



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 5:1–10

“Our High Priest, Called and Compassionate”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the great promises of the word of God and, especially, for the promises concerning a faithful high priest, who ever lives to make intercession for us. We thank Thee for the greatness of the Son of God. We thank Thee for the magnificent sacrifice that was accomplished in our behalf, which has made it possible for him to minister eternal salvation to us. We ask, Lord, that Thou wilt be with us as we study in this our. May our minds be open to Thy truth. May we be responsive to it in our lives and we pray that we may, in our Christian testimony, be not only faithful but fruitful. We are especially grateful for a High Priest who has been tempted as we are, so often, and yet he was without sin, and knows how to deliver us in the testings and the trials of life. Lord, teach us to lean upon him in the experiences of life and receive from him what our Savior longs to do for us. May our hour this evening contribute to that.

We pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Well, our subject for tonight as we continue our exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews is “Our High priest, Called and Compassionate,” and we are turning to chapter 5, verse 1 through verse 10 of the letter to the Hebrews.

This, of course, is really the primary subject of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the high priesthood of Christ and its ramifications and so, it's extremely important that we follow carefully

along and listen with open minds and hearts to what he is saying to us. The author of the epistle writes in verse 1, chapter 5.

“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. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. 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.’ As He also says in another place, ‘You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek,’ who in the days of His flesh. [Now, this, of course, is not Melchizedek, but the High Priest after his order.] 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, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Now, I think, when you look at this section at the first, you get the impression that the author has a seemingly academic aim in writing this section, because what he is talking about is the qualifications for high priesthood and how Jesus Christ has met them. But, in the course of doing that, there is a window that is opened on Gethsemane, and that overshadows in the minds of many readers, the academic interest.

Now, there are several noteworthy points in this remarkable reference to Jesus Christ’s training school, for high priesthood. Notice that he says in verse 7, that “He offered up strong crying and tears.” Or as my version has, “vehement cries and tears.” Now, why did the author find these words, “strong crying and tears?” Well, now, probably most of you in this room have read the

Bible enough to know that if you were to look for these, you would go back to the Garden of Gethsemane. But you would not find strong crying and tears. In other words, in the Bible, other than this passage, there is no reference to our Lord’s strong crying and tears. There are some statements that are somewhat similar, and one gets the impression, as you read it, even if you were not thoughtful enough to say, “where did this author get that?” Or, “I don’t remember that,” and start looking for it, well, you would probably look at those passages and you would find some statements that were very similar to this. But you will not find “strong crying and tears.” So it’s reasonable to ask where he got it. And the chances are that where he got it was an independent witness to the passion of our Lord, historically.

Now, Luke tells us, in the opening verses of his gospel, that many had taken it to themselves to prepare an account of our Lord’s ministry. In other words, Luke’s gospel tells us, in the first four verses, that others tried to do exactly what he did. And, therefore, there was in the earlier stages of the Christian church, material that we don’t have today. So what we have to say, with reference to this is, that this is probably a phrase or two that was taken from one of those accounts, true, in itself, for not everything that our Lord said and did is found in the New Testament as John tells us in his gospel. So here is a little phrase “strong crying and tears” that comes from another source of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, an independent witness. And what’s so interesting about it, to me, as a person who has taught New Testament and theology for many years, is that what this is, is an independent witness to the historicity of the passion accounts or the accounts of the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. So if you are looking for further substantiation of the historicity of the things that are found in the Gospel accounts, this would be further evidence of them.

Now, I’m not looking for them. I’m perfectly satisfied with what we have, but it is encouraging to know, at least, that there were many accounts of our Lord’s ministry, and what we have is not simply those four Gospel accounts.

Now, there’s another thing that is interesting. It is stated here that “He was heard, in that He feared.” The New King James Version, which I’m reading from has, “His godly fear.” So he

became the partaker of our trials. His dealing with them is the pattern of our piety or our religious experience, and it is a picture of the path to answered prayer; what happened in Gethsemane.

And there is a third thing that, I think, is interesting and it seems to overshadow the academic interest of the passage. We read in verse 8, “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.”

