

Hebrews

A Superior Heavenly Priesthood

Hebrews 8:1-6

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INTRODUCTION:

One of Satan's objectives is to diminish the supremacy and all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ. You can evaluate a teaching or practice by this: if it diminishes the glory of Christ, it is not of God. Satan uses legalism to divert people to the superficial and external, as opposed to the reality, which is Christ.

Colossians 2:16-23 (NASB95)

¹⁶ Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— ¹⁷ things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

²⁰ If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" ²² (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? ²³ These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.

If Satan can get us to focus on rules and outward observances, we can be fooled into thinking that we are "good" Christians. If the person and work of Jesus Christ is not our focus and joy, we can do all sorts of earthly things, but miss the most important thing, which is to glorify Christ and to know Him.

Philippians 3:2-11 (NASB95)

² Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; ³ for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, ⁴ although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

⁷ But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of

knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Sometimes the enemy uses trials to get our focus off of Christ. Rather than allowing the trial to drive us to Christ for sustenance and comfort, we often turn to worldly counsel that anyone could use, whether he knows Christ or not. The council may even “work,” in the sense of providing relief from our anxiety and pain. But if it is relief without Christ, it is deceptive relief.

Sometimes the enemy uses the temptation of the world and its pleasures to lure us from Christ. It is like the seed sown on the thorny ground that chokes out the Word that directs us to Christ.

Luke 8:14 (NASB95)

¹⁴ The *seed* which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

We become satisfied with all that the world offers, forgetting that its pleasures are fleeting at best. Only Christ satisfies for time and eternity.

The first readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews were tempted to abandon Christ and return to Judaism under the threat of persecution. Judaism had been the practice of their forefathers for centuries. God had revealed Himself through the Hebrew Scriptures and the religious practices spelled out there were comfortable and satisfying. Why endure persecution for their faith in Christ? Why not just go back to the old ways that had been followed for centuries?

To counter this danger, the author sets forth the supremacy of Jesus Christ over the old ways. He has shown that Jesus is the one of whom the entire Old Testament was written about and He is the fulfillment of all that it pointed to. In our text this morning we learn that as God’s priest according to the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is greater than the Levitical priests because He has A Superior Heavenly Priesthood.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Hebrews 8:1-6 (NASB95)

⁸ Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ² a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. ³ For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer. ⁴ Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; ⁵ who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “See,” He says, “that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.” ⁶ But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.

Prayer

The Author starts with "Now the main point in what has been said is this:"

The author is working through a argument here and that is the superior priesthood of Jesus.. A great many things have already been presented and explained concerning this. Before the Holy Spirit puts His focus on the New Covenant and how it is much better than the Old, He mentions two more ways in which Jesus, as our High Priest, is superior over the Levitical priests and how, because of that better New Covenant, He has "obtained a more excellent ministry."

This chapter raises a number of difficult issues among Christians. Namely how the Old Testament law relates to believers under the new covenant. If I leave you with unresolved questions, I invite you to spend time in the Word and dig deeper.

BODY:

I. Jesus is Seated at the Right Hand of God.

Hebrews 8:1 (NASB95)

8 Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

Here the author states the main point of what he has been arguing. We have a heavenly high priest. This is in contrast to the Levitical priests who were weak and imperfect.

Hebrews 7:28 (NASB95)

²⁸ For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever.

The Levitical priests served in an earthly tabernacle on behalf of the worshipers. But Jesus, our priest according to the order of Melchizedek, has ascended into heaven and has taken His seat at the right hand of God which is the true throne of God. The Holy of Holies "where God dwelt" was just a foreshadowing of the reality of God's true throne in heaven.

Psalms 110:1 (NASB95)

110 The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

The author reverently refers to God as "**the Majesty in the heavens.**" It describes God's splendor and sovereignty as the King of kings.

The Levitical priests always stood when they were in the tabernacle or temple, indicating that their work was never done. But Jesus has taken His seat at the right hand of God's throne, having accomplished His work of purification of sins.

Hebrews 1:3a (NASB95)

When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

He has done all that can be done to accomplish our redemption. As He cried out from the cross, "**It is finished**". To add any human works or merit to what Jesus accomplished on the cross is an insult to His death as our perfect sacrifice.

The right hand of the throne is a place of honor, power, and exaltation. "**In the heavens**" refers to the dwelling place of God. Rather than an imperfect human priest who can only enter the Holy of Holies once a year, and never stay there for long (much less sit there permanently!), **we** have a high priest seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens! The point is, "Why would you even **consider** going back to an old obsolete system when you have such a high priest permanently seated in such an exalted position?"

II. Jesus Ministers in the True Heavenly Sanctuary.

Hebrews 8:2 (NASB95)

² a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.

