

Title: Two Gardens, One Source
Text: Hebrews 5.1-10
Theme: Christ's qualifications for Priest
Series: Hebrews #13
Prop Stmt Christ is the greatest high priest because he is the greatest sacrifice and the greatest advocate.

Read Text:

This text provides the support for the great command that we looked at last week. So many of you have commented on the wonderful affect that Hebrews 4.16 has had upon you this week. These 10 verses take us a little deeper into that mine, but that is where the diamonds are. I do not mean that we dig deeply so that we can simply uncover profound truths that fill us with big thoughts, I mean to help you understand some important truth so that your soul will sing. Some of you sang this morning because you believe these truths, they matter to you and you have staked your life upon them and if you were to keep your mouth shut, it would be like an act of treason. You sang not only out of conviction but also out of experience. This week you experienced fresh evidences of God's grace in your life. There are fresh promises that you have banked on and new mercies that have been poured out upon you. You have longed to gather together and be able to add your voice to the song of the redeemed. Church for you this morning is not a duty to perform, nor simply a habit to keep. You have been in the valley and you have found his grace sufficient. You have been in the deep end and you have found his rescue true. You have been in the dark night and you have found his presence precious. These truths are more than doctrines that fit together; they are the food that you eat and the water that you drink. They are life for you! Beloved, that is what this text is designed to do. It combines deep truth with life's needs. And it does this by helping us understand that Christ is the greatest high priest because he is the greatest sacrifice for sins and the greatest advocate for his followers. He ever lives to keep us because he died to save us!

1. **OT priests gave us a preview of Christ.** (1, 4)

Verses 1-4 focus upon the office of the OT high priest. Verse 1 is a wonderful description of his important position. As I will point out, there were some responsibilities that only the priests could do, and there were some responsibilities that only the High Priest could perform. That becomes a bit more prominent in chapters 9-10.

a. **“From among men”**

This phrase is most likely a reference to Exodus 28.1, where God instructs Moses to take Aaron and his sons “from among the people” so that they may serve as priests. God established the office of priest (and high priest) to be occupied by one who was one of “them.” This phrase emphasizes the solidarity and connectedness that the priest has with his own people. Because of the religious background that many of you have, when you think of a priest, you tend to think of a man wearing a black outfit with a white collar who lives a life far removed from your own. The result is, you do not quite understand

him and you are not certain that he understands you. But that is not what the audience of this book thought. A priest was one of them, who lived near them. In fact, he had to be from among them. He had to be from the tribe of Levi, meaning, he had to be an Israelite like them so that he could properly represent them. He was usually married, with children, a home, and land but who once a month would be assigned to go minister at the tabernacle (later the temple). And in that activity he would spend entire days killing, burning and sacrificing animals and other offerings on the altar. At the end of a day, he would be exhausted and would be covered with the evidence of his work. They were not celibate men who lived aloof in privacy, whose work consisted of mystery. These men would be called upon to diagnose disease, deal with mold, and perform all sorts of very earthy tasks. He was a man chosen by God to act on behalf of his fellow citizens in offering sacrifices that were related to the removal of sin.

b. Appointed by God

It was an enormously sacred job that never ended because the people and the priest never stopped sinning. But, even though the priest was from the people, the priest was also one whose task was sacred, in the sense that he was set apart from the people in his role. He was one of them, but was set apart in his role. Verse 1 points that out when it states that he was “appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God.” The OT law is clear that it is God who has done the appointing. For his purposes which were ultimately fulfilled in Christ (that’s what this text is all about), God set up the priesthood in the OT that could not be filled with just anyone.

The background to Hebrews is Exodus, Leviticus and to a certain extent, Numbers. In Numbers 16, a man named Korah, from the same tribe as Aaron and Moses incited a rebellion against them by accusing Moses and Aaron of “having gone to far.” Korah’s argument was, “we’re all holy – not just you!” This was no small incident. The text states that 250 chiefs of the congregation rose up against Moses and Aaron. They said, “Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” In other words, “who do you think you are?” (explain) Now, I would imagine that at this point in Moses’ life he is ready to give this position over to someone else. These people are acting like a pack of mules who refuse to be moved. Their story is one sordid and sorry incident after another of rebellion and response, rebellion and response. And now, Korah and his dim-witted band of dipsticks are challenging the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Now Moses is probably tempted to think, “Look, I didn’t ask for this job. Fact is, I was happy being a nobody, minding my own business watching sheep. You want this job? Fine! Here, you can have it. Oh, but make sure that you can make manna appear every day from heaven, and you can make water come out of a rock. But, when you read the entire account, while Moses’ leadership is an issue, for some reason they really seem to take issue with Aaron’s position as the High Priest. The scene intensifies until (16-19) the lines are clearly drawn between the 250 leaders, each having their own censer and Aaron with his.

