

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
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Sunday, Sept. 21, 2003

Hebrews 8:1-5 “Jesus: a Far Better Priest”

Intro. A great many things have been presented and explained in chapter 7, but they all relate, directly or indirectly, to Christ's high priesthood. Now keep in mind that the Law and the Temple rituals led by the priests were the chief features of Judaism (cf. Judges 17:4-5, 9-13; 18:19-24). In order to persuade Jews to believe in Christ and stay true to Him, it would require convincing them that Jesus supercedes the priesthood, and provides a New Covenant that replaces the covenant of the Law of Moses. So in chapter 8 the author discusses the fact that Christ is the mediator of a new or better covenant. It is only fitting that a superior priest mediate a superior covenant (& vice versa).

However, in our message today, we will continue to focus primarily upon the priesthood of Jesus. The priesthood of Jesus is not something very many people know much about. But this aspect of the ministry of Jesus meets a very important need that we all have in our relationship with God. Sin has created a barrier between us and God. Sinful man cannot draw near to a holy God on our own. We need a mediator, a priest. Now Judaism, Catholicism, and some other religions have priests, but these are very inadequate. We are going to see that Jesus is not only a better priest, but really, He is the only Priest that gives us genuine hope of drawing near to God. If you are counting on some human priest to get you into heaven, I'm afraid you are going to be very disappointed. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” So how is Jesus Christ a superior priest?

I. HE IS A SEATED PRIEST (V.1)

V. 1 says, “...We have such a High Priest, who is seated....” That may not seem very significant, but you will understand its significance as you consider:

A. The Contrast of Levitical Priests - The Levitical priests never sat down while ministering. In fact, Heb. 10:11 says, “And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.” The priest's job was never done, because the sacrifices he offered were symbols pointing to the true Sacrifice. They had to be repeated over and over. Therefore, no place was provided in the Tabernacle or the Temple for the priests to sit down. You say, “What about the mercy seat?” Well, the mercy “seat” in the Holy of Holies was not really a seat at all. In any case, it would have been utterly blasphemous for the high priest to have presumed to sit on the mercy seat, which represented God's throne and His special presence. Even so, the only person allowed in the holy of Holies was the High Priest, and then only briefly once a year.

But in contrast to earthly priests, we see in our text:

B. The Seated Christ – Why is Christ seated? Well it means 3 things. First of all, He is seated because of:

1. His Finished Work - After Jesus Christ offered His sacrifice, He sat down at the right hand of God to indicate that the work of atonement for sin had been accomplished. This is

indicated more clearly in Heb. 1:3b which says, "...when He had by Himself purged our sins, [He] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." He was qualified to sit down because His work was done. Right before Jesus died on the cross He cried out, "It is finished." We cannot add to the finished work of Christ. He has accomplished all that can be accomplished, all that needs to be done. Yet, people are still trying to add to the simple, pure grace of God and salvation. This truth should have been the most joyous news possible to Jews. Imagine a final sacrifice and a finished work!

The practice of the Sanhedrin provides an illustration of the saving work of the seated Christ. When the members sat in judgment, a scribe, or secretary, sat on either side of the presiding judge. The scribe on the left side was responsible for writing condemnations, while the one on the right was responsible for writing acquittals. Thus, it is fitting that Jesus sat down at the right hand of God. John 3:17 says, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

2. His Enthronement – V. 1 says that Jesus is "seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty¹ in the heavens." Likewise, Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus "...sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." This is the fulfillment of the Father's promise to the Son, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool" (Ps. 110:1). Only a priest after the order of Melchizedek could be enthroned, for Melchizedek was both king and priest (Heb. 7:1). What is amazing is that, as believers, we will one day be invited to sit on that same throne. Rev. 3:21 says, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." Our destiny by the plan of God is not the pigpen of sin, but to sit on the throne with our Savior, and reign with Him!

Also, for Jesus to be seated at the right hand of God indicates:

3. His Supreme Exaltation - Phil. 2:9-11 says, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (cf. Eph. 1:20-23). The right hand of a monarch symbolized honor, exaltation, and power. To stand at his right hand was honor, but to sit there was supreme honor. Thus, the crowning argument for the superior priesthood of Jesus Christ is His exaltation into heaven to sit at the Father's right hand - the place of honor.

However, it is not just a place of honor. It is also a place of ministry. So let's see the 2nd main reason why Jesus is a superior priest:.

II. HE IS AN ACTIVE PRIEST

Someone may ask, "If Christ has finished His work and He is seated in heaven, does He have nothing to do now? Is all of His priestly work finished?" The answer is, No. His sacrifice is finished, but all of His priestly work is not. V. 2 says that He is "a Minister of the sanctuary." The word translated "minister" (*leitourgos*) refers to one who discharges some public official act of service either to God or to man. In the Bible the word is especially employed in reference to the service of a ministering priest. He is seated, yet serving. He is on the throne, but in His royalty, He serves.