There have been a number of interpretations proposed for these verses, but without wading through all of them, I think that his main point is that the earthly tabernacle was only a shadow. The true tabernacle is the very presence of God in heaven. "**Sanctuary**" refers to the Holy of Holies within the tabernacle

The word "**true**" here is not used as the opposite of false. The true Israelite tabernacle is not being contrasted with the false tabernacles or temples of their pagan neighbors. The idea is that the Israelite tabernacle was just a temporary, shadowy, and unreal comparison between it and the real and permanent tabernacle in heaven.

The world that we are experiencing today is much the same. It is not the real, true world. It is only a temporary representation of the new heaven and earth where we will live eternally when Christ comes again. Our earthly worship, even the most sincere and godly, will only be a reflection of what worship will be like in heaven. The earthly priesthood is only an inadequate shadow of the real priesthood of Christ.

Hebrews 8:3 (NASB95)

³ For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer.

Although Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, He is not inactive. He is continuously ministering as a priest.

Thus it was necessary for this high priest (Jesus) to have "**both gifts and sacrifices**" to offer. He is referring back to 7:27, where Jesus offered Himself once for all.

Hebrews 7:27 (NASB95)

²⁷ who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

The author continues by repeating that Jesus would not qualify as an earthly priest because He was not from the tribe of Levi.

Hebrews 8:4 (NASB95)

⁴ Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law;

It follows then, that Jesus' priesthood must be exercised in heaven, not on earth. His statement "*since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law*" indicates that the temple was still standing in Jerusalem, which dates the writing of Hebrews prior to 70 A.D., when the temple was destroyed.

Thus far the author has argued that our high priest has taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. So, rather than ministering in an earthly tabernacle that is only a shadow, Jesus ministers in the true, heavenly tabernacle.

Hebrews 8:5 (NASB95)

⁵ who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain."

The author's point in both verses 2 and 5 is that this sanctuary and tabernacle in heaven is the real thing. The earthly tabernacle was only a copy and shadow of heavenly things. To support this, he cites Exodus 25:40.

Exodus 25:40 (NASB95)

⁴⁰ See that you make *them* after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.

Moses was not free to design the tabernacle according to his own ideas. The design of the tabernacle revealed some specific truths about the person and work of Jesus Christ. It was a limited, earthly picture of heavenly, spiritual truths. As such, the priests who served in the earthly tabernacle were inferior to our high priest, who serves in the true, heavenly dwelling place of God.

III. C. Jesus Has Obtained a More Excellent Ministry.

Hebrews 8:6 (NASB95)

⁶ But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.

It must have been an impressive sight to see the high priest in the splendor of his priestly garments going through the elaborate rituals at the tabernacle. The worshipers would have had a few minutes of suspense every year when the priest disappeared behind the veil. Their imaginations must have run wild as they wondered, "What is it like in there? What is he seeing? What is he doing? Will he come out alive?" Then he appeared and they all breathed easier.

The author is saying, "That was nothing when compared to where Jesus is at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens! Their yearly ritual was nothing when compared to our high priest offering Himself once for all on the cross, and now serving in heaven on our behalf! His heavenly ministry is much more excellent than their earthly ministry ever was!" The implied appeal is, "Don't even consider returning to the old, earthly system that was a mere shadow. Stay focused on Jesus, who is the reality and fulfillment of all that the old system pointed toward."

Conclusion

I would like for you to consider two applications as we conclude.

1. Jesus serves in heaven on our behalf—let Him serve you!

Our tendency is to focus on how **we** should serve Jesus, and there is certainly a place for that.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NASB95)

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

But there is also a place for pausing from our busy activities and allowing Jesus to serve us. Do you recall Peter's horrified response when Jesus took the towel and basin and washed the disciples' feet?

John 13:8-9 (NASB95)

⁸ Peter *said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!"* Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." ⁹ Simon Peter *said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."*

We have to allow the Lord, through the water of His Word, to wash off the dirt that we pick up from walking in this world. As our high priest, He ministers on our behalf before the throne of the Majesty. Take the time before Him to allow His ministry to cleanse your soul.

2. The heavenly and spiritual is more real than the earthly and visible—keep seeking the things above!

The author is making the point that the earthly tabernacle was **not** the real thing. The **real** tabernacle is in heaven, where Jesus now is seated on our behalf. We are prone to think that the earthly is real and the heavenly is less real than what we can experience with our senses. But listen to what Paul tells us...

Colossians 3:1-2 (NASB95)

³ Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

At the very least this means that we should dwell on the things of God so often that they become more real to us than the things on earth. We can only apprehend the things of God by faith in the truths of His Word. Meanwhile, we are surrounded and bombarded by all of the things that we see on earth. Unless we deliberately and consistently cultivate this heavenly vision, our priorities will get out of kilter. We will get caught up pursuing the temporary and missing the eternal. Like the rich man Jesus spoke of, we will build more storage units to hold all of our earthly goods, but we will be poor in relation to God.

Remember, the earthly is the shadow; the heavenly is the reality.

Go Tell it on the Mountain