

A HIGH RESPONSIBILITY GOES WITH EVERY PRIVILEGE

Today's Text: Heb. Chaps. 7-9

Extracts:

- a) **For it is evident that *our Lord arose from the tribe of Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood...And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath...by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant [Heb. 7: 14, 20,22].***
- b) **We have a *High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens... a Mediator of a better covenant [Heb. 8: 1,6]***
- c) **But *Christ came as High Priest... not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place, once for all, having obtained eternal redemption [Heb. 9: 11-12]***

In the United States of America, there is a well-established practice for the winning team in each of America's major sports to pay a visit to the White House where the US President will personally receive the team and take pictures with them. Sports stars regard it as a rare privilege because your team may not win again or soon. In 2011, the Green Bay Packers from Wisconsin were the Super Bowl Champions. After many delays, they were finally scheduled to see the then President, Obama, on Friday, August 12, 2011.¹ For the Packers' linebacker, Desmond Bishop, there was the added pride that he was going to meet and take pictures with the first African-American President. But, as security started to check the team's ID cards before boarding the bus to the White House, Bishop discovered that he had left his wallet back home! As a result, he was left behind in the team bus. Speaking later, Bishop said, "It was pretty disappointing. I think it was a historic time, something you can tell your kids or your grandkids one day. To have missed that opportunity, it definitely stung."

Indeed, responsibility goes with every privilege. Sometimes, we may have the chance to make amends when we blow an important chance. In most cases, however, there is no second chance. So, how can you ensure that you do not waste your chances? In today's study, we shall use the case of Jesus Christ who did not come from a priestly line but whom God gave the privilege to now become our High Priest forever.

¹ Story is based on "Bishop forgets ID, misses White House," August 16, 2011

<http://msn.foxsports.com/nfl/story/desmond-Bishop-forgets-ID-misses-green-bay-packers-White-House-visit-081511>

1. Background: Privilege and Sacrifice are two sides of the same coin!

According to a popular saying, “To whom much is given much is expected.” What is given can also be called a privilege. The President of any country or organisation, the head of a major denomination or church and many others carry prestige that opens doors beyond the reach of common people like most of us. But have you ever paid attention to the responsibilities that go with such privileges?

When John saw Jesus coming toward him (not quite long after he had baptized Him), he said, “Behold! The *Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” [Jn 1: 29]. Jesus was introduced according to the responsibility He would bear. But during His trial, the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate was desirous to set Him free because he found no fault in Him. His accusers, the Jewish leaders, insisted on His crucifixion because according to their own law, “*He made Himself the Son of God*” [Jn 19: 1-6]. He was being tried and punished according to His privilege. As we approach end times, we are faced more and more with political and religious leaders, among others, who love and enjoy the *perquisites* of privilege while ignoring or abusing the *prerequisites*. ***Therefore, privilege and the conditionalities tied to it are two sides of the same coin. You cannot choose the privilege part and ignore the other side, the responsibility part; otherwise, that coin would be counterfeit!***

How do we know what responsibilities are associated with the privileges that we enjoy? How can we carry out such responsibilities to make our privileges “fit” us “perfectly”? What rewards do we expect for such faithful service? The writer of the book of Hebrews has made it easier for us to answer such questions. In Chapters 7-9 of the book of Hebrews, he has given us a perfect understanding by using our Lord’s example. Let us pay attention to the following:

a) *The Privilege: Jesus became a High Priest but He was not born one*

The writer states, “For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe, Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come not according to the law of a fleshly commandment but according to the power of an endless life. For it is testified, ‘*You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*’” [Heb. 7: 14-17]. As the “Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” [Rev. 5: 5], Jesus was born a king not a priest. However, He is a priest forever of the order of Melchizedek.

Who is Melchizedek? In one of His running battles with Jewish leaders during His earthly ministry, they asked Jesus, “Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead?” He replied, “*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.*” They went on, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” He replied, “Most assuredly, I say to you, *before Abraham was, I AM*” [Jn 8: 48-58].

The second part is easy to understand; Jesus is the Son of God and He is, therefore, the I AM [Ex. 3:14; Jn 1: 18]. But when did Abraham see Jesus and was glad?

There are two places in the Old Testament where Abraham met God in human form [Gen. Chaps 14 and 18]. The first time was when he was returning after helping to set free Lot, his nephew, who had been captured by invaders of Sodom. On his way back, we are told [Gen. 14: 18-20]:

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High, and he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And he gave him a tithe of all.

Soon after, when the king of Sodom asked Abram to give him the persons (captives) but keep the goods for himself, Abram replied, “***I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth***” [vv. 21-22]. Did Abram see more than we have just read because God was to later tell Abimelech, king of Gerar, that Abraham was a prophet [Gen. 20:7]. Did he see Melchizedek as God in human form, the pre-incarnate Christ? After all, the risen Christ later opened the Scriptures to His disciples when He told them, “All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” [Lk 24: 44].

Melchizedek was the king of Salem, translated as the “king of righteousness” and “king of peace.” He had no beginning nor end of life but was “made like the Son of God” and “remains a priest continually” [Heb. 7: 1-3]. Therefore, ***Melchizedek was the pre-incarnate Christ, to whom Abraham paid tithe! Jesus that came later in flesh is, therefore, a King (by birth) and a Priest (by privilege).***

- b) *The Sacrifice: Other priests came every year with the blood of animals but Jesus had to offer His own blood ONCE*

We are told, “But Christ came ... not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” [Heb. 9: 11-12].

