospels He speaks thirty-two times of Him that sent Him. He bases the authority of His ministry on the fact of His being sent. The twelve Apostles were sent by Jesus. In John 20:21 it says: "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

Some of the choicest Scriptures to be found throughout the Gospels are those dealing with His having been sent.

may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:

2 Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

3 And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

4 And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as *was* Aaron.

5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.

6 As he saith also in another *place*, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

10 Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.

"He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (Matthew 10:40).

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17).

"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: [How that falls perfectly in line with the opening of this epistle!] for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. (John 3:34).

Priesthood of Christ

He also speaks of His Priesthood here. A priest is one appointed by God to represent men before God. Christ's Priesthood, you will notice in this Epistle, is a growing conception. It is by far the largest subject dealt with in the Epistle.

To the priests pertained the matter of purification and sanctification in their duties about the Temple or Tabernacle. The 17th verse of the 2nd chapter of Hebrews contains the heart of the whole thing.

"Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest [This is the first time this expression is used in the Epistle.] in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."

The term "high priest" occurs 17 times throughout the Epistle; but not once does it occur in any of the other Epistles. You can see that this Epistle to the Hebrews stands out largely in setting forth the office of Jesus Christ: "that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." In Proverbs 16:6 we read: "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged." Without mercy and truth there can be no purging of sin. When we take into account that Paul here was writing to the Hebrews and contrasting the Old Dispensation with the New, we can see how forcibly he was bringing out that in Christ Jesus they had a merciful and faithful High Priest; for the Aaronic priesthood, after Aaron, had signally failed in this very thing. They were not very merciful to men nor were they faithful to God. That unfaithfulness began at a very early period, in the time of Eli.

In the Herodian epoch, in the time when Jesus lived, the high priests were notorious for their cruelty, insolence, and greed. There were 28 high priests in 107 years of this period and their brief tenure of office was due to their wickedness. The writer is bringing before them the pre-eminence of the Priesthood under Christ. Here was a merciful and faithful High Priest such as they had not had for centuries under the old order.

Christ Compared

Jesus Christ as an Apostle is compared with Moses as a prophet. There is no difference between an Apostle and a prophet in their function. Moses was "one sent"; and a prophet is one who speaks for another. That is the meaning of the terms. The prophets were those who spoke for God; they brought His message to men.

In the opening of this Epistle the writer compared Jesus Christ in His eternity with the angels because His associates in glory were angels. But now in His humiliation He compares Him with Moses, a man on earth, because men are now His associates. He came down to walk among men. How logically this writer follows his theme from one step to another. Later we will find that Christ as a priest is compared with Aaron. Christ was both the Moses and the Aaron of the New Dispensation -- the two offices taken up in one.

As an Apostle He, like Moses, pleaded God's cause; and as a High Priest He, like Aaron, pleaded our cause with God. You remember the high priest of old had the name "Jehovah" written on his golden mitre, so that when he came before Israel he came as a man representing God. He also bore on his breast the names of the tribes of Israel, so that when he went in before God he would stand as their representative and plead their cause. So in Christ we have both the Apostle and the High Priest of our profession.

His Faithfulness

"Who was faithful to him that appointed him." That faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ is the theme that you will find carried throughout the entire Epistle; "as also Moses was faithful in all his house." That points back to Numbers 12, where Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses. The Lord spoke out of Heaven and called all three of them, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam over to the Tabernacle:

"And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.

"My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house" (Numbers 12:6,7).

If Moses held the exalted place among the prophets, which is set forth here, and then Jesus Christ takes pre-eminence over him as the writer brings out, what an exalted station He is put into in Scripture! In fact, among the Jews, Moses was the great character of the Old Testament. There was no other man who was looked up to, who was commemorated and celebrated among the Jews as was Moses. For a good reason: he stands out as their deliverer out of Egyptian bondage; he stands out as their lawgiver, and as their first prophet. The Lord chose him and singled him out from all the prophets in the way that He made Himself known unto him.

Christ the Builder

He goes on to say that "he that built all things is God." We can say that is Christ, because in this Epistle the writer has already said that by Him were the worlds made. John also said: "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). The house of God spoken of here is the Church. Israel was God's house under the Old Testament. It was not the Tabernacle, neither was it the Temple; it was God's people who constituted His house.

Christ is here set forth as being the builder or establisher of this house, and Moses was the appointed servant over the house which Jesus Christ Himself established. See the place that that puts Jesus into as compared with Moses.

"But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, . . ." (Hebrews 3:6).

