

The Superiority of Christ's Priesthood Part 3

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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by S. Michael Durham
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Hebrews 8:1-5

Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; 2 A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. 3 For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. 4 For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: 5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

I am convinced that many of you do not experience the comfort of God when you are hurting because you refuse it. That seems to be a very harsh statement coming from one who is supposed to be gentle and compassionate when dealing with the wounded in heart. But as is sometimes necessary, when the wounded in body enter the emergency room, the doctor must inflict another wound by cutting with a scalpel in order to save the patient's life. I assure you I have made this statement in the same spirit of concern. It is my great desire for the brokenhearted to experience the unspeakable joy of our God this morning, and so, with the precision of a surgeon, in the hope that the Holy Spirit will guide my hands, I apply the scalpel of God's word that your broken hearts might be made well.

Now why would I say that most of you who seek God's healing do not find it because you reject it? I say it because it is true, in my humble opinion. You reject God's comfort and consolation because you do not recognize it in the manner in which it comes. I do not accuse you of willfully, out-and-out rejecting God and His mercy. I know you too well to think this of you. You sincerely desire His soothing and healing touch on your bruised hearts and wearied minds. But when He reaches forth His hand, you refuse because you do not believe what He offers to be any help to you.

For example, our text today is God's medicating salve to heal your hurt.

How many of you found the heaviness of your heart removed by the reading of these verses? Now do you see what I mean? This text is a summary of the first seven chapters, and it offers you what you need today to lift your worried heads and rejoice again in your God. But how very

few of you, if any, discovered it. The last two sermons I have presented to you have been about the superiority of Christ's priesthood. I have dispensed, as a doctor, the medicine your sick hearts needed, and yet you have left each time weaker than you came. Why the refusal to take your medicine? Is it because you found the pill so small that you thought it was not enough to help you? Look again at the words of our text and tell me the truth, you see nothing here to wipe away the agony of your mind, nothing to remedy the torment. You have come for weeks now thinking I, the preacher, must be off-stride and not at full strength because I have not cheered your gloomy hearts. Undoubtedly, some have left accusing me of not giving you anything practical and applicable to your lives. You have found our time together in Hebrews as wasted excursions into a dried-up orchard. The fruit has already been harvested, and there is nothing for you to eat. To say it simply, you have found it dry and dull. You have said as much in your hearts if not to one another, "I will be glad when we are through this book of Hebrews for I have found nothing of much value to my life and personal struggles."

Yet, all the time ripe fruit has hung from each verse to nourish your impoverished soul. May I remind you that this book of Hebrews was God's way of encouraging a devastated group of Christians. In verse one of our text the writer says, "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum . . ." In other words, the author of the book of Hebrews is giving us the main point and summary of the entire first seven chapters. And what is his main point? "We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens."

Therefore, I say to us, if this was the manner which the all-knowing and all-wise God determined would best cheer and comfort the hearts of hurting Christians then, then it is sufficient for the hurting here among us! It is our job to apply ourselves to pull back the leaves and discover the fruit that we first thought was absent. It is for us to put forth some effort of mind and glean what the Lord has placed within these verses. Not a little comfort is here, my friends, but great comfort and joy to all of you who will not refuse it.

Today we are going to center our remarks to the superiority of Christ's priesthood as it deals with a better sanctuary. In verses one through five our writer shows that Christ's priesthood is better than the Levitical priesthood because it is centered on a better sanctuary.

SUPERIOR BECAUSE OF THE HEAVENLY TABERNACLE

Jesus' ministry revolves around a heavenly tabernacle. The priesthood of Levi revolved around the tabernacle of Moses, and then later the temple of Solomon. Without the tabernacle or temple there would be no necessity of a priesthood. The priesthood depended upon these structures because all that the law appointed the priests to do revolved around the instruments of the tabernacle and temple. Destroy the tabernacle and the temple and you have no reason for a priesthood. Therefore, Jesus' ministry revolves around a better tabernacle, a heavenly tabernacle. Everything He has done as our high priest centers around this Heavenly sanctuary. I want you to notice that this heavenly tabernacle was built by Christ.

A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man (Hebrews 8:2).

In other words, there is a heavenly tabernacle that the Lord Himself erected or built. Moses was instructed on Mt. Sinai how to build the earthly tabernacle. The tabernacle was made out of skins of animals. It was a tent, and within it was a Holy Place, and within the Holy Place was a Holy of Holies. Within the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant. Jesus Christ has established a sanctuary in Heaven, and it was from this sanctuary that Moses got the pattern to build the one in the wilderness. Everything that Moses saw on the mountain was a pattern from this heavenly tabernacle. Verse five supports this interpretation.

Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, [that] thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount (Hebrews 8:5).

Jesus' priesthood has to be better because it revolves around a better tabernacle, not built with human hands, but with the hands of God.

God gave Moses the instructions on how to build the tabernacle by showing him this heavenly tabernacle, which served as a model. The earthly tabernacle was a copy of the heavenly sanctuary. A copy. Now, friends, copies of documents are important; we need them. Often you fill out an important document in duplicate or triplicate for such copies. But in a very serious legal matter a copy is no longer sufficient. In a court of law, you have to have the original. Earlier in the year when I applied to the United States Government for a passport, they said I had to have an original of my birth certificate. All I had was a copy. So I had to apply to the state of Missouri for an original copy of my birth certificate. In legal matters a copy brought to the judge is not sufficient for him to render a decision. It requires the original. The original was not what Moses built, but what God built in Heaven.

The earthly tabernacle is not only called a copy, but was a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary. A shadow has no substance in and of itself. When I am hot and the sun is scorching my head, I don't look for a shadow, I look for a tree that provides a shadow. A shadow in itself is merely a reflection of the real. The old earthly tabernacle and temple were nothing more than shadows of the real thing, the thing of substance.

What is the writer saying? All of the sacrifices, all of the offerings, all of the priests and their duty, including the tabernacle and its furnishings were nothing but a shadow cast by the reality of these things in heaven. They were not the substance, and therefore, there was no salvation in them. But there has come one whose priesthood is eternal not temporal. He has established everything upon an eternal foundation. His priesthood and ministry are the essence of eternal salvation. They were not and are not a shadow, not a copy, but the reality. Our Lord's priesthood is not transcendent but remains with us throughout all eternity. The writer of Hebrews has encouraged my heart this morning by reminding me that we don't serve copies and shadows. We

serve the real thing. A shadow has no substance, a copy is not legal; but Jesus is the real thing. He is the original, the bonafide, not the shadow. The priesthood of Christ is superior not only because it revolves around a heavenly tabernacle but also because of His position in this better sanctuary.

Again, I want to call to your attention the words of our text. I want you to look at the position of Jesus. The text says in verse one that Jesus is seated, which is an extremely important point.

Now of the things which we have spoken [this is] the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Hebrews 8:1).

The position of being seated tells us the work of this High Priest is finished; He is done. Friends, it is more than just a coincidence that when He hung on the cross He uttered the immortal words, "It is finished." In essence He was saying the same as our author is stating. This position of being seated at the right hand of God is a declaration that all of the redemptive work of our Savior is complete. It is finished.

I am so thankful for this truth this morning. There are some men climbing into pulpits today thinking that if they tell enough people about Jesus that will ensure their own salvation. I am thankful I am free from that bondage. I know what a terrible master that thinking can be. I used to believe such. But I know today that my Savior did a complete work, and it is finished. He doesn't lack anything. He needs nothing from my hand. Oh, sinner, do you need a salvation that has no strings left untied? I tell you there is such a Savior, Jesus. He completed the work. Everything needed to guarantee you Heaven and a relationship with God is found in the finished work of the High Priest Jesus Christ.

You need not worry about standing before the throne of God, with some sin left uncleansed. Satan, the accuser of the brethren, may present to your mind an argument saying that the sins before conversion were nailed to the cross, but what about all those sins committed since you've become a Christian? Don't pay him mind, but remind the devil that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. Just seeing Him seated there is a statement that should be proclaimed from every rooftop and every pulpit in this land today. It is this statement, "it is finished, and all of our sins were nailed to the cross." I will not have to go through some purgatory where I will suffer to complete my salvation. Oh no, dear friends, it is finished.

I know what it is like to have been forgiven and then later question the integrity of it. You feel like you have so sinned against God that, that one sin cannot truly be totally removed from your record, and God surely must remember it. Oh the torment of mind, the nagging doubt and the uneasiness of heart plagues the soul. If you are one that is so accosted by uncertainty, I am here to tell you Christ is seated. He is not standing. He is not still about the business of trying to get you saved, He has saved you. It is an eternal salvation.

There is much in this statement of our Lord's sitting on the right hand of the Father. His throne is truly the mercy seat of heaven. Do you realize the power of this statement? No high priest would have ever thought of sitting on the mercy seat. Only once a year was he allowed into the very place where the mercy seat was. And then he had to have a rope tied to him, because if he didn't do everything according to the law or was guilty of unconfessed sin, God would strike him dead. But here our author says our High Priest is seated and He is seated, on a throne of mercy. In John's vision in the apocalyptic book of Revelation Jesus is seated with a rainbow covering the throne. The rainbow is the Bible's symbol for mercy. In Christ Jesus is mercy because He is the sacrifice by which men obtain mercy with God. Not only is He seated, but look at where He is seated---at the right hand of the Father.

