

The High Priest's Offering

Hebrews 5:2-3, 7-8

Turn to Hebrews 5. One of the big reasons that believers are reluctant to come to God is that we don't feel very good about ourselves. We have had the same weaknesses and sins for a long time. We've come to God for forgiveness and mercy so many times, and we cannot imagine that he would still welcome us warmly.

I assume every believer has some personal experience of this. I certainly do. We can only imagine God being frustrated and disappointed, and perhaps angry and ready to strike us. And the result is that we avoid God. We don't approach God as we otherwise would.

Part of this is a problem that God's people in biblical times did not have. They were not plagued by their own guiltiness nearly as much as we have become in our introspective times.

Out of 150 psalms, only four or five are prayers of confession of sin and asking forgiveness. And there are twice that many psalms where the worshippers ask God to take good care of them, because they have been serving him blamelessly. Blamelessly – did you get that? We never pray like that. Ps 26 is one example. So we have a problem they did not have.

On the other hand, Hebrews does assume people will be reluctant to come to God because of their weaknesses and sins. And in Hebrews, avoiding God is the very worst thing anyone could do. Never avoid God, always go to him boldly and confidently.

And one big reason we can always come confidently is that Jesus, our high priest, is merciful and sympathetic. And the reason Jesus our high priest is merciful is that he knows what it's like. He is fully human, made like us in every way. He suffered when he was tempted, so he's good to those who struggle with sin.

That was Hebrews 2. In Hebrews 4 we learned that he was sympathetic, because he was tempted in all the common ways, as we are, and that he was weak in these temptations. He was fully human, made like us in every way, he was tempted in all the common ways, just as we are, and in these temptations he was weak, which means faithfulness to God was a real fight. That's how he became sympathetic.

Today's message on Hebrews 5 is on more or less this same topic, our Lord's weakness and temptations and struggles with sin, and therefore his mercy and kindness to us. And Hebrews does not come back to this. So people, take this to heart, and make use of it. It is incredibly important in our daily life with God.

We're looking at four verses today, Hebrews 5:2-3, and 5:7-8. Verses 2-3 tell us what kind of character every human high priest had to have, and remember that Jesus was fully human, made like us in every way. And verse 7-8 show how Jesus qualifies as that kind of priest.

Hebrews 5:2-3 – *[Every high priest] is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and wandering, since he himself is clothed weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices concerning his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.*

We'll go through our text a line at a time.

*[Every high priest] is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and wandering.*

This is core of the teaching. Ignorant and wandering means those who often sin. Heb 2 said he was a merciful high priest, and Heb 4 said he was sympathetic. This gentleness is a another word for the same thing. Every high priest has this.

*Since he himself is clothed in weakness.*

At the end of Hebrews 4 we learned that Jesus was sympathetic with *our* weaknesses. This line takes it a bit further – *he* was clothed in weakness. Another translation says “he was surrounded with weakness,” and that is good, too. Every high priest is clothed with weakness, is surrounded with weakness, and Hebrews 5 will show that this includes Jesus.

We have all at some time done the right thing when it was hard to do. We did not feel strong, we felt weak, but we really wanted to do the right thing, and with God's help we did. That is the story of the Lord's life.

*This is why he has to offer sacrifices concerning his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.*

Unless you use the King James Bible, your Bible has the word “sacrifices” in v3. But the King James Bible was right to omit the word “sacrifices.” It is not in any Greek manuscripts at all, but the translators think it should be there. So my advice is you at least put a parenthesis around “sacrifices,” better to draw a line right through it. “Sacrifices” should not be there.

If we leave “sacrifices” in there, then vv2-3 cannot apply to Jesus, since Jesus was sinless and did not need to offer sacrifices for his own sins. But the writer of Hebrews obviously wants to include Jesus in this, as a human high priest.

The high priest has to offer concerning his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. This comes from the Day of Atonement, described in Leviticus 16. I said last week that the priest went into the Holy of Holies only one day of the year, the Day of Atonement.

What I did not say is that on the Day of Atonement, the high priest went into the Holy of Holies twice. The first time the high priest went in, he went in because of his own sins. His own sins have defiled and contaminated the Holy of Holies.

His own sins have polluted the Holy of Holies, so he sacrificed a bull, and he took the blood of the bull in there to purify the Holy of Holies from his own sins.

Then he went back outside and sacrificed a goat, and he brought the blood of the goat into the Holy of Holies because of the sins and rebellions of the whole people of Israel, because their sins and rebellions also have defiled and contaminated the Holy of Holies.

