

Sermon 22: Hebrews 8:1-6: Perfected Heavenly High Priest

OUTLINE

Perfected High Priest
Heavenly High Priest

INTRODUCTION

Imagine with me for a moment a first century conversation between you a converted Jew living in Rome; maybe an uncle or some concerned Jewish relation who is trying to convince you to forsake Christ and go back to Judaism. It is that time of the year when the Jewish men have to make a pilgrimage to go to Jerusalem for Passover, and he is making his arguments, putting forward the superiority of Judaism before you to get you to come with him. He would argue that Judaism is built upon the word of God; that it offers a temple, where God dwells in the midst of His people; and it is here that priests can offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin; where incense is offered during the time of prayer to cause our prayers to be heard. Where is your priesthood and high priest? Where is your sacrifice? How can your prayers be heard? He shouts about how the pagans have no hope of knowing God but the Jews have been given these things by God Himself that we can know and worship Him. And you remembering the recent reading of the word of exhortation, the letter to the Hebrews in a recent meeting on the Lord's Day say to them, 'I do have a high priest! Jesus Christ.' And the conversation goes on, and what appear to be arguments against Jesus being able to be our high priest, that He is not of the tribe of Levi, but Judah; that He cannot serve in the temple in Jerusalem; and where is He now? These so called disadvantages underline to prove that Jesus is a better High priest; with a better sacrifice; who is priest and King; whose coming marks the end of the law that could not perfect us and the arrival of the New Covenant. Hebrews 8:1-6 adds a cherry on the top of these advantages over the present priesthood as Jesus is described as our perfected and heavenly high priest.

Several things have been listed as Jesus superior qualifications for being a better high priest. That He is God the Son and superior to the angels who gave the law and Moses who communicated it. That He is of the tribe of Judah and so can be both King and priest. That He is sinless where Aaron is sinful. That He has an indestructible life where all other priests die. The focus in this next section is that fact that Jesus is a perfected heavenly priest. The Levites serve on earth in the earthly temple; Jesus ministers in heaven in a better temple. We have two main ideas being developed here, Jesus is the perfected high priest; and Jesus is the heavenly high priest.

Perfected High Priest

V1, 'Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.' The opening words of this chapter reveal the author's main point for the whole book of Hebrews. You and I have *such* a High Priest in Jesus. The word *such* is talking about what sort of high priest we have in Jesus. And what sort of High priest do we have? The end of the verse before it makes clear that Jesus is a high priest who is 'a Son who has been made perfect forever.' In other words, Jesus is our perfected High Priest. This idea of Jesus being perfected is a most important theme in this letter. Remember, 2:9, 'For it was fitting that he, for whom and by

whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.' And, 5:8-9, 'Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.' How can one who is God the Son immutably perfect be made perfect? There are several aspects to how Jesus was made perfect to be our high priest.

Firstly, He had to be incarnate, He had to share in our humanity, yet of course without sin, this was secured through the miracle of being conceived by the power of the Spirit in the virgin Mary. But being born was not enough. His humanity not only fits Him to represent us, but also to sympathize with us. Secondly, that word 'founder' or pioneer in 2:9 highlights the reality that as a second Adam Jesus blazes a trail as our representative. 5:8 highlights that key ingredient of obedience. Why did Jesus, God the Son, one in will with the Father and knowing all the Father knows have to learn obedience? The Son was not adding something to an incomplete holiness; nor adding anything to His knowledge. No, as our representative He was filling up a perfect life of obedience. We speak of two aspects to the obedience He learned as our second Adam and pioneer. His active obedience where Jesus lived a perfect lawkeeping life. Unlike Adam who failed the test in the Garden; Jesus submitted His will in the Garden. God demands that we be perfect as He is, Jesus lived a perfect human life doing the will of His Father from the heart. And He did it on our behalf. Secondly, we speak of Jesus passive obedience, the obedience He rendered to God in order to pay for sins. 5:8 puts a point on this by emphasizing His obedience by what He suffered in dying for us. By His life He fills up a positive law keeping life for us; and by His death He makes a full payment for what God's law requires as payment for sin. This is a key way in which He was made perfect by His obedient suffering. But this is not all.

Thirdly, He was perfected when He was resurrected from the dead. His body was glorified into a new creation body that could not die. His resurrection as our representative made Him the firstborn from the dead, and a firstfruit of a resurrection harvest of which we will be a part. Because He is glorified, we to will be glorified; because His humanity was perfected from a body that could die to a body that could not die when He was resurrected, so will ours.

Fourthly, not only was He resurrected, but He ascended as our representative into the heavens; was given the name above all names, sitting on God's right hand; interceding and ruling on our behalf.