The House -- The Church

Now what house is he speaking of? The present dispensation, the church of this present period; not in structure of stone with Gothic architecture or with stained glass windows. That does not constitute the Church. Neither is it the elaborate organisation with its board of deacons and elders, neither is it the policy of worship which they have adopted, and the forms and ceremonies which they go through. What constitutes Christ's Church is Christ's people.

"And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28 :17).

In that instance there was just one man and God and the stone that Jacob set up, and he called that the house of God, because that was the place where God met him. The essence of God's house is

the place where God meets with men. That is why the Church, then, is His people. The Church is God's house in the New Dispensation. Paul tells us that in I Timothy 3:15: ". . . the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

Christ's Church is likened unto the human body, of which Christ is the Head and we are the members, as brought out in Ephesians 4:15, 16. Paul brings it out beautifully how all the members function in perfect harmony one with the other. So it is in the ideal Church of Christ: perfect unity. No one member can be dispensed with, each one has his own place and his own function; and Christ is the Head of it all. You can see how utterly helpless the Church, which is the body of Christ, would be were it severed from the Head. It would be a corpse. That is what the nominal church has become because it has been severed from its Head.

Again, it is likened unto a building of which Christ is the Chief Cornerstone and we are lively or living stones. That is in I Peter 2:4-8. Christ is the Cornerstone, which was rejected by the builders, but has been made the Head of the corner. That is taken from the 118th Psalm where it says that the stone, which the builders rejected became the head of the corner. He was rejected and was crucified, but was resurrected and became the Chief Cornerstone of the Church established on the Day of Pentecost.

Spiritual Worship

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession" (Hebrews 4:14).

This is an answer to the objection that the Jews were bringing to the worship of the Hebrew Christians. They in substance were telling the Hebrew Christians: "You have no tabernacle; you have no temple; you have no priest; you have no sacrifice; you have no altar; you have no ritual." And that was all true. From the Jewish standpoint they, therefore, had no religion, because by their conception religion was inseparably bound up with these outward observances. They could not conceive of anyone's continuing in a religion and dispensing with these things.

From their standpoint you can see how difficult it would be for a Jewish convert, even after his change of heart, to catch a glimpse of heavenly things and adjust himself to this new order. And this was the objection that they were bringing. The answer is this: "We have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God." Jesus said to the woman at the well:

"Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.

"Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:21-23).

Jesus struck the very keynote of what this author declared to the Hebrew Christians at that time: namely, that true worship does not in any wise depend upon outward symbols, outward appearance, ritualism, sacrifice or offering, but it consists of one's worshipping God in Spirit and in truth. And that seems to be one of the hardest lessons that humanity learns. Very few men and women seem to reach the point, as Moses did, where they can endure as seeing Him who is invisible. Moses did, although he was one who was

commissioned of the Lord to establish this Tabernacle service with its ritualism and its sacrifices.

Yet Moses saw beyond that. He saw the invisible God, and because of that he endured. In spite of all we have in Scripture along the line of worshiping God in Spirit and in truth, people down through the ages have been lapsing into the idea of something tangible that they can see, that they can feel, in order to worship God.

Temporal Forms

Even among Protestants many have substituted church organisation, church forms, church ceremonies, and all the elaborate paraphernalia that goes with it, for the true worship of the Father in Spirit.

It means something for people to cleave to the pure essence of the worship of God. It is possible to worship God in Spirit and in truth without any paraphernalia. It is true that God has an outward church. It is necessary that there be a physical church as long as congregations are made up of human beings, and it is necessary that they have a board, that they have some officers; but they are just outward trappings, not the essential things. The main thing in the worship of God is that we see the invisible God and worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

Our High Priest and the True Tabernacle

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, . . ."

The thought here expressed is that Jesus has passed into the heavens, into the presence of God. The priest in his service went first to the brazen altar, which stood outside the Tabernacle, and there everything was sacrificed. Then he took the blood of that sacrifice, passed through the first veil before the sanctuary, and performed his ceremonies. Then if he was a high priest he went on through the second veil to the Holiest of All. This seems to have been the thought of the author here.

Likewise when Jesus was upon the Mount of Olives He was received up in a cloud and carried into Heaven, through the physical heavens, out of their sight; and then He passed into the presence of God just as the priest passed into the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle service.

"A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man" (Hebrews 8:2).

It was when Jesus entered into the presence of God that He entered into the true Tabernacle; that is, the Tabernacle, which was pitched in the wilderness was a replica of the true Tabernacle which is in Heaven. That is why the Lord enjoined Moses to see that he did everything according to the pattern showed him in the Mount, because that pattern on the top of the mount was patterned after the true Tabernacle in Heaven.