Moses is alarmed! But what is it that frightens him? Is Moses afraid of losing his grip on his position of power and influence? Is he some old, desperate, pathetic politician who will do anything in order to stay in office? No! He is alarmed because Korah and his

band of rebels have stated that they do not need the means that God has established to deal with the sins of his people. We are all holy! We can handle this on our own! We do not need Aaron as the priest; we can do this. The obvious reason why God responded with such severity against Korah's rebellion is because they not only blatantly rejected the authority structure that God had established, but in so doing they mocked and scoffed at the means of salvation that God had provided. The OT priest was appointed by God as a preview of Christ. Rejecting the God-appointed priest then, was like rejecting the God-appointed priest now, who is Christ. Notice what Moses says in v.5, "The one whom he (Yahweh) chooses he will bring near to him."

c. Accepted by God - "in relation to God"

The priest was appointed by God to obey the laws of God. When he did, his offerings would be accepted by God. Now, on the Day of Atonement, only the high priest could offer that sacrifice. No one else could step in, in case he was sick. There was only one high priest, and only the high priest could offer the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement that would be accepted by God. At the time it would have been very easy to question the laws and wonder; why only the high priest? God's purpose was always to point to Christ.

2. **OT priests had limitations.** (2-3)

a. weakness enabled him to be sympathetic

The word that is translated weakness has the idea of something being tied around you that weighs you down. V. 3 identifies that weakness as his own sin, which means that he not only offers sacrifices for others, but he has to offer sacrifices for himself. Because he himself is a sinner, he knows firsthand the struggles and the sins of the people that he represents. The priest who is not aware of his own sin, is going to be indifferent to the needs of his people. The fact that the priest has to offer sacrifices for himself means that even the priest needs a priest. Even the priest needs a Savior. Even the priest needs forgiveness and priests would get old, sick and die. A wonderful priest would be a wonderful blessing to the people because he would deal gently and lovingly with the people. The Israelites had to involve the priests for all sorts of things that were very earthy and personal in nature. Have you ever seen how even so many bodily functions were intertwined with the sacrificial system and tabernacle life. Obviously, there were not too many secrets in life of which the priest was not aware. What a kindness to the people to have priests who knew how to keep their mouths shut and treated the people with care and confidence. But, even a great priest like that would not last forever. By the way, that is just one more reason why every need, even earthy ones should be brought to God.

b. weakness made him prone to resentment

But, I think that the AH is pointing out something else as well. The weakness, failings, limitations, blind spots of a priest would all come out when dealing with the ignorant (those who do not know – but should) and the wayward (those who have gone the wrong direction, perhaps intentionally – who know better, who because they are ignorant). In

either case, the priest is not going to bring his “A” game to the tabernacle every single day. Think of this. The more the people sinned, the more he had to work. In fact, the word that is translated “deal gently” is actually from a word group that involves much emotion, and this particular word has the idea of trying to find the middle ground between indifference and extreme passion (anger and grief). You can clearly imagine a priest after seeing the same person over and over for the same reason, wanting to scream in exasperation – “What is wrong with you?! How come you just can’t straighten up and fly right?” The priest who was not handling his own sin, was in no position to effectively help others. The OT priests needed a priest. The OT sacrifices needed a sacrifice. The OT system of salvation needed to be saved. It was a good system, but it was never complete. That is the point of this text and this book.

These 2nd generation Hebrew believers were under pressure to return to Judaism. There is no doubt that OT Israel had some wonderful advantages and built-in reminders of these, whose comfort, familiarity and routine would clearly be a temptation to return to, in view of the cultural pressure. But Judaism was never established to be one of the world’s great religions. Judaism was established to be the foundation of Christianity. The OT priest provided a wonderful ministry, but it was incomplete. Don’t go back to that. The one to whom the OT pointed had come. There is no going back. Going back to the OT meant a rejection of Christ, and it meant a rejection of that to which the OT pointed. You cannot live by the OT system and be right with God. This is so difficult for people to grasp. With the advent of Christ – there’s no going back. The OT is no longer valid. It is no longer available. It is no longer salvific. Since it all pointed to Christ, to go back to it without Christ would mean that you were now constructing the OT to be something that it wasn’t.

