

The Superiority of Christ's Priesthood Part 2

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 7:20-28

And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

The major problem in the world and in our lives is not the financial worries we have or our problem marriages. Neither is it our wayward children, or failing health, or cultural degeneration. The main problem in the world -- everybody's problem -- is how to be reconciled to God so that we escape His terrifying wrath at the judgment. That's the main problem.

The Biblical answer is priesthood and specifically the superior priesthood of Christ. Specifically, that His priesthood is superior to anything else before or after it.

And so the reason for all of this talk about Christ's relationship to Melchisedec in the entire seventh chapter of the book of Hebrews is because the superior priesthood of Jesus is our only hope of eternal salvation. Wrongly we have identified the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary's cross as something separate from his priesthood. But it isn't; it was a part of His priestly ministry. God's wrath never changes. There is only one hope for sinners like us, and it is in our High Priest Jesus Christ. That is why the book of Hebrews is so important to us. We must understand this priesthood thing if we are to have any undying and eternal hope. The book of Hebrews is the main source of our understanding of the Priesthood of Christ. While some doctrines get a "verse or two" treatment here and there, the priesthood of Christ gets several chapters, and as far as I am concerned it is one of the major themes of the entire book of Hebrews. A whole book is given to this consideration. That's how important it was to the author of the book of Hebrews.

Once again we will watch and be amazed as our author unfolds this divine mystery, and I pray we will see with the eyes of our understanding how secure our salvation is in this priesthood of Melchisedec. And at the same time we will be alerted and terrified if we have not submitted to this High Priest.

The only thing you should be afraid of is the wrath of God. Jesus said so much when He said, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Dear friend, if you are not sure that you are saved, then you need to be alarmed today. The only way of hope and freedom from fear of death is the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Only He can give you access to the Father and the mercy that is in redemption. I want to continue today the message entitled, “The Superiority of Christ’s Priesthood,” part two.

I want to share with you four reasons in these few short verses why Jesus’ Priesthood is superior. There are many, of course, but I want to focus on just four.

SUPERIOR BECAUSE IT IS BASED UPON THE OATH OF GOD

Jesus’ Priesthood is better than the Levitical priesthood because it is based upon the oath of God. This is very critical in the theology of the writer of Hebrews. He quotes this verse more than any other verse in the entire Old Testament.

Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec

He repeats it several times. The superiority of Jesus’ position as a mediator between you and God is based upon this oath. The author points out that it is better than the Levitical priesthood because the Levitical priesthood did not receive an oath. Look at verses twenty and twenty-one of our text.

(For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou [art] a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) (Hebrews 7:21).

Jesus is superior because He was made a priest by a direct oath out of the mouth of God. This is critically important. We do know that the Levites were appointed as priests by the law, for the author makes it a point to tell us this several times throughout the book of Hebrews. We also learned a couple of weeks ago that a Levite was commissioned to serve in the priesthood at the age of twenty-five. He could not be ordained and fully appointed as a priest, but would serve as an apprentice in the tabernacle and later in the temple. At age thirty he was fully ordained and appointed a priest but could only serve until his fiftieth birthday. Forced retirement was pressed upon all Levites, except the high priest who served until his death. The Levites were made priests by the law that stipulated that only those of the tribe of Levi could be priests.

Christ, on the other hand, received His priesthood by an oath, not by the Old Testament law. This is critical in the thought of this writer. The oath is greater than the first covenant, which contained the law. One may argue and say the law of God came out of the very mouth of God that swore to His Son that He would be a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedec. How can one word out of God's mouth be any greater than another? Here is how. The people of God violated the law, which meant they broke that covenant. It is not ironic or coincidental that Moses, after receiving the first tablets on Mt. Sinai, found the people already breaking the covenant that God had just given to him. In anger Moses broke the tablets, symbolizing the breaking of the covenant of God. The covenant at that point was violated and in essence ended the covenant, yet God in His mercy, because of the intercession of Moses, continued with the people of Israel for several centuries. But there came a time when God said, "backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce" (Jeremiah 3:8). The first covenant was broken, and therefore rendered inoperative. But, dear friend, the oath God promised His Son is indissoluble; it is eternal. It was a promise guaranteed from the Father to the Son, and it remains forever. The first covenant, as we are going to learn in a couple of Sundays, does not remain forever; it is no longer binding.