We don't have just a man who lived a perfect life and achieved some type of nirvana. We have God. Our Lord came and took upon Himself humanity so that now humanity sits on the throne of God. It is a position of exaltation. Are you getting a glimpse of how this is encouragement? Do you see this as medication to the heart that is weary? It is amazing if not surprising at first thought that our Heavenly Father would comfort hurting children with such analogies and typology. But on further reflection and study, you see the genius of it. Remember, these first century Jewish Christians had experienced persecution. Some had been imprisoned; some had their properties seized, and others had lost their jobs. Adding insult to injury, they had also experienced the defection of some of their number. Some had left the wounded church and gone back to Judaism to escape persecution. How does the Lord comfort their hearts? How does He lift up those who have been laid low by circumstances? By giving them a lesson in priesthood and how Christ is our High Priest. What good is this, and how would this help anyone?

The blessed writer of our text, by the Holy Spirit, is producing for us a panoramic cinema, and Christ Jesus our Lord is the hero of the movie. It is a known fact that we identify with the hero or heroine of a movie. We see their strengths and transpose ourselves onto the silver screen as if we were the ones who were saving the day. Our text is setting forth before us our beloved hero and saying, "Here is our hope! Here is our hero!" The Lord Jesus has come as our High Priest and has saved not just the day but also our eternity.

But this is not some Hollywood film, this is not some fanciful novel, this is reality. He is our hero. So the writer lifts Him up and gives us an exalted view of our High Priest. As High Priest He has conquered the greatest enemy that you have ever faced, sin, your sin and God's judgment of it. And if our High Priest has conquered the greatest enemy you have ever faced, isn't He sufficient to conquer whatever is confronting you right now? That is what the author is saying to us. He is exalted at the right hand of God, meaning He has conquered all things including the problems that torment you right now. Thus the writer says to us, "Look and consider Jesus." That is all he has been telling us. He begins the book by saying, "God, who at sundry times and divers manners spoke to our fathers in times past by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by the Son" (Hebrews 1:1). Then he says in Hebrews chapter two and verse nine, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9).

In Hebrews chapter three and verse one the author says, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1). All the author was doing to encourage the people who were hurting, to people who were in prison, to people who had lost everything for Jesus' sake, was saying to them to look at Jesus. And that is all you need.

Watch Him perform the sacrifice of the priesthood on that Day of Atonement that eclipsed all other such days. The great High Priest of Heaven's sanctuary combines the Passover sacrifice with the all other sacrifices and in one offering does it all. And now watch Him from the Mt. of Olives ascend until a cloud receives Him and He passes out of human sight. Can we imagine what our High Priest's triumphal entry into the Holiest of All must have been like? Only imagination can serve us here. May the Lord sanctify it. Christ enters behind the veil and ascends the steps of the throne's dais. It is there as our High Priest takes His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. The Sacrifice is seated upon Heaven's mercy seat.

Is your heart broken because you have sinned grievously? The Sacrifice is still on the Mercy Seat. Its efficiency is not diminished with time nor will it need to be redone. Has your heart grown numb to this truth? Are you no longer moved by such mercy? Then move closer to this sacred sight. I bid you to come closer. You may have heard of some people condemned to execution, who at the scaffold were so emotionless that not a cry or a tear came from them. Yet, just as they were going to be strapped into the chair or submit their necks to the noose, a pardon came, and they were at once set free from guilt, imprisonment, and death. They that were unable to weep a tear before are now melted into tears of joy, thankfulness and surprise. So it is with believers. The more they see Christ as the pardon of sin and the love of God in Christ to receive and embrace them, the more they melt.

So today I want you to come with me. I want us to see the Sacrifice and the Priest. Let our hearts become soft again as we draw closer and see Him in all of His glory, having all authority in Heaven and earth.

Are you heartbroken today because you suffer for Christ? Take stock: He who was acquainted with grief and a man of sorrows has conquered suffering. He who was stricken and accused innocently as a lamb before its shearers has triumphed. You are not forgotten, nor does He fail to see what you suffer on His behalf. He reminds you today to remember He has suffered on your behalf. It is the Lamb that was slain that is also the Lion of Judah who will revenge you. Look to Jesus.

Are you crushed in spirit because of illness? I bid you also come closer and see the High Priest of our faith. There is a link between our bodies and souls. When the body is in pain it can wear down our spirits. Cast your cares upon Him who heals the sick. Remember He is not a High Priest that cannot be touched by the feelings of our infirmities. Is your brow hot with fever, He can feel it. Are your legs weak and can barely carry you along? Do not forget that His legs buckled under the load of His cross. Is your back racked with pain? Find consolation in the fact He gave His back to the smiters, and by His stripes we are healed.