Under the Law of Moses, priests, descendants of Aaron of the tribe of Levi, offered every year the blood of animals to atone for their own sins and those of the people [Lev. 9: 7]. Priests and Levites were in active service until the age of fifty [Num. 23-26]. In the case of Jesus, He took His own blood, in that He shed it on the cross at Calvary. Before He died, He cried aloud, “It is finished” and “bowing His head, He gave up His

spirit” [Jn 19: 30]. Immediately, the veil of the temple in Jerusalem was torn in two “from top to bottom,” [Lk 27: 51]. The veil over the part of the tabernacle called the Holiest of All or the Most Holy Place was removed forever, not with the blood of animals. ***With His own blood, Jesus had entered the Most Holy Place “once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” [Heb. 9: 12].*** Indeed, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world [Jn 1: 29].

c) *The Reward: He has thus become a Priest forever!!*

Having given Himself as our sacrifice, we now have a High Priest “who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” [Heb. 8: 1]. He has become “a surety of a better covenant” and “continues forever” with an “unchangeable priesthood” [Heb. 7: 22-24].

By His sacrifice, He now appears in heaven for us in the presence of God [Heb. 9: 24]. Indeed, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, who has “redeemed us to God by (His) blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation ... and made us kings and priests to our God, and we shall reign on the earth” [Rev. 5: 1-10]

From the foregoing, the Lamb of God has set a perfect example for us. The word of God says, “Walk in love, as ***Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma***” [Eph. 5:2]. By your sacrifice, God will know whether you appreciate the privilege(s) that He has showered on you.

2. Lessons for us

We should pay attention to the following lessons, among many others:

a) *Do a stocktaking of the privileges you currently enjoy*

At the beginning/end of each year, organisations close shop for a few hours to take stock of their inventory. Auditors are brought to assess the profitability (or otherwise) of their operations. From such reports, such organisations are able to know how well they are doing and what areas need to be strengthened. Perhaps it may also be a good thing for you to take stock of the privileges that you currently enjoy.

Are you winning your races because you are the swiftest or your battles because you are the strongest? Are you rich because you are the most hardworking or most skillful? Are you so strong and well because you take care of your health than everyone else? Some people are in oxygen masks in the hospital and you are complaining of sweat in your spacious homes. You are a world traveller and yet you have never had a plane

crash. Hurricanes and earthquakes are news items from distant lands but you have never experienced a simple flood. Indeed, there is so much God has given you. People never know what they have until they lose them!

b) How about the fine prints of your responsibilities?

Most times, we may not know the privileges that we enjoy from God and others each new day. However, if we pay attention to the fine prints of our responsibilities, God will take care of our privileges for us. For example, when God told Solomon to ask what He should give him, the king replied, “I am a little child; I do not know how to come in and go out.” He then asked for an understanding heart to be able to judge over God’s people (as David’s successor) and discern between good and evil.” His answer pleased God so much that He gave Solomon wisdom and wealth beyond measure [1 Kgs 3: 1-13]. Solomon focused on the fine prints of his responsibilities as the king of Israel. How about you?

Some of us use the privileges God has showered on us to promote self-aggrandizement or self-enrichment. For example, for being a faithful servant to prophet Elijah, Elisha got a double portion of his spiritual powers [2 Kgs 2: 1-25]. But Elisha’s servant, Gehazi, was greedy. When Elisha refused to take anything from the Syrian general, Naaman, that God had healed of leprosy, Gehazi said to himself, “Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but as the LORD lives, I will run after him and take something from him.” He did and hid everything away from his master. For that, God punished Gehazi and put the leprosy on Gehazi and his descendants forever [2 Kgs 5: 20-27].

As a church leader, do you neglect to render accounts to your congregation? As a politician, do you by-pass laws, rules and regulations when it comes to personal matters? Even where you claim to obey laws and rules, do you place more emphasis on legalism than morality? God is watching you!

c) Do you now see why you must be humble?

The word of God says, “A man’s pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honour” [Prov. 29: 23]. Pride can be defined as acting with impunity. Impunity means self-awarded importance or self-exemption from laws, rules and regulations. Humility, on the other hand, means acting within laws, rules and regulations or self-denials of what you are entitled to. Writing to the Philippian church, Paul said [Phil. 2: 5-11]:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with

God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond servant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and ... on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Do you need to know more about the need to always be humble?

In sum, here is the heart of the matter. Every privilege goes with heavy responsibilities. Unless/until you know those responsibilities and seek to accept/honour them, do not be surprised/disappointed if such privileges look elusive! To whom much is given, much is expected.

3. Conclusion: Learn from Jesus!

On one occasion, when Jesus brought His disciples to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked them what men said that He, the Son of Man, is. Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” We are told that from that time on, “Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” [Matt. 16: 13-21]. The disciples focused on His privileges but Jesus drew their attention to His responsibilities- His mission on earth. What lesson does that teach us?

Everyone who exalts himself/herself will be humbled; but s(he) who humbles himself/herself will be exalted [Lk 18: 14]. Whoever seeks to be the greatest among you, let him/her be as the one who serves [Lk 22: 24-27]

Responsibility goes with every privilege. Let us learn from Jesus!