

About a year ago, a man was found guilty and jailed for three months in Dublin District Court for impersonating a garda.

A year previously he'd been driving his car when he saw a driver in front of him who was using her mobile phone. So he switched on the blue flashing lights that he'd installed in the grill of his car, and signalled for the car in-front to stop.

But when they did, the man got more than he bargained for, because the car he stopped was actually an unmarked garda patrol car and the occupants were plainclothes officers.

When they provided their identification and asked him for his, he initially tried to make excuses, but eventually realised that he was found out!

So why was this man in trouble but the other two officers weren't? Well, of course, it is because they had been appointed by the relevant authorities to have the power to stop people, but this guy had just taken that power upon himself.

How someone is appointed determines what authority and power they really have.

Last week, we were rejoicing in what the writer of Hebrews told us about Jesus being our great high priest. We were thinking about how that should encourage us to come close to God and be confident that he will provide us with all the grace and mercy we need.

But this only helps if Jesus really has the right to be our great high priest. If he's just impersonating a high priest, if he doesn't have the right to mediate between us and God, then he can't help us as he claims.

And so the writer of the Hebrews went on in his letter to show that Jesus did have that right. He had been appointed as our great high priest, with a better appointment than even the high priests of the Judaism they had left behind.

Hebrews 5:1-10: "Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. ³ This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

⁴ No-one takes this honour upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,

"You are my Son;

today I have become your Father." ⁶ And he says in another place,

"You are a priest for ever,

in the order of Melchizedek."

⁷ During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Although he was a son, 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."

1. His Appointment

In this carefully constructed passage, the writer compared and contrasted the high priests of Judaism and the high priesthood of Jesus –

- between the office of high priest in the Old Covenant between God and the nation of Israel
- and the office of high priest in the New Covenant between God and believers in Jesus.

And his purpose was to show that Jesus did not just have the right to be our high priest, but that he was superior to all who went before him. He did this by looking at their appointment, their actions and their attitude.

a) From the people

First of all he said that "Every high priest is selected from among men..." Hebrews 5:1 This was vital. They had to be identified with the people they were representing. They had to be one of them.

Last month a new appointment in Scotland caused great uproar across the internet. A guy called Jason Grant was appointed to a new government funded position in the Tay region.

He'd previously worked in tobacco sales, a student wellbeing officer and as a personal trainer. But his new appointment was ridiculed by many. Some said that when they heard it at first, they thought it was a joke. Others called it ridiculous and

absurd.

The reason was because he is Scotland's first Period Dignity Officer, who will be expected to visit schools, colleges and wider communities to lead campaigns and give advice about women's health issues. And to many people, the first qualification to speak about women's health, is to be a woman!

The first qualification to be high priest was to be one of the people they were representing. When Aaron, the first high priest of the Israelites was appointed, the Lord said to Moses, "Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so that they may serve me as priests." Exodus 28:1

And in a similar way, in order for Jesus to be able to represent us, he too had to be one of us. This is what the writer of Hebrews has already made clear. "He had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest." Hebrews 2:17

This is the vital truth of the incarnation. In order to be our high priest and rescue us, Jesus had to become like us. He had to be fully human.

b) Chosen by God

But it wasn't enough just to be from the people in order to be a high priest. You also needed to be appointed by God. "No-one takes this honour upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was." Hebrews 5:4

The office of high priest was not something you volunteered for. It wasn't open to applications from anyone. You couldn't appoint yourself. It was a role that was given to the one that God chose.

A number of times in Israel's history people tried to take that role for themselves. Numbers 16 records the time when Korah and 250 others rebelled against Moses and Aaron. They said, "The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?" Numbers 16:3.

They were jealous of Moses and Aaron and their special role before God and demanded that they had the same right to come before him. But God disagreed and acted in judgement. When they all approached God, "The ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them." Numbers 16:31-32

And so for the writer of Hebrews to show that Jesus is our rightful high priest, he had to show that he'd been appointed by God.

And this is at the heart of this passage. The structure of this passage makes that clear as right in the middle are two quotations from the Old Testament.

We've seen the first of them before in chapter 1 of this letter. It's from Psalm 2 where God said to Jesus: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." Hebrews 5:5

As we saw before, this was looking forward to the time when Jesus would be raised and exalted to the royal position as King of the Universe and so reveal his unique relationship as the Son of God.

But the second quotation is from Psalm 110, and says, "You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 5:6. Jesus is not a descendent of Aaron and so is not part of the Levitical priesthood of the Old Covenant. Instead, he was declared to be a priest in a different order, the order of Melchizedek.

And we'll see how this priesthood was much better than the Levitical priesthood when we get to chapter 7 of this letter. But for now his focus is that the same God who declared Jesus to be the anointed one, the exalted King, also declared Jesus as the eternal priest in a new and unique priesthood.

So Jesus has the right to be our great high priest, not just because he became one of us, but because he was appointed by God. He "was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 5:10

2. His Actions

But what was he appointed to do? What actions was he chosen to perform? Well in the old covenant "Every high priest is... appointed to represent them in matters related to God," Hebrews 5:1

a) To Represent the People

The high priest was not just appointed from the people of God, but also for the people of God.

As we mentioned last week, he was the only one who was allowed, once a year, to enter the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle or temple. On his chest he wore a breastpiece of gold on which were mounted twelve precious stones in four rows of three. On each of these stones were engraved one of the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

In this way, “Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the LORD.” Exodus 28:29

In a sense, Aaron didn’t enter God’s presence on his own. He was carrying the people of God with him, to represent them before God. He was doing this on behalf of them.