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

It is implied here that the Aaronic priesthood could not be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. They became steeped in ceremonialism and finally debased to the point where they simply exploited the people instead of helping them. Even at as early a date as Eli's time, his sons became covetous, and profited illegally by the offerings that the people brought, till the whole thing became a stench in the nostrils of God. He set aside the whole line of Eli and

brought in another member of the family of Aaron to fulfil the office of priest. So all the way through, this priesthood fell short of that to which God had called them. And now Paul is bringing out by implication that very difference:

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

That Throne of Grace has reference to the Mercy Seat where the very presence of God dwelt. Under the Old Dispensation the high priest went into the Holy of Holies once a year, and that not without blood -- the blood of the sacrifice. And there every move he made, every step he took, had to be in strict accordance with the Law that God had laid down. A breach of the Law meant death. Therefore he wore bells upon his garments, that as he moved about in his service the Israelites would hear and know that he was still in the service of the Lord.

That is how strict God's law was. But now that we have a High Priest who has entered into the true Tabernacle, to the true Holy Place, Paul brings out the contrast as to how we may enter boldly without fear, and obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Grace is defined as God's favour shown to the undeserving, those who merit nothing. That is the case with every one of us. But mercy goes a step farther than that. Mercy is God's favour shown to the ill-deserving, those who merited punishment, as in the case of the sinner. You can see what wonderful reaches these two words have: God's grace and God's mercy. No matter what place we occupy in God's service, how busy we may be, what good we may be doing, what visits we may be making; no matter how diligent we may be in giving our testimony, in visiting the sick, in going to the jails and the hospitals, there is not one thing that we do that merits God's favour. It is well for us to remember that. The sacrifice that Jesus made, and that alone, merits His favour.

**"Could my tears forever flow,
Could my seal no languor know;
These for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone."**

And that is as true after we were saved as before. We are saved from day to day, from hour to hour, from moment to moment, by the merits of the crucified One. Where is there any room for boasting? we are rewarded for our works but we are never saved by them. That is another point in which Christendom has fallen down -- if they do not do it doctrinally they do it unconsciously or subconsciously, depending upon the things they are doing to find favour in the sight of God. There will be many disappointed people some day. They will find out that their work has never won the favour of God. They will also find another thing, that their works are bringing no reward if done in that frame of mind.

Divine Origin of Appointments

Although the priests were appointed to represent man, God did the appointing. "And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" (Hebrews 5:4). In fact, there is no office in the church, from the least to the greatest, but that God does the appointing. And more than that, when He does the appointing, the congregation will recognise that He has put that man or that woman in his particular place. That does not apply to only the officials but it applies to every one who has a part in the service of God. If you recognise that fact when you have been given a task to do, that the Lord through His ministry or overseer has assigned it to you, it ought to put upon your heart a greater

responsibility in taking care of it. You have received your commission, whatever it may be -- taking care of the place of worship, or some humble task -- from the Lord. Therefore you are accountable to the Lord for the way you do that job.

If Christ is Priest forever, as is set forth in Hebrews 5:6, where Paul quotes from Psalm 110, there can be no succession of priests. He has abrogated that in becoming a priest, not after a carnal kingdom, but after the power of an endless life; so there is no more succession of priests.

The Atoning Sacrifice

"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared" (Hebrews 5:7).

Jesus faced something there on the cross that the human mind has never fathomed. Upon Him came the entire load of sin of a lost world. Upon the cross He was to make propitiation for every sin; and the burden came upon Him. Right then the Father's face was averted, because He could not tolerate sin in the least degree. That is what brought forth this cry; and it was that from which Jesus seemed to shrink.

Jesus was in constant communion with the Father, and He said that He and the Father were one. Here the Father's face was averted and His presence withdrawn until that propitiation was completed, the Atonement made, and Christ had seen the thing through to the end. Then He cried, "It is finished."

**"But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night
That the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost."**

"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:9).

That means having perfected His mission. He personally needed no perfecting -- He was perfect in His incarnation from Bethlehem to the Cross. He perfected or finished His mission -- completed it there -- and thus became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that believe Him and obey Him. In fact, believing and obeying are almost synonymous terms in Scripture. Therefore when a man says that he believes in Christ and does not do what Christ commands, he does not have the kind of belief that the Bible is talking about. Only those who obey Him are entitled to eternal life.