Now, that might seem strange to you. If you have been taught that Jesus Christ was very God of very God, as the ancient creeds have put it, you might ask the question, “How could our Lord learn anything? Is he not God himself?” And the Christian Church has from its beginning proclaimed that particular truth; that the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ was very God of very God. He is God. He’s worshiped as God. And so how can you say, “He learned obedience,” if you affirm the omniscience of God? Well, of course, our Lord, we’ve said so often in Believers Chapel, not I but other teachers, as well, that the Lord Jesus is one in person. He’s not two persons, he’s one person, but he possesses two natures; a human nature, a divine nature. There are qualities that pertain to both. The person, of course, possesses the qualities of both of the natures.

Now, with reference to his human nature, he learned. Now, we have many instances of that in the Gospel of Luke, for example, we read in verse 80 of chapter 1, “So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the desert, till the day of His manifestation to Israel.” In verse 52 of chapter 2, we read, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.” Now, if he increased in wisdom, he did not increase in wisdom in his divine nature, for he was omniscient. But he increased in wisdom in his human nature or in the sphere of his human nature. So here we read, “He learned obedience.”

Now, the Lord Jesus also made an interesting comment in John chapter 6 in verse 45, that pertains to all of the servants of the Lord. Let me read the verse for you. John 6, verse 45, the Lord Jesus speaking, “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore, everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” In other words, the Lord says, “All those disciples of the Lord God are taught by Him.” Our Lord was no exception. As the

second person of the Trinity, as the incarnate Son, he too, increased in wisdom and stature, with God and men, and he learned obedience by the things, which he suffered. So he too was one of God’s Children. All of God’s Children go to school. And he went to school in this specific aspect.

James Stalker has an interesting comment. I think I can find it and read it to you, and it bears on that point. I thought I could find it. And, I know, I can find it, if you can just wait a minute. [Laughter] I looked at the wrong page here. This is it! I’m not omniscient and perfect like Rush Limbaugh. “It belongs to the very essence of human nature that it must grow from stage to stage. And the perfection of our Lord, just because it was human had to realize itself on every step of the ladder of development. He was always both perfect on the stage which he had reached, and at the same time, rising to a higher stage of perfection.” So he learned obedience, but he was never disobedient. He learned obedience by experiencing it. He did not learn to obey, in the sense that he was disobedient and learned to obey; like every one of you in this audience, if you are obeying, had to learn. What you told your children was meant to teach them to obey. Our Lord did not have to learn to obey, but he went through the experience of obedience, responding to the requirement of obedience at each step of the way.

So we’re turning to a most interesting section and, I agree with Mr. Spurgeon, who said with reference to this, “Come, Holy Spirit, and take of the things of Christ and show them unto us?” What a marvelous prayer. It’s the kind of prayer that you and I, I believe, ought to have every time we open up Holy Scripture.

Now, let’s look at the requirements for priesthood, which are set forth in verse 1 through verse 4. Incidentally, if I had been dividing up the book of Hebrews into chapters, I don’t think I would have made the chapter division here. Probably, it would have been better to make the chapter division at chapter 4, verse 14, because this is a continuation very closely related to it. In fact, you can tell by the first verse of chapter 5, “For every high priest,” because the “for” is going to tell us how he meets the requirements of the high priesthood and why we ought to be so encouraged thereby, as to fulfill that exhortation, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we

may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” “For,” he meets the requirements of high priesthood. And this is how he does it. He has genuine humanity, and he also is called of God. It isn’t enough to simply have genuine humanity. One must also be called of God.

“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. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray.”

What a beautiful little phrase that underlines our depravity, our human inability. We are ignorant and we are constantly going astray. Look at your life. Look at your heart and you will thoroughly agree, I know, if the Holy Spirit is guiding your thinking, you are ignorant of the truth that you ought to know, and you constantly find yourself going astray.

“Since he himself is also subject to weakness.”

Now, it’s very interesting that he does not say that he is subject to going astray constantly, weakness that’s a little bit different. He has the weaknesses of any human being, who has a human body. In other words, he may be tired, weary, all of those things that suggest weakness, but not sin. So he is, himself, subject to weakness, not sin. This author will tell us later on, that he is anything but that. He is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. But he is subject to weakness.

“Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sin.”

James Moffat, who wrote a very significant commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, says with reference to this that, “Jesus, our great High Priest, was humane as well as human. Not simply

one of us, but one of us in perfection, in the sense, at each stage of the way he’s what human nature ought to be.” Humane, as well as human. The dangers of the priests of old were the dangers of anyone in authority; to be severe, too severe, or to be too weak. Those are the kinds of dangers, incidentally, that fathers and mothers have. They are afflicted with the two types of possibilities of mistakes. Be too severe on your children and then, on the other hand, be too lax in the discipline, which you are required to give to them. So this two-fold description of men; those who are ignorant and going astray are those who need priests who are not too severe, and on the other hand are not too lax.

This is so very striking. I think it has so many applications to the Lord’s work. I remember, many years ago, we had a person in our Sunday school teaching. He was a very good teacher in many ways but he also was a teacher who was very strict. Whether he was too strict or not, I’m not prepared to judge. I didn’t sit in on the Sunday school class. But I do know this that one of the children, who’s now almost middle age, that is, almost thirty-five, almost middle age, a young man, was one that this teacher had a great deal of trouble with. And many years ago, I wrote in my notes a little account of it, in which he had a telephone conversation with me and complained of this child in his class because he showed no interest in his class and then he went on to rave over two retarded children that he did have in his class.

Now, what is interesting about this is the person who did this was an individual who for thirty-five years was absolutely indifferent to the things of the Lord. And here he was complaining over a twelve year old who was not listening to him teach the Sunday school class. So often we are like that, are we not? The very sins that characterize us, either now or have, are those that we quickly see in others. And then we want to be judgmental about it. Now, that individual I’ve not seen in a long time. But the young man, who was so indifferent, is a man who appears quite frequently in Believers Chapel, listening to the ministry of the word of God. So the person who was absolutely uninterested is at the present time, somewhat interested, at least. Whereas, I haven’t seen the teacher

for fifteen years. So, and I'm not saying he's not interested, but we just cannot tell. We do know this that the genuine priest must be humane as well as human.

Now, he must have more than that. It's not enough to be humane; it's not enough simply to be human. A man in Israel would be human, of course. That would qualify us. All of us would have in Israel, if we were Israelites, we would have one qualification for the high priest. We would be human. That's probably the only qualification that I would have. Human. At least, fall into the category. But humane is something else. But do you know that if, in Israel, the first place, you had to be an Israelite that eliminated all the Gentiles. But, if you were an Israelite, you had not simply to be humane and human but you had to be called. That is, you had to be in the right family, the right tribe, not only in the right tribe but in the right family and, as a matter of fact, the high priest in one specific line. So an individual had to be called. Notice the 4th verse.

“And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.”

So Aaron was human and, evidently, I'm not going to pass judgment on Aaron. Every now and then he manifested the fact that he was one of those who was ignorant and going astray, but God appointed him to the high priesthood and so he was called of God. Called of God to be the high priest of Israel because the high priest must represent man with reference to God. And since he must represent man with reference to God, God's approval must be given for that. For, no one of us, can of ourselves represent others with reference to God. As a matter of fact, an individual who does not know the Lord is not in the family of God, he does not have the entrée with the Lord God that the saints should have. So Aaron was called by God. He was humane or human, called by God. These two qualifications marked him out as the high priest of Israel. “Just as Aaron was,” we read.

Now, what that suggests to us, of course, is that the individuals who were high priests had special prerogatives, only they could approach the Lord God and enter that holiest of all, once a year, on the Day of Atonement. That was their right to do that, and no one else's, no matter how great

and marvelous, obedient and loving, with reference to God, and successful in work a prophet was, he could not be that high priest, unless he was from the right family and had been appointed by God. That's illustrated in the Old Testament, in the case of those who sought to intrude upon the priesthood when they were not members of the right family and called.

Now, we have an instance of this in the case of Korah in Numbers chapter 16 in verse 10 and 21. You may remember it. And in chapter 16 in verse 10, with reference to Korah, and those who rebelled, it is said, “And that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? Are you seeking the priesthood also?” Korah is challenged.” And then later on in verse 21, we read, “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” The Lord speaking to Moses and Aaron because it was such a evil thing for Korah and others to rebel and seek to take the priesthood to themselves when God had reserved it for Aaron and his family.