So back to the opening conversation with that Jewish friend trying to convince you to go back to Judaism, there is no Levitical high priest that qualifies. There is none who is so sympathetic and loving; none who is free from sin. There is none who can obey the law for us, nor die to pay for our sins; there is no one else who could die and be resurrected overcoming death and securing our own resurrection; and there is no earthly priest in the heavens with the authority that Christ has. Christians have such a high priest.

The key words we need to press home in 8:1 are the words 'we have.' Do you have Jesus as your perfected High Priest? Jesus identified Himself with us, He became human, and was baptized in water in a baptism of repentance not because of His own sins but in identification with us. He died our death in identification with us. But have you identified yourself with Him? It is not enough to save you that He came and died and rose again. He must be your perfected high priest. You must turn from the sin you have been serving and serve Him. You must turn from those other saviors you have been looking to for righteousness and fulfillment and find your righteousness and your all in Him. Acknowledge Him as God and Lord of your life; turn your back on your willful life

of rebellion and self-rule. If you call on His name as Lord, and believe upon His work for you, He is a merciful and willing king and Savior. He will grant mercy to those who ask. All that is needed to pay for your sin is paid; the proof of His willingness is clear in His incarnation and death. All that is needed now is for you to confess your sin, humble yourself, return to the God who made you and be cleansed through a free offer of forgiveness. Is He your high priest?

Heavenly high priest

Not only is Jesus our perfected High Priest but the one who is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He is our heavenly High priest. Next our author shows how Jesus as our heavenly high priest is superior. V2, 'a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.' Firstly, Jesus priesthood is in a better temple. It is taking place in the God made temple of the heavens and not the man made one of Herod's temple on earth. The original tent with its three parts was a symbolic representation of the 3 heavens. Jesus has entered beyond the veil, a forerunner on our behalf, 6:19-20. Why have a photo of a person when you can have the person; why have the Levitical High Priest go into a now redundant Holy of Holies when you can have God the Son, sinless, resurrected, go into God's very throne room as your representative. Secondly, he also goes with a better sacrifice. V3, 'For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.' In the OT tabernacle the animal was killed in the outer court and its blood applied to the Bronze altar. Jesus died on the earth. The blood of the sacrifice on the day of Atonement would be offered in the Holy of Holies as proof of the life of the sacrificial animal given to pay for sin. Jesus takes Himself, the better sacrifice into the very presence of God as a neverdying testimony to having been paid for. Please notice the radical understatement of v3. Jesus had 'something to offer.' Nothing so pure, nothing so valuable would or could ever be given. If Jesus had offered up the universe as a gift to God it would be nothing in comparison to the God-man offered in surety and payment for the forgiveness of sin on behalf of sinners.

V4-5, 'Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. ⁵ They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." You can imagine someone saying in that conversation we started with: but if Jesus was a priest why didn't He just serve in the temple? Here we are told that Jesus could not be a priest in the earthly temple, not because He was not good enough but because it was not good enough. Not that it was sinful or polluted, but rather because it was merely a copy, a shadow, a type, are some of the words used to describe it. The author quoting Ex. 25:40 reveals that Moses was shown a heavenly version of the earthly tabernacle that he built. In other words, the earthly temple is not the original template the heavenly is. Now this leads to all sorts of speculation and questions. Did Moses see a mini replica that He used as a blue print? Did Moses translate a majestic and glorious heavenly vision like Isaiah's throne room scene; or Rev. 4-5 into a symbolic building version of something much more grand? We are not given these details. But the point is that the earthly tent is a replica and Jesus is serving in the original. Therefore as the heavenly high priest in the heavenly temple his service is better and more effective. V6 says as much, 'But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better

promises.' The outcome is not a priesthood like Aaron's offering sacrifices like Aaron's that could not finally cleanse the worshipper or perfect them; nor establish a better covenant with better promises. We have a priest who has and can.

