

Throughout the history of religion, but especially as we see in the Old Testament, mankind needed someone to represent them before an almighty, holy God. They needed a priest. But who is really qualified to do such a job. God tells us what is needed and the author of Hebrews presents in this passage how Jesus Christ fulfills those qualifications in a superior manner.

I. What qualified high priests?1. *Their ability to sympathize with people (5:1–3)*

- a. An ability found in their humanity (which Jesus fulfills, *cf.* 2:14)
- b. An ability related to dealing gently (or in an appropriately measured way) with those who ignorantly go astray, because they themselves share in weakness. (Jesus felt the full pressure of temptation as well, although apart from sin.)
- c. An ability found in their understanding of the need to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin, part of their assigned task. (Jesus as well understood the need and came to give His life as a ransom for many. But unlike human priests, He did not have to offer a sacrifice for Himself.)

2. *Their divine appointment (5:4)*

Only God may select those who may approach Him, which was clearly the case in the O.T. with Aaron who neither chose the role nor was elected to it.

II. What qualified Jesus as High Priest?1. *His divine appointment (5:5–6)*

- a. The “honor” of divine appointment is advanced to “glory.”
- b. God the Father Himself exalted Jesus Christ the Son to be high priest.
- c. Jesus as appointed high priest is also the exalted Son (*cf.* 1:1–5).
- d. Jesus is a priest forever, never dying nor needing replacement, whose sacrifice remains effective eternally.
- e. He is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, not a Levitical priest and a topic to be mentioned again and developed (*cf.* 5:10; 6:20; ch. 7).

2. *His distinguished empathy (5:7–10)*

a. What did His human experience look like? (5:7–8)

Note: “the days of Jesus’ life on earth” (NIV) is more literally, “the days of His flesh” which emphasize His human experience, not his spacial location.

- 1) The result for Jesus as a human being: He learned obedience.
- 2) The position in which He learned obedience: Son, not merely as a son, but as the Son who has been presented in chapters 1–4.
- 3) The method by which He learned this obedience: suffering.
- 4) The response to facing this suffering: He offered prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears.
- 5) The attitude toward suffering and obedience: humble submission.

b. What was the result of His human experience? (5:9–10)

- 1) He became perfectly equipped to be our high priest (v.9a).
- 2) He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. That is, those who come in repentance to Him as incarnate God and Savior, benefit from His perfect sacrifice which is good for all eternity.
- 3) God “designated” or called Him a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (a topic to be developed later in the letter).

We may only approach God on His terms. He has provided the perfect representative, the perfect High Priest, in Jesus Christ who spans the gap between God and man by being God and having become man. He knows us as one of us, yet is the exalted Son of God who speaks on behalf of all who have placed their trust in Him. Why attempt any other approach to God? Why dare?

Questions for further reflection:

- What is being said about God and His choices when some other way to approach God than Jesus is tried? What motivates people to attempt some other way to God other than Jesus?
- What circumstances did Jesus face which required specific obedience? What circumstances do you face which require obedience? Do you really believe that Jesus understands the challenge? Why/why not? How do you know?
- Should you view suffering as helpful for your spiritual growth? Why/why not?
- Believers are called royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). What might these qualifications for a high priest in Hebrews 5 say about the way we should live?