Now, I think, in our day, we have something that's very similar to that. We have individuals who stand behind the pulpit in churches who are not born again. They don't belong to the family of God, but they stand as, in many cases, Christian ministers. They have the proper credentials, outwardly. They belong to a particular church and, probably, hands have been laid upon their heads at one time or another. Dr. Ironside used to call it “empty hands upon empty heads.” [Laughter] But, at any rate, they have been ordained and they are standing the pulpit, opening up the Bible often, and seeking to give teaching, but they don't really belong to the family of God and have not been called by him.

Now, calling is a slightly different thing today. I'll just call it “led by God the Holy Spirit,” to give themselves with their gift to the ministry of the word of God. We have a great deal of that. Sunday morning, when I came in, Lane gave me a letter from a man in Canada, New Brunswick, actually. And this man is a man who said in his letter that he had listened to the tape ministry of Believers Chapel and he had gone through the Systematic Theology tapes, and he was now teaching the Bible. He'd been in contact with an elderly lady. And an elderly lady had also been listening to

the radio and, evidently, come into contact with a Dallas-ite. Now, the Dallas-ite is a “minister.” And he had been in contact with her. She had, evidently, listened to him on the radio, and so he had begun to send her literature. This is the kind of literature.

“Dear Sister Dorothy, have I sent you my nineteen page, nineteen ninety-three predictions and perspectives on the mood and future of America yet? Even though I gave them to a few of my other closest friends back in January, the Lord reminded me early this morning, “You didn’t send the prophesies to Sister Dorothy.” This is all a letter that he, himself, had made up. What should I do? I said [tears it up] [Laughter] Anyway, he goes on. I won’t read the whole thing to you because it’s two pages but he gets over into the good part before long because he wants her money is what he wants. “God spoke to me.” First of all, he sent in the letter a little packet of holy water from the holy lands, plural. “God leads me to tell you to follow his holy instructions to break the Devil’s spirit that has been assigned to buffet and confuse you. The Devil is mad. Boy, is he ever mad. He cannot stand it because you’ve decided to follow God’s ways. He’s being trying to afflict your money and confuse your mind through another person. God spoke to me that he was using water to heal the sick before he ever started using oil. God’s man told Namaan to dip in water seven times, and his leprosy was healed. Even the Holy Ghost came upon Jesus, Himself, as He came up out of the water. Sister Dorothy, I have personally been involved with your problems and I have been warring against the attacks of the Devil, has been,” that’s wiped out a little bit, “giving you, in the spirit realm where I have been warring. Sister Dorothy, please listen to me in the spirit. Now, the Holy Spirit speaks to me to ask you to get involved with your answer. Yes, deliverance from this spirit principality of the Devil.”

I don’t want to take too much time with this, but it’s so interesting. “Go into a quiet room, by yourself and say this prayer.” There are four steps. Four spiritual laws with new wording. “Say this prayer, ‘In the name of Jesus, Lord, this is Sister Dorothy.’ [More laughter] “In the name of Jesus say, Lord, this is Sister Dorothy,” not a very high understanding of the omniscience of the Lord, is it? “I realize that the source of all my problems has been in the spirit realm. Now, Pastor,”

he mentions his name, I'll save that for the final part, “and I are going to break that spirit principality of the Devil. Then, open up the holy water, by tearing off one end, take the spirit.” Now, that's messed up a little bit, I may have to take my glasses out. “And speak,” Oh, I see, “the spirit soaked prayer cloth out of the packet and anoint your fingers. Then, anoint every piece of money you have with this water.” [More laughter] “Yes, that's right, every bill, every piece of change, and even all of the checks and credit cards that you may have. Anoint them with this holy water of the holy lands. Next, take this holy water and anoint the picture or photograph of that person that you care about deeply, the one who the Devil's spirit has been affecting.”