Then, in v. 3 our author compares the ministry of Jesus to the ministry of earthly High Priests. He says, "For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer." That being the cases, we see first of all:

¹ "Majesty" is a periphrasis for God. The Jews often substituted something else in place of God's name.

A. Jesus Is Still Offering “Gifts” – We have already talked about the sacrifice that Jesus offered when He died on the cross. But now in heaven, He offers “gifts. In Heb. 5:1 we discussed the distinction between gifts and sacrifices. “Gifts” referred to meal offerings. The gift offerings were given to represent personal dedication and thanksgiving to the Lord. The offerings of gifts such a meal & drink offerings were an expression of thanksgiving to God for the harvest. The blood offerings, on the other hand, were for cleansing from sin. The priests were responsible for offering both. Jesus has offered the final and complete offering for sin. But God's people still need to come to God for dedication, commitment, & thanksgiving. Jesus still offers on our behalf our offerings of praise and thanksgiving. Do you offer thanksgiving to God for the blessings you have received? [Review what we should be thankful for in the aftermath of the hurricane]. But let me tell you something that you may not realize. None of us can praise God, or thank Him, or commit or dedicate ourselves in worship, obedience, and service to God, apart from Jesus Christ. We must offer all of our gifts & praises to God through Jesus Christ!

There is another ongoing work of Jesus as Priest that is not mentioned in our text, but is mentioned in the previous text of the book of Hebrews:

B. He is Still Interceding – Heb. 7:25 says, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Romans 8:34 says, “Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” 1 John 2:1 says, “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Isn’t that wonderful! If you have trusted in Jesus as your Savior, He will become your advocate, seated right there at the right hand of God. And when you fail to live right, and when you confess your sin to God, Jesus is right there interceding as your Advocate. That old devil may accuse you, and demand that he be given permission to destroy you, but Jesus will speak up and say, “Father, I died for his sin. I plead his acquittal for I paid for his sin by My precious blood.” Oh, we do indeed have an active High Priest, who is working on our behalf.

Now there is one more statement about our wonderful Savior:

III. HE IS THE PRIEST OF A BETTER SANCTUARY²

This is mentioned in v.2, where it says that Jesus is “a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.” In contrast, the sanctuary that earthly priests ministered in was man-made, and it was destroyed in 70 A.D. and has never been rebuilt. So Jesus is a far better Priest because He ministers in a far better sanctuary.

Now as we think about this, let’s see first of all:

A. The Necessity for His Ministry in a Better Sanctuary - During His earthly ministry, Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, preached on the hillside and in the synagogue, and forgave sins. But He never claimed the right to minister in the Temple. V. 4 says, “For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law.”³ If Jesus Christ were still on earth, He could not function as a priest. He was not of the tribe of Levi, or of

² This point will be discussed further in chapter 9.

³ The tense indicates that the temple was still standing. Thus, the time of writing this book was prior to 70 A.D.

the line of Aaron. But He can serve as High Priest in heaven because there the order of Melchizedek governs the ministry, not the order of Aaron. Also, Jesus could not minister as a priest on earth because He never mixes the shadow with the substance, the type with the antitype as we shall see next.

Another reason Jesus ministers in a better sanctuary is because:

B. The Earthly Temple & Tabernacle Were But Shadows of the True – V. 5 says that the earthly priests “...serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things....” Then he quotes from the Old Testament where Moses was informed that the earthly tabernacle was to be patterned after the heavenly sanctuary (Exodus 25:40). So the earthly sanctuary was but a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary. A shadow has no substance in itself, no independent existence or meaning apart from what it is a shadow of. It exists only as evidence of the real thing. Why, then, should a Jew be satisfied with the old priesthood and the old sacrifices - which are only copies and shadows of forgiveness and reconciliation - when he can have real forgiveness and real reconciliation in Jesus Christ? Our author used the same imagery in Heb. 10:1, “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” Likewise, Col. 2:17 says that Jewish ceremonial rituals were “a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” [Illustrate with the spotlight making a shadow of me or someone else].

And so this affirms the main point. Jesus is a far better Priest because:

C. Jesus Ministers in the True Sanctuary (cf. v.5b) - The heavenly sanctuary is not an enhanced, improved version of the earthly. It is just the opposite. The heavenly was true as opposed to a copy. The contrast is not between the true and the false. The comparison is between the typical and temporary and the real and permanent. In the book of Revelation, John states that there is a temple of God in heaven (Rev. 11:19). For example, there is a brazen altar (6:9-11) as well as an altar of incense (8:3-5). If I had a photocopy of a \$100 bill and a genuine \$100 bill, which would you want? Even so, why fellowship with priests who are serving in a copied sanctuary when you can fellowship with Christ in the original heavenly sanctuary?

Sources: John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* (on 8:1-2), Vol. 15 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Warren W. Wiersbe, “*Be*” *Series: New Testament Volumes 1 & 2, John* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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