Are you weary of the cares of daily life? Does it seem there is not enough provision for your basic needs? Then cast your sights upon the High Priest who without restraint laid aside all riches and pomp and became poor for our sakes that we might be rich in God's grace. Look to Christ who supplies all your needs according to His riches in glory.

Are you brokenhearted because death has visited your home and left a vacancy? Or is it that death is now at your doorstep and you fear the unwelcome visitor? Our High Priest is so far superior to any other for He too has experienced the cold tide of death sweep over His body, but unlike any before Him, He broke its hold on Him. Death could not keep its prey when it came to our High Priest and Mediator. I will not make empty promises to you and tell you that Christ will keep death from you or your loved one. Nor will I tell you that the funeral home will never know your business or the graveyard your presence as a mourner. But I promise you, based on the promise of the Faithful One, death cannot keep its prey forever. It can neither keep or my body or yours nor can it keep the body of the beloved Christian whom you now mourn.

Our High Priest has conquered sin, death and the grave and is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty of the heavens. But He does not remain seated always. In Acts chapter seven and verse fifty-six, after Stephen preached that marvelous defense of the Messiahship of Christ, he is given a glimpse of heaven's Holy of Holies. His accusers assailed his mortal body and cast him beyond the wall of Jerusalem. Stephen lifted his gaze toward the sky and was granted a view past the bonds of this world. But he did not see the High Priest of Heaven seated at the right hand. No, he did not see Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father. He said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

Those of you who weep over those who have departed this life trusting in our High Priest, know today that when it was their time to depart the Lord stood to receive them. He refuses to merely watch but rises to bid them to come to Him. His atoning work is finished but His mediatorial role is not, and forever He remains our intercessor and advocate. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" that He would rise off His royal throne. He, the King of Glory, rises from the throne to greet us, His lowly and unworthy subjects. He rises in our presence, we who should fall prostrate in His. What a scene of comfort!

Now why do we need to despair today? We have found in our text great reassurance. We have an advocate with the Father who has triumphed over all things and has conquered of all that troubles our hearts. No wonder is it that He said to His disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled. If you believe in God believe also in me." Our text is the very medicine that our weary and grieving hearts need today. Take it, take it, drink it, receive it, and let the cheer of God comfort your heart. Jesus is enough; there is none better. Neither is there man, angel or devil who can best Him. He is brighter than any light, stronger than any enemy, sweeter than any nectar. It is the consideration and meditation of Christ that is the remedy of all that ails us today. Draw near to Him and behold His vast superiority to all.

There are no conceivable methods of bringing comfort to your heart other than this one. All of the sermons of pastors, all the books written by counselors, and all the psychologists can't give you an ounce of joy like meditating and considering the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So I ask you this today, one more time, draw nearer to Him. That is what this sermon is all about. Draw nearer, but not to a man, a preacher, or even a brother or sister. Draw near to your High Priest today.

Charles Spurgeon told the story of a cripple who spent his life in a room where he could not see the sun. He heard of its existence, he believed in it, and he had seen enough of its light to give him high ideas of its glory.

Wishing to see the sun, he was taken out at night into the streets of an illuminated city. At first he was delighted with the bright lights. But then he reflected on the sky, and realized there was darkness spread amid the lights. So he asked, "Is this the sun?"

Next he was taken out under a starry sky and was enraptured until, on reflection, he found that night covers the earth and was bewildered. Again he asked, "Is this the sun?"

Finally he was carried out on a bright day at noon, and no sooner did his eye open on the sky than all questions came to an end. There is only one sun! His eye was content; it had its highest object, and knew that there was nothing brighter.

In application of this story Spurgeon said, as only he could,

The same is true of the soul. It enjoys all lights, yet amid those of art and nature, the soul still inquires for something greater. But when the reconciling Christ leads the soul into the presence of the Father, and He lifts upon it the light of His countenance, all thought of anything greater disappears. As there is only one sun, so there is only one God. The soul, which discerns and knows Him, knows that there is none greater or brighter, and that the only possibility of ever beholding more glory is by drawing nearer.

Dear sinner friend, I suggest to you this morning that is what you need. You need to see the light of Jesus Christ because sin is a blinder, and it has left you in darkness. So this morning here is my advice to you, pierce the darkness of your soul with a cry to the Son of David, Jesus Christ, for mercy. That is what you need to do. He can show you the light that outshines all lights. He will dispel the darkness of your sins and bring you forth into victorious light today. Come, you beloved of the Lord, draw closer and you will find joy, peace and rest. Amen.