Now, he's made that up, that someone's bothering her. “If you do not have a picture or a photograph, then anoint something they have touched, instead; perhaps a letter or a piece of clothing. God will show you. Then, since God moves because of a seed, re-anoint your two largest bills and send them to this ministry in the enclosed envelop.” [Roaring laughter] “First thing tomorrow morning along with the water of the spirit soaked towelette. This way, this Holy Spirit water will have made a complete circle from me, here in Dallas, to you there in Canada, and back to me. God may lead you to send a check, for exactly fifty-nine nineteen, instead of your two largest bills.” Especially if the two largest bills don't make fifty-nine dollars and nineteen cents. I'm reading that. That's a gloss on the side of the page. “This will represent Isaiah 59:19, which I am praying for you. ‘When the enemy comes in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against it.’”

Well now, I would want to say that that man is not called to the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Now, I cannot prove that. I can just only go by things like this. It so happens, this is Pastor W. V. Grant, who Steve Blow, in the *Dallas Morning News*, has written two articles about in recent days. This is the one who pleads that he's poor and has on the rolls a nine hundred thousand dollar home out in the southern part of Dallas, another home, a hundred and fifty-thousand dollars approximately, a hundred forty-something thousand. He drives two Ferrari's. And his wife, poor wife, she only has a Mercedes, one or two of them, in her name. And this is the

individual, on the radio, who’s appealing for funds. This is, to my mind, very parallel to those who, like Korah, tried to take the priesthood to themselves.

Well, now, the author has said then that two qualifications are necessary and now, let’s see how these things are realized in our Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 5 through verse 8, he makes the points that our Lord meets these qualifications. Notice the two words that begin verse 5, “So also,” just as one must be humane as well as human, “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.’” And I must add here, “who has glorified You.” That’s the point of it. As he also says in another place, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” In other words, our Lord has been truly called by God. He is God’s Son and because he is God’s Son, he has God’s life, and because he has God’s life, he is qualified for the priesthood. Because the priesthood, the ultimate priesthood, that to which the Levitical priesthood pointed forward, must be a priesthood that can bring sinners into relationship with the Lord God in heaven. So he must be not only a man but he must be an infinitely holy, perfect man. And only such can a divine person be. So our author takes the passage from Psalm 2 and then the passage from Psalm 110, puts them together and says in effect, “So also Christ was glorified by God,” in calling him to the ministry of High Priest. “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” So Sonship means God’s life, which qualifies for the eternal priesthood.

Now, that’s precisely what he said in verse 14 of chapter 4, “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.” Jesus, human Son of God, infinitely holy person.

Now, what about the genuine humanity? Well verses 7 and 8, are our author’s exposition of that. He goes back to the days when he was a man on earth, days of poverty, days of weariness, days of reproach, days of supreme testing. And he writes concerning Him.

“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, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Now, what I want you to do is to turn back to Matthew chapter 26, verse 36 through verse 46, which is the Matthean account of what we are talking about here. Matthew chapter 26, in verse 36, our author says this concerning the Gethsemane account.

“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, [The Olive Press, incidentally] and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go and pray over there.” And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.’ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’ Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ [Well, it’s obvious that Peter, the first Pope, is not qualified to be the high priest that our Lord is.] Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.’ And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.’”

Now, the story is very simple. There are the prayers that closed the Upper Room discourse, the great prayer of John 17. Then they sang a hymn and they went into Gethsemane crossing the Kidron. And then from the eleven, eight were separated and the three were called by our Lord to go further into the garden. “He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee.” And then, later on, he, himself, leaves them. So he’s by himself, a stone’s throw probably from them. And the first petition we’ve read. I needn’t read that over again, for the sake of time. But you can obviously see from it that our Lord was very deeply disturbed by what was happening. Very agitated before he gave this particular series of prayers for our Lord.

One of the older students of Scripture has said something about this. Let me see if I can find that within my notes. I’m not sure I can; but perhaps I can. Because the words are exceedingly interesting and, I think, exceedingly good. And I put one of these things out of order in my notes. But, this is it. One of the older students of the word of God, Robert Trail, speaking about this, talking about the fact that there he lay upon the ground, like a worm, recalling the Messianic text. But I’m a worm in no man. “He filled the silent night with his crying,” Trail said, “And watered the cold earth with his tears, more precious than the dew of Hermon or any moisture next unto his own blood that ever fell on God’s earth, since the creation.” A magnificent statement concerning the suffering of our Lord!