This is what Jesus does. Hebrews 7:25 says that “He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Jesus was appointed as the great high priest for us. He carries us on his heart. And he is committed to representing us before God.

b) To Redeem the People

But what did the high priest do when he entered the Most Holy Place? He was “to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.” Hebrews 5:1

On the Day of Atonement, he was to take two goats from the people. He would kill one of them and take its blood into Most Holy Place and sprinkle it on the ark of the covenant. This was “for the sin offering for the people.” Leviticus 16:15

Then he would bring the other goat, put his hands on its head, confessing all the sins of the people before the Lord, and then send that scapegoat into the desert. In this way “the goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place.” Leviticus 16:22

By doing this, each year, the high priest made atonement for the sins of the people and enabled them to live with God.

But Jesus, did this in a more wonderful and effective way. As we’ll see in more detail later in this book, he did not perform numerous sacrifices, year after year that could never ultimately deal with sin. Instead, he gave himself up as a sacrifice for our sins.

On the cross, our sin was placed on him. The punishment that we deserved he received. And he died in our place. He was our scapegoat. As Paul wrote, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

c) Through Radical Submission

Through this: “He learned obedience from what he suffered.” Hebrews 5:8 This doesn’t mean that before the cross, Jesus was disobedient. But it means that through his willing sacrifice of himself on the cross, Jesus experienced in full what obedience to his Father cost.

But also by doing this he became perfect and “he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” Hebrews 5:9 Again this doesn’t mean that before the cross, he was imperfect. But it means that it was only after laying down his life that Jesus was able to rescue us. Because Jesus radically submitted to his Father’s will and completed the work that he gave him to do, he can save all those who come to him!

But if we want to experience this amazing gift, then we need to obey him! That doesn’t mean that we need to perfectly obey all his commands, as if we earn our salvation through our efforts. But it means that we need to obey his call on us to accept the gospel and trust in him as our Saviour and Lord.

So in a sense, we’re called to the same radical submission to the Father that Jesus demonstrated when he went to the cross. We need to repent of demanding our own way, and receive Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Maybe that explains why so many struggle to accept the gospel. Deep down we all want to be in control of our lives. We want to do our own thing and depend on our own efforts.

But it is only if we do repent, if we do put our trust in Jesus and depend on him alone, that we can be saved. And not just

for now, but for all eternity.

If any of us here have not yet accepted this amazing gift, then please don't put it off any longer. Jesus is the only source of eternal salvation!

3. Attitude

And we can come confidently to him, because if we do submit to him, he will deal gently with us. This is the attitude of the high priest.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest of Israel didn't just sacrifice for the sins of the people. Aaron and all the high priests that came after him were sinners. They too stood guilty before God. So ["He has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people."](#) Hebrews 5:3

a) Gentle with Fellow-Sinners

But this had a very helpful side-effect. Because the Jewish high priests were one of them, and struggled with sin, just like they did, he was ["able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness."](#) Hebrews 5:2.

He had a certain solidarity with them. He knew what their lives were like. He understood their struggles with sin and shared in their battles with their doubts and waywardness.

And so instead of cold indifference or just criticism and condemnation, he could sympathise with them. Reach out to them with understanding, gentleness, grace and love.

That's of course what we should do. As Christians, we should be all too aware of our sinfulness and our weakness, and that should stop us from harshly judging others.

That's why we should be gentle in sharing the gospel. Paul said ["Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst."](#) 1 Timothy 1:15 That was his attitude when he preached the gospel. Before he saw anyone else's sin, he saw his own! So from his perspective he saw his sin worse than anyone else's.

That didn't mean that he put himself down and kept his distance from God. Instead it meant that he understood the depth of God's grace that he'd received. And so he could confidently offer God's grace to anyone else – no matter who they were or what they were guilty of!

This is also why we should be gentle with each other. ["Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."](#) Galatians 6:1 If we judge and condemn others harshly, we're forgetting that we too struggle with sin and are subject to weakness.

b) Gentle with Fellow-Sufferers

But even more importantly, we should deal gently with each other in this way, because that is how Jesus deals with us. Last week we rejoiced that ["We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses."](#) Hebrews 4:13

Jesus is not cool and detached from us. He suffers with us. He feels our pain. He shares in our suffering. That's not because he is a fellow sinner. But it is because he is a fellow-sufferer. ["During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."](#) Hebrews 5:7

Some people think this points back to Gethsemane where, in agony, Jesus prayed three times for God to take away the cup of suffering he was about to drink. If so, it gives us an insight into reality of the struggle that Jesus faced, the intensity of distress that he felt, the terror he experienced as he looked to the cross.

But he was heard because of his willing submission to his Father as he prayed, ["Not as I will, but as you will."](#) Matthew 26:39. This of course was not through being spared the cross, but through being raised again on the third day!

But it is the intensity of this battle that Jesus experienced, that gives him a unique insight into our struggle with sin and enables him to deal gently with us! As we read before, ["Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."](#) Hebrews 2:18

Conclusion

So this morning, we can rejoice that Jesus is not an impersonator.

- As one of us, he was appointed by God as our high priest.
- As our Saviour, his actions have rescued us from our sins.
- And as a fellow-sufferer, his attitude to us is one of gentleness and grace.

He truly is our great high priest!

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