3. **Christ is the One and only High Priest** (5-10)

In verses 5-10, we see how similar and how different Christ was to the high priest. He was similar in his role, but was different in that he did not share in the weaknesses of the high priest. But, the fact that Christ was not a sinner does not mean that he is disconnected from our needs. Not at all! In fact, because of who he is, he is more aware of our humanity and more aware of our needs, than we are.

a. **A Man** – “in the days of his flesh” (7)

As the eternal Son of God, his incarnation did not mark his beginning for he is without beginning and without end. Though born of an earthly mother, he continued to be what he had always been (God), but by means of his conception, he became what he had never been before – a man. From that point on, he added a human nature to his divine nature and therefore, is now and forever, perfect man and perfect God.

b. **Appointed and Approved by God** (5-6)

In these verses (5-6) the AH refers back to two Psalms that he has already quoted, in chapter 1. Verse 5 is a quote from Psalm 2, which is that great Psalm that speaks of the installation of the eternal king by God upon his throne in Zion. In that Psalm God says to

the King, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” This is not a statement saying that he has an origin, but is a statement by the Father declaring his Son’s position of honor. Then in verse 6, he quotes Psalm 110, which begins by saying, “The LORD says to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” Verse 4 tells us something else that God says about this King. “You are priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Psalm 110 has already promised that the Messiah is going to be the Son of God, a King, and a priest forever in an order that follows Melchizedek.

c. King/Priest (5-6)

Who was Melchizedek? Melchizedek was a rather mysterious figure who appeared in the OT during the life of Abraham. We will look at him more in chapter 7, but the point is that Christ functions like Melchizedek who was both a king and a priest, whose life, like the OT priests was a preview of Christ. This just underscores the point of verses 5-6. Notice that verses 5-6 are one sentence. Christ is the appointed heir, Christ is appointed priest, and Christ is appointed King. There is no one who can compete with this. There is no savior like our Savior. There is no one who as the approval, the position, the authority, and the relationship like Him. When you come to faith in Christ, you are receiving the most excellent Savior and the most perfect redemption that is eternally effective.

Now, God never gives us his Word simply for information sakes. He gives us rich truths because rich truths make heavy anchors for the soul. Fact is, good theology is designed by God to make your soul sing. Without robust truth, your worship will be shallow and your love will be flimsy. Here is where it starts to come together.

d. Complete (7-10)

In verse 7 we read that Christ, this King/Priest, appointed and approved by God was a man who while on the earth, lived in deep dependency upon and in true communion with his Father. The loud cries and tears speaks of the anguish of soul that he experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here we are seeing why Christ is your only hope, but our hope is not a “I sure hope this works, cause this is all that we’ve got and it will have to make do” sort of a hope. (neighbor – cancer) No, this hope is an incredible, perfect hope that shows us how absolutely perfect of a Savior, King, Redeemer and Priest Christ really is. I believe that v.7, has the Garden of Gethsemane in view. The picture of Christ calmly leaning upon a rock and serenely looking into heaven is not an accurate picture of the reality of that night. That is another reason why we need to get our theology from the text and not from pictures. In the Garden, Christ was pleading with his Father regarding the cup of wrath that Christ had to take for us. He was beseeching his Father to find another way. There was no other way. He was praying “to him who was able to save him from death.” The text says that the Father heard his prayer. And we see that while Christ was not saved from the cross, he was saved from death through the resurrection. In other words, because of his perfect death, Christ was saved from death. What he experienced in the garden and what he endured on the cross, was real, was awful, was infinitely intense and was purposeful, because in that, the final aspect of Christ’s perfect life came together that made him the perfect sacrifice. There is a direct connection between the anguish of

the garden, when Christ became credited with our sins, and the final stage of experiential obedience (v.8) that qualified him to be the source of our salvation (v.9) and our great high priest (v.10).