Now, James Denney said that what was happening was that “He was drinking the cup, which our sins had mingled.” Now, it is evident from what takes place previously, because the Lord’s Supper has just been instituted. And he has said, “For this is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins,” that our Lord is thinking about the Cross on Calvary, and so these petitions are petitions in the light of what he, as the God-man knows now is just before him, the suffering on Calvary’s cross. And Luke tells us that this was such a tremendously difficult situation for him, with reference to the anticipation of this that he even, as he puts it, “being in an agony, prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down

to the ground.” Hematidrosis, the pouring out of blood. Rare, yet, documented in the literature and, evidently, our Lord suffered that.

Now, the third petition is the last of them. And this is what he says in it. “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” What is meant by this? Now, you could think of a lot of things that might be offered as explanations of this tortured petition. Well, you could say, “Perhaps this is the grief of broken family ties.” The Lord Jesus must now be separated from Mary, his mother, and from his brethren and he knows that and, therefore, he is in an agony over the fact that he’s to be separated from them.

Martha and I attended a funeral this morning and the mother is a very, very dear friend of mine and my family. For many years, was ministering to us and our family. And I, I must confess, when I saw her walk out of that church, weeping, and crying. When I finally got to her face, I’m not a person who is affected, usually, by things like that, but I finally got to her in the car as we were going to the cemetery, and I, actually, could not get out a word. Isn’t that right Martha? I couldn’t get out a word. Martha got a new revelation of what a soft heart I have. But no, it was very meaningful for me, for someone who had been so close in our family, not in my family, but one who was as close as someone in our family, to suffer the loss of her son, suddenly, of a heart attack.

It wasn’t that in our Lord’s case. Was it loneliness? The loneliness of misunderstanding? After all, these individuals who were the closest companions of our Lord didn’t understand. They were off sleeping, while he’s thinking about the New Covenant and what must transpire because the New Covenant being affirmed demands a sacrifice. A High Priest, first of all, must offer a sacrifice. And that’s upon his mind, the priestly sacrifice, surely. But, the loneliness of misunderstanding, the shame of the Roman Gibbet? He must die as a criminal, the Son of God, the Holy Son of God, the person who walked for thirty plus years the roads of the land of Palestine and never once sinned, and now he must die on a Roman gibbet or cross, which is, of course, a criminal’s cross. He must die a criminal’s cross. Was that reason for the agony?

Was it the anguish of suspense over God’s will? Now, he, as you and I must find God’s will, remember? He never knew what was wrong, but every step of the way he must listen for God’s steps for him and God’s words for him. He tells us in the Gospel of John that he speaks the words that God speaks to him. He does the things that God tells him, the Father tells him to do. So he must listen for direction as the God-man. And was it the anguish of suspense that He prays, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” He’s just prayed just previously, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.” Is it the hellish ordeal of demonic opposition? Because did not our Lord say, “This is your hour.” And the power of darkness? Was that the cause of the agony? Was it the horror of contact with sin? Well, yes, there must have been some of that.

But I’d like to just suggest what must be obvious to you. If you’ve sat in Believers Chapel for awhile, you know these facts. All of the teachers here, so far as I know, teach this. That this was the agony of the anticipation of the divine condemnation of sin which he must bear for others. Was it un-heroic of him? No, I don’t think it was un-heroic of Him. You might turn around and say, “Why, Latemer and Ridley and others of the martyrs of the Christian Church, they died in a much more heroic way than Jesus of Nazareth, agonizing on the ground with great drops of blood pouring from his body over the agony. Is he the illustration for us in this?” Well, Isaiah tells us, “All we like sheep have gone astray.” We turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Some people who study the atonement tell us, that our Lord died as an example. Abelard taught that, one of the older theologians, always referred to as the Abelardian View of the Atonement. Something very similar to the exemplary theory of the atonement.

