

Hebrews 5:1–14 — Jesus, Our Great High Priest, and the Call to Grow Up

At the end of Hebrews chapter 4, the writer introduced a glorious truth—Jesus is our great High Priest:

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession” (Hebrews 4:14, NKJV).

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

That sets the stage for Hebrews chapter 5. The question is simple: How can Jesus be our High Priest, and why does that matter for daily life?

The Priest’s Mission: Representing People to God, and God to People

In the Old Testament, the priest had a two-fold ministry.

1. He represented the people before God.
God is holy. People are sinful. A sinner could not casually stroll into God’s presence. So the priest stood as a mediator. The worshiper brought a sacrifice, confessed sin, and the priest offered that sacrifice to God on the person’s behalf.
2. He represented God to the people.
After ministering before the Lord, the priest came out to declare God’s word, God’s will, and God’s assurance to the people.

That’s why the Jewish mind had been trained to think, “If I’m going to approach God, I need a priest.” And for generations, that was true under the old covenant system God established.

But now these Hebrew believers were wrestling with something: “If we leave the temple system behind, what happens to our access to God? Who represents us now?”

So the writer says, “You have not lost a mediator—you have gained a better one. You have Jesus.”

The Old High Priest: Appointed, Compassionate, and Limited

The writer begins with the familiar:

“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins” (Hebrews 5:1, NKJV).

The high priest was taken from among men, so he understood human weakness:

“He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness” (Hebrews 5:2, NKJV).

But that compassion came with a limitation: he was a sinner too.

“Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins” (Hebrews 5:3, NKJV).

Before he could represent you, he had to deal with his own guilt. Even the high priest needed mercy.

And he did not appoint himself:

“And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was” (Hebrews 5:4, NKJV).

It was a calling, not a career move. When spiritual service turns into mere political machinery, everyone suffers. God never intended His work to become a platform for ego, control, or ambition. Ministry is a calling that must remain a spiritual work, not a human ladder.

Jesus Did Not Promote Himself—The Father Appointed Him

Now the writer turns the corner:

“So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’” (Hebrews 5:5, NKJV).

“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 5:6, NKJV).

God the Father appointed the Son. Jesus did not seize the title—He received it. And His priesthood is not temporary or inherited through Levi. It is forever.

Gethsemane: The Cost of Our Salvation and the Narrow Door of the Cross

Then we come to one of the most tender verses in the chapter:

“Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear” (Hebrews 5:7, NKJV).

That points us to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus entered our suffering, not as a spectator, but as the Substitute. He prayed with anguish. He wept. He faced the cup.

And when Jesus prayed, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me,” the meaning is unavoidable: If there were any other way to redeem mankind—any other path to forgiveness—any other route to God—then the cross would have been unnecessary.

But the cup did not pass. Jesus went to the cross. He shed His blood to save us from sin. And the resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

The cross does not flatter human pride. It does not tell us we can climb our way to God. It tells us we needed saving—and only Jesus could do it.

What Prayer Is Really For: Submission, Not Manipulation

Hebrews continues:

“Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Hebrews 5:8, NKJV).

That does not mean Jesus moved from disobedience to obedience. It means He experienced obedience in the most costly form—submission under suffering.

And it teaches us something about prayer. Prayer is not a tool for controlling God. Prayer is where God reshapes us.

Yes, God hears. Yes, God responds. But prayer is not how we force our will into heaven. Prayer is often how God brings our will into alignment with His. The mature prayer is not, “Lord, do what I demand,” but, “Lord, Your will be done.”

Completed Work: Eternal Salvation Through Christ

“And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9, NKJV).

“Perfected” means brought to completion—His mission carried through fully. Salvation is not partly Christ and partly you. It rests on what Jesus has done—His blood on the cross, His victory in the resurrection, His living intercession as our High Priest.

“Called by God as High Priest ‘according to the order of Melchizedek’” (Hebrews 5:10, NKJV).

The writer wants to say more, but then comes a hard pastoral moment.

A Loving Rebuke: “You Have Become Dull of Hearing”

“Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing” (Hebrews 5:11, NKJV).

The problem was not that truth was unavailable. The problem was spiritual sluggishness. Some were hesitating, stuck between old patterns and full confidence in Christ. And that hesitation was producing immaturity.

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food” (Hebrews 5:12, NKJV).

That is one of the most common struggles in the church: arrested spiritual development—saved, but stalled. Years pass, but growth doesn’t. The appetite remains shallow, the discernment remains weak, and the heart remains easily swayed.

“For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe” (Hebrews 5:13, NKJV).

Milk isn’t bad. It’s necessary at the beginning. But it’s tragic at year ten.

The Goal: Maturity That Produces Discernment

Here’s the mark of maturity:

“But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14, NKJV).

As you take in the Word of God, apply it, and walk with Jesus, something happens: you gain discernment. You start recognizing what is nourishing and what is just religious sugar—sweet, exciting, and empty.

Maturity doesn't mean you stop loving simple truths. It means you stop being easily impressed by shallow substitutes.

Practical Application

- If Jesus is your High Priest, then you don't have to live afraid of God's presence. You can come—boldly—by grace.
- If Jesus shed His blood for your salvation, then you don't have to keep trying to earn what He already purchased.
- If Jesus learned obedience through suffering, then your hardship is not wasted. God can shape you in ways comfort never will.

Ask yourself:

- Am I growing, or have I plateaued?
- Do I crave God's Word, or mainly religious stimulation?
- Is my life increasingly marked by discernment, humility, and obedience?

A Challenge for Believers

Don't settle for spiritual infancy.

Step forward into maturity. Reopen your Bible. Strengthen your prayer life. Commit to steady growth. Refuse the trap of coasting. The Lord has more for you than survival Christianity.

By God's grace, move from needing constant reassurance to becoming someone who can strengthen others.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

If you do not know Jesus Christ personally, you are still trying to approach God without the only Mediator God has provided.

Jesus is the great High Priest because He offered the perfect sacrifice—Himself. He shed His blood on the cross to save you from sin. He rose from the dead, declaring that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

Today, you can come to God through Him—not by your works, not by religion, not by promises you cannot keep, but by faith in the One who finished the work.

If you are ready, turn to Him now. Confess your sin. Ask Him to forgive you. Surrender to Him as Lord. Trust Him as Savior. And step into the life that only He can give.