Verse 8 reminds me of the famous kenosis passage in Philippians 2, where even though Christ is God, that did not stop him from humbling himself and becoming a man and dying the most humiliating death a man could die. Here in verse 8, the AH is making a similar point, that even though Christ was the Son of God, he still experienced what human sons experience. He learned. He learned obedience. Not that he learned obedience because he disobeyed. No, he learned what obedience is experientially in all situations. He suffered. He learned through his suffering. He learned obedience through his suffering, which made him (v.9) perfect – meaning complete.

You see, the OT system was built upon substitutionary atonement. The priest stood in the place of the sinner and did the offering for him. The sacrifice stood in the place of the sinner and was the offering. Both the one doing the offering (the offerer) and the offering were offered up in place of, that is as a substitute, for the guilty. The perfect life of Christ qualified him as the perfect offering. But, even as he was learning, and maturing, and experiencing life as we know it, yet without sin, he was fully entering into our humanity at all levels, except without sin, so that he was not only the perfect offering, he was the perfect one to do the offering. Unlike other priests who had to offer sacrifices for their own sin, or who were limited by their own weaknesses from fully understanding the needs of their people, Christ learned all about us in his life. His learning was not limited to an academic knowledge, but was an experiential connection. His learning obedience through what he suffered not only prepared him to be the perfect and complete sacrifice, it also prepared him to be the perfect priest. John Murray (former prof at Westminster) uses four terms to help us grasp the beauty of the obedience of Christ: inward, progressive, climactic and dynamic.¹

The **inwardness** of his obedience means that Christ's obedience always came from his heart as a willing, joyous yielding up of himself to his Father's will and law. It was never artificial, perfunctory, mechanical and done simply as "one's duty." Every action and reaction was one of delighting in doing his Father's will, even when his Father's will did not appear at the moment to be delightful.

The **progressiveness** of his obedience means that Christ grew in favor with God, because as his human nature matured and deepened, his obedience matured and deepened. This means that "as he moved in perfect obedience to the will of God from one trial to the next throughout his entire lifetime, his will to obey was made ever more and more resolute, even in the face of stiffer and severer trials, in his determination to do his Father's will. This process was necessary to prepare him to face the final ordeal of the cross.

The **climax** of his obedience was the unprecedented testing that Christ faced in the garden of Gethsemane that took him to the cross itself where he remained faithful and

¹ John Murray, "The Obedience of Christ," in collected Writings of John Murray, 2.151-157 (also cited in Robert Reymonds Systematic Theology – pp. 630-631)

believing in the midst of experiencing the full fury of His Father's wrath for sins that he did not commit.

His obedience was also **dynamic**. That means that his trials, temptations, deprivations, hunger, thirst and other forms of physical suffering all became instruments in his Father's hand by which Christ was "perfected" as the Author of salvation, that he might become everything he had to be and endure everything that he had to endure in order to bring many sons to glory. (repeat v.9)

Even his dying was part of his obedience that he learned and experienced that qualified him to completely satisfy his Father and pay in full the penalty for our sin. He was fiercely tempted to doubt because of the accusations hurled at him. He was tempted feel pity in the midst of his abject and deep loneliness. It was tempting to give up because of the personal rejection of his own, the betrayal of Judas (whom he loved) and the abandonment by his disciples into whom he had poured his life. Beloved never think that Christ was unmoved by any of this. He loved others more deeply than all of us, and therefore experienced rejection and betrayal more deeply than we do. In spite of the personal torment of bearing the wrath of the Father and fully experiencing the weight of our sin that caused him, for the first time to actually experience guilt and shame because he was credited with ours, he did not quit. He endured. His faithfulness even in dying was all part of what he experienced to their depths and overcame by his trust in his Father that made him a perfect sacrifice for our sins. The means, by which he secured your salvation in his death, is also the means by which his ministry as your great high priest is so effective now. Even as he was dying for us, he was living for us, that he might understand us, so that even now before the Father's throne, he knows, he knows, every tear, every cry, every rejection, every fear, every need, every secret, he knows. (4.16)

The Garden of Eden made necessary the Garden of Gethsemane. Now Christ is the one and only and perfect source of our salvation. There is no other. Apart from Christ, you have no sacrifice and without Christ, you have no advocate. But, because of Christ, you have a salvation that is sure, and a priest who represents you perfectly, eternally and personally. (4.16)

Therefore:

- 1) Dealing with your sin and your weaknesses is a very personal matter with God.
- 2) Don't settle for another Savior; there is no other.
- 3) Draw near with even more confidence