Now, our Lord was an example for us, but he was more than an example. And when you look at this, if you say that he just died as an example, his example’s not very good. Many of the saints have died heroically. They’ve rejoiced at the fact that they were entering into the presence of the Lord and have entered the presence of the Lord with calmness and equanimity of mind. But our

Lord, groveling on the ground, I'm sure you can see that the Abelardian view of the atonement cannot explain this. If we acknowledge that Jesus Christ was truly, the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, there must be something so serious, so agonizing in itself, that it alone can account for the way in which our Lord acts in Gethsemane. And it alone can explain why on the cross, he can say, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” And then later say, “It is finished. Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit.”

We sing here sometimes the hymn that has the little line, “Death and the curse were in our cup, O Christ, 'twas full for Thee!” What our Lord was doing was doing what Klaus Skeldar has said. “He was learning obedience by the things that he suffered.” Now, again, I think I have this in my notes somewhere. I hope I can find it in a hurry, because it was a marvelous little statement that Professor Skeldar made, with reference to our Lord. I have found it. Put the sign on my car. “Christ himself though not inconstant in the sense of less faithful was, nonetheless, as bearer of natural, creaturely human life subject to the natural law of undulation, capable of learning, susceptible of accretion in his temporal human existence; in his fidelity he was constant, but not impassive.” That is not unfeeling. “He was not a petrification.” That is our Lord, in his suffering. Perfectly human and at the same time, infinitely divine Son of God.

Well what is the result of that? Verses 9 and 10, back in the Epistle to the Hebrews, give us the resultant salvation. “And,” I love that little conjunction, “And,” “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” We live in the day where preachers hope to be relevant. Relevance. Who would want to preach theology? One of the marvelous things about theology is it is relevant. If you're going to preach something that will always be relevant, it must be what? Eternal. It must be truth that is eternal. And so in the case of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. “Having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek.”

How relevant that is to have an eternal priest, from the beginning of time to the end of time, someone to whom we can go, in all of the experiences of life. Oh, the wonderful confidence and

safety from knowledge that God, against whom we’ve sinned, has appointed the Son our Priest. It’s safe to accept him. Always relevant! Always relevant, my friends, to turn to Him.

God and the Son, this is a startling thing. I remember the day when I was reading this, after I had read this chapter, I don’t know how many times, taught many classes, a word dawned on me. It says, “No man takes this honor to himself.” No man takes this honor? What honor? What’s the honor? Why, it’s the honor of being High Priest. It’s an honor to be our High Priest. You might say, “What is the honor of that?” Why would the Lord call being my High Priest an honor? But that’s what Scripture does call it. “No man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called of God.” God and the Son of God count it an honor to serve me, all the needy, as their priest. He delights in the work of his priesthood. Trust him, my Christian friend and let him prove his greatness in your life. And let him be satisfied, and in fact, glory in the fact that he is your priest.

Well, I don’t have time to talk about the great text in the Book of Jeremiah, which bears on this point. In that text, Jeremiah chapter 12, verse 5, expresses the necessity of this overcoming faith, for triumphant passage through the trials of life. In temptations, in sickness, in sorrow, even in loss of one’s financial resources by things that may happen, or the loss of a friend, in questions of conscience. Have you ever been plagued by your conscience, over things that have transpired in your past? I have. I have been plagued by those things. And I can remember of some of those things, I was plagued by them for a considerable period of time. And when you turn those things over to the Lord and those things too, our High Priest takes care of.

There’s a marvelous little thing that, well, I really don’t have time to do this. I’m sorry. We’ll have to put that, and Rush Limbaugh has a little thing with a question mark. So we’ll have to leave it at that. It’s time for me to stop.

I just hope that the thought of a great High Priest may so grip you that the trials of your life, the problems of your life, the experiences of your life, and all of the infinite details of each one of you here in this audience, that you’ll bring them to your great High Priest, in confident assurance that he will care for them.

“Our High Priest, Called and Compassionate” by S. Lewis Johnson
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Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are so thankful to Thee for our great High Priest. Where would we be, Lord, if we had no great High Priest, who has offered that sacrifice that satisfaction which has washed out our past, made us clean, set us apart as the children of God, for now and for eternity.

Lord, if there should be someone in this audience who has not yet come to the priest for forgiveness and cleansing, may they, right at this moment, offer the pray, turning to our Lord who loved us and gave himself for us.

We pray, in His name. Amen.