Now I want to be practical for the rest of this message. I am deeply aware that saying that Jesus is a better priest because He is a heavenly priest is pretty abstract, but I want to bring this home. There are a few key windows in scripture that open up what it means that Jesus is our heavenly priest. Turn firstly, then to Rev. 1. The book of Revelation we know is written by John, in the 90s, just before the outbreak of a satanically driven persecution. Christ as the shepherd of the sheep provides for His people. He gives a revelation that helps the people of God to see who He is, who they are supposed to be, and who their enemy is. He writes to them to interpret the events that are about to happen as they go through the fire; who is in control; how He is providing for them; and how the story will finally end. This book unfolds a picture of satanic attack, through the first beast of Roman governmental power and legal persecution through the first beast; and religious deception through the second beast that is a lamb that speaks with a dragon's voice; and the seduction of Roman culture portrayed as the Harlot. Terrible times are coming but Christ as our Bridegroom, Warrior, and Priest speaks to encourage and strengthen us. John we are told is in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, 1:10, and He hears a trumpet loud voice behind him, the voice of Christ. Jesus instructs John to write down the vision and send it to the churches. A personal message from Him to them. John then turns around and what does he see? He sees a temple scene with Jesus as our heavenly high priest ministering for us. V12, 'Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands.' The lampstand in the tabernacle was in the holy place, where the altar of incense was, where the lampstand, representing the light of God's presence would shine on the 12 loaves that represented the 12 tribes. Here the lampstands are representations of God's people in this dark world, bringing the light of Christ to the world, v20 spells out this connection. What we need to see is the fulfillment of His promise, I am with you to the end of the age. The curtain is pulled back for us to see His attentive ministry. In the room of the temple where incense rose as a symbol of prayer, Jesus is walking among the churches in heavenly intercession, v13, 'and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.' A Son of Man, another Adam, the glorious figure of Daniel 7, a human priest king walking among the churches trimming wicks and pruning us in sanctification; and filling up the oil, pouring out Spiritual blessings, fueling the purity and intensity of our light. He is attentive making sure our lights do not go out. But notice how Jesus is portrayed. Before any other parts of Him are described, where we might start with His eyes, He is portrayed as wearing the long robe of a priest with a golden sash. Where the OT High Priest was to wear the priestly garments for beauty and for glory; Christ is the living embodiment of what those garments pointed to. The high priest who prayed for Peter when He was going to be tested; the high priest who prayed for all the needs of His church on the night of their great need when He would be taken from them, here he is continuing in His everliving intercession and priestly role for us. John then moves from the general impression to the focus of Christ's head, v14, 'The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.'

The Ancient of Days in Daniel seven has hair white as wool. A symbol of God's infinite wisdom and authority, but here Christ, as God, who is our priest has all the wisdom of God to exercise on our behalf.

Next we have images that relate to Jesus as judge as He has eyes of fire and feet of burnished bronze. These words are repeated to the church in Thyatira that permitted false teaching, and there we see Jesus threatening to act as judge against His church, 2:18-23, 'And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. "'I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. 20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, 23 and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.' Christ is presented as the judge and judgement begins at the house of the Lord and then extends more terribly to the world. His purposes of judging sin in the church is for its purity and preservation not its destruction as with the wicked. What does Jesus heavenly priestly ministry mean for you today? That he sees and purges sin in our churches and in us individually.

Christ's voice comes with an overwhelming noise, 'like the roar of many waters.' This is not because Christ is shouting, but because Christ bears irrefutable authority. And from His mouth is a two-edged sword. We know that Christ washes us with the water of the word; and grows the church as the truth is spoken in love through the officers of the church. So when we see the 7 stars in His hand, this refers to them being wielded by Him. In this context the word is also described as a sword which has to do with judgement. It is applied in judgement against false teachers in the church 2:14-16; and to the unbeliever 19:15. His priestly work is concerned with serving us with the word and carving out the unclean leaven of false teaching in the church. Christ's priestly service continues every His word and Spirit work in our midst.

The overall impression of His face was so full of divine glory that it was like looking into the sun. John falls down as dead. The one who ate and joked with Jesus and lay upon His chest in friendship is overwhelmed with the divine glory of the exalted High Priest.

When Hebrews 8 talks about Him ministering in the better temple, this is what this looks like. The King of the universe busy as an attentive priest and shepherd. Bringing all the weight of His authority and power to preserve us, sanctify us, and comfort us. There is so much more that we could investigate here. We could go on to Rev. 4-5 and think of His glory as He is worshipped by the heavenly court, and then go on to Rev. 6 as we see that it is His hand that unlocks the scroll of God's plan for history so that all the terrible events that put the church in the crosshairs of the devil are the perfect plan of Christ for His people. We could go to the martyrdom of Stephen and the outbreak of persecution that is just about to be poured out upon the early church and see Jesus standing to receive and honour His faithful martyr and praying for the strengthening of a church that is about to go through the fire. We could go to Zechariah 3 where we have a court room scene where the devil seeks to accuse

the high priest in dirty garments and how Christ is our advocate who rebukes satan. For no one can bring a charge against God's elect for it is Christ who has died and is now interceding. We could go to the upper room and the high priestly prayer and see what He prays for there to see what is on His heart and how He would be praying for us now in His heavenly intercession. But time will not allow it. What is want you to feel as we conclude this prolonged discussion of Christ's priesthood is this victorious and irresistible conclusion that we are saved to the uttermost, that He is ours and nothing can overcome Him, that He is supremely qualified to save us, and not only from our sins, but to see our every need met, to see us protected and persevere, and to finally bring about the end of all things fulfilling every promise.