

Bible e-Study on the book of Hebrews (5)

Icons

“8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:8-10

NUGGET – When we talk about ‘icons’ we generally refer to things or people in our culture or history that are commonly acknowledged across political, ethnic, religious or geographical boundaries. You can say, ‘John Wayne’ and people around the world will know whom you’re talking about. The same is true with the Taj Mahal, Abraham Lincoln, Red Square, Martin Luther King Jr, the Grand Canyon and the Panama Canal.

All of these people and places give us a common reference point with whomever we’re talking. And that is what has been happening up to this point in Hebrews as well. We’ve heard Jesus compared, in the first chapter to angels, in the second chapter to His ‘brothers’ (that is that He is human like every other person), in chapter 3 to Moses – the lawgiver and deliverer from slavery, and in chapter 4 to Joshua – the one who led Israel across the Jordan to the Promised Land.

Along the way these icons have allowed the first readers of Hebrews, and us, to learn more of who Jesus is by comparing Him *to* these icons. These things, angels, Moses, Joshua are things the readers had a handle on and felt they knew well. So to have Jesus referred to alongside them, gives them the opportunity to get to ‘know’ Jesus as well.

And now in chapter 5 we have yet another icon, Melchizedek, the great high priest who is from before Aaron’s time. Melchizedek was the priest/king of Jerusalem at the time of Abram and this foretells the role of priest and king that Jesus now holds. Further as Melchizedek is outside the priestly line of Aaron, his priesthood is ‘forever’ in the fashion that there is no beginning or ending within the confines of Judaism.

His status as an icon among the Jews comes from him being recognized as a priest of God by Abram and by David’s reference to him in Psalm 110 as a ‘priest forever.’ So the writer of Hebrews uses that status to teach more about Jesus. In this chapter we see in verse 1 that a high priest is a *man* and is selected *by God* to that post. Again in this we are being taught that Jesus has the full nature of being human otherwise He could not serve as our High Priest. But He is also fully divine in nature as verse 5 establishes that Jesus is the Son of the Father.

And so Jesus is lifted up to a standard that is both recognized by the Jews and yet is outside of the Jewish line of Aaron. No one since Melchizedek has met that standard to serve as High Priest. Jesus is both Jew *and* outside of Judaism. He is sent from outside the bounds of earth to be bound to the role of Priest/King. Jesus has become the new Icon. He is now the point of reference that all people know as the High Priest of God to serve as both the one who offers sacrifices and has become the sacrifice offered so that we can mature in faith and grow in righteousness (verses 13-14).

APPLICATION -

1. Our icons show us something of who we are as they reflect what we value. Even before the days of the renaissance icons, as a style of art, were used by the faithful to help guide them in their faith. Yes, there was abuse of that, but such abuse should not stand in our way of the proper use of icons. Perhaps you might do some looking on-line at icons of old and even new origins that may help you focus on Jesus as your High Priest.

PRAY – Dear Jesus, our great High Priest and King, You have offered Yourself as the sacrifice needed for us to obtain Mercy and Grace. Grant us sight to see and eyes to perceive that You are the only and one true icon we have or need. In Your name, amen.