God would not allow an arrogant and self-righteous high priest. The first trip in was for his own sins, and the second trip in was for everyone else's. The high priest always knew he was a part of the problem, he himself was clothed in weakness, and therefore he would be gentle with the ignorant and wayward. This has always been very important to God.

Heb 5:3 says, omitting "sacrifice," *This is why he has to offer concerning his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.* Every high priest is full of weakness, and therefore has to offer something for himself concerning sins. The OT high priests offered *sacrifice* for themselves, concerning sins, because they had sinned.

Jesus was without sin, so did not need to offer *sacrifice* for himself, so the writer purposely does not use that word. But he *was* full of weakness, just like the OT high priest, and Hebrews means this line to apply to every high priest, including Jesus. What must Jesus *offer* for himself concerning sins? We find out in verse 7: *Jesus offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears.*

The priest was clothed with weakness, so he sinned, and so he need to *offer* sacrifice for himself concerning sin. Jesus was also clothed in weakness, and he was tempted in every way as we are, yet he was without sin. But he also must *offer* something for himself concerning sins. He *offered* prayers and petitions that he would not sin, that he would do the Father's will. He offered prayers and petitions for himself concerning sin.

Let's read vv2-3 again, and then we'll move to vv7-8.

*[Every high priest] is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and wandering, since he himself is clothed with weakness. This is why he has to offer concerning his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.* This was true of every OT high priest, and also true of Jesus.

*During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Though he was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation.*

*During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears.* In Matthew it says that Jesus, in Gethsemane, fell with his face to the ground, and prayed. None of the Gospels mention loud cries and tears in Gethsemane, but the writer of Hebrews knows things that were not written in our Gospels.

Jesus was praying that he would do the right thing, not the wrong thing. It is a desperate, desperate prayer. Does Jesus feel strong? No. He wants to do the right thing, and it feels impossible, he is so afraid to go to the cross, yet he wants to obey the Father.

*To the one who could save him from death.*

Jesus knew that if he asked God to take him out of this, his Father would do that. He does not need 12 disciples to fight for him, he can ask more than 12 legions of angels to rescue him. But then God's whole plan would fail.

Jesus prayed, "take this cup from me." If the prayer had stopped there, the cup would have been taken from him. What we learn from "prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears" is how hard it was for Jesus to pray, "not my will but yours be done." What we learn from "prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears" is how close Jesus was to not going through with this, not saying "your will be done." It was very close. Jesus was not faking anything. It was a hard fight.

These loud fervent cries and tears were his offering for himself concerning sins, giving us evidence that he truly was clothed with weakness.

*His prayer was heard because of his reverent submission.* Do you know why Jesus ended up doing the right thing, doing the Father's will? Because God answered his prayer. God listened to him because he wanted to do the Father's will. His prayer was heard. Jesus asked God for help, and God helped him.

What if it was a close call? It sounds like Jesus barely did the right thing. It sounds like Jesus wanted to do the Father's will, but he knew he was not strong enough, and he could not do it. So he kept praying, more and more desperately. Jesus could feel that his determination to obey was slipping away. Earlier, Jesus had been resolved to go through with this, but now in front of it, he falters.

I find this frightening, to say the least. My soul is on the line, and so is yours. Why did he do the right thing, why did he obey the Father? Because God answered his prayer, but obviously not right away. It was a fight.

We need to imagine Jesus saying to himself, "Temptation is strong, brutal. I had no idea how difficult obedience was. No wonder my followers sin. I so close myself, too close. No wonder they sin. I will be merciful, and sympathetic, I will always be gentle."

*Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.*

Hebrews speaks of the Lord's suffering several times, but the only actual example is these loud cries and tears. And these loud cries and tears don't happen when the Lord is being flogged, or nailed to the cross. They happen when he's praying, "don't let me sin, Father, not my will but yours be done."

As far as God was concerned, Jesus without sin was not yet perfect. Jesus was not perfect until he knew about this kind of painful and difficult obedience. Jesus learned what obeying the Father actually costs, and how hard obedience can be for those who truly love God. Once Jesus had been through that, the Father said, "OK, now you are perfect."

*He learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation.*

This is why Jesus is sympathetic with our weaknesses, and this is why we should come boldly to the throne of grace. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, how great are your riches of wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand your ways. Who could ever know your thoughts? Who could ever give you advice? Who has ever given to you, so that you should repay them? Everything comes from you, everything continues on by your power, and everything brings you glory. O God, how fortunate we are to be your people. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what pleases him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.