In the sixth chapter of Hebrews and verse sixteen the writer states,

*For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation [is] to them an end of all strife.
Hebrews 6:16*

My, dear friends, seldom do we use oaths. I can only remember one time when I have been asked to raise my right hand and to swear, to pledge an oath. I was being interviewed as a prospective juror in a criminal case. There the officer of the court asked me to raise my right hand and give myself to nothing but to the truth so help me God. He asked me to bind myself to God for help in honesty because a man's future was at stake. I did not have to serve as a juror, but I still had to pledge an oath that day as I was being interviewed. We reserve the oath only to the most important matters of life. If this is true of us mortal and frail men, how much more of the infinite God?

When a man makes an oath he does so by swearing by something that he considers greater and more lasting than himself. Because God has nothing greater than Himself to swear by, He swore by Himself, meaning that He guarantees this oath by virtue of the holiness of His name. That is how high God considers His name. Such an oath is the same as declaring that there is nothing greater or higher, nothing more important. This ought to make a man tremble regarding how he uses the name of God. If God would place such a premium on His name, we ought not to trifle with it. We ought not abuse it by using it idly or using it as a profanity. A man ought to tremble at the thought of taking God's name in vain.

Christ received His priesthood by an oath, and it is this oath that makes His priesthood superior. It elevates the priesthood of Christ, and here is a holy mystery that the writer is communicating to us by the Holy Spirit. He has virtually pulled back the veil and allowed our wondering eyes to behold the sanctum sanctorum of Heaven, the very inner Holy place of Holy places. Might we

see the Father and the Son standing together? Watch with awe as the Father slowly raises His right hand and utters this oath to his Son.

What a solemn moment that was in the eternal ages past as the Father raised His right hand and utters to His Son the words, “Thou art a Priest forever according to the order of Melchisedec.” What a moment that had to have been, a sacred moment as God pledged Himself to His eternal plan of redemption. This oath makes redemption the Father’s plan, and that is why I believe it is a superior priesthood.

We must address some misconceptions that are prevalent about the Father. Often the Father is recognized as the person in the Godhead who is angry, wrathful and who can never be pleased. The Son is portrayed as the One in the Trinity who is loving, kind, and compassionate; and the Holy Spirit is looked upon as an “it” or “a force.” Well, let me say to us, beginning with the Holy Spirit, He is neither an “it” nor “a force.” He, the Holy Spirit, is a person. He is the third person of the Godhead. He is to be revered and respected as much as the Father and the Son. He is not some impersonal form.

The Son is loving and compassionate. He died on our behalf, but did you know the Bible says that it has been reserved for the Son the right of judgment? On that great Day of Judgment all the living and dead shall stand before the Son. The Son, the second person of the Trinity, will pronounce His wrath against all sinners.

It was the Father motivated by eternal love and pure mercy that created a plan for redeeming a people. Understand that when the Father raised His hand and swore an oath to His Son, He was creating in effect the plan of redemption. The loving and gracious plan to save you and me was initiated by the Father, because He is a God of love. The Father loves us and is plenteous in mercy. By virtue of pledging His Son to be our High Priest, God initiated our redemption by giving us a mediator. Great joy and comfort to all who know the Father of salvation!

SUPERIOR BECAUSE IT IS ETERNAL

Let’s now move to the second reason why the writer of Hebrews considers the priesthood of Christ superior. It’s superior because it is eternal. Let’s look at verse twenty-four.

But this [man], because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood (Hebrews 7:24).

In verse twenty-five the eternality of Christ’s priesthood is made clear.

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25).

Death will never come to our Lord again. When you look at the Levitical priesthood you see an uncertain priesthood. As I said a few moments ago, they could not serve past their fiftieth

birthday. The high priest could serve for life, but death removed him. What would happen when your priest, the one that has attended to you, offered your sacrifices, and interceded for you, died? There was a degree of uncertainty. You have come to know this priest; he was there when you were born. You knew his eyes, full of tender compassion, and his voice, the voice of a friend. He had been there when your oldest child was gravely sick and he prayed for him. He was there when you went through a great tragedy, and now he is gone. The person that you had found to be a friend, a mediator, one that helped make access to God for you, is now gone. What would you do?

There is uncertainty because there are concerns about the succeeding priest's acceptability to God. Would the man who followed the priest whom you knew be as acceptable to God as his predecessor was? What if he is not as holy? Here is the man you are looking to for help with the guilt of your sin. What about his compassion? Would he be as compassionate as the former priest? He may be more intellectual and more learned, but will he be as tender? Perhaps he is more gifted, but will he be as full of concern and love as the previous priest? These things you would not know. There was a degree of uncertainty because of the fluctuation of priests.

It would be like if this afternoon the Lord should take me, and you all gather here this evening and you are told the news that your pastor has preceded you in death. I would like to think that, for some of you, it would be like losing a father. Some of you are my spiritual seed, having led you to the Lord Jesus Christ. Others of you have come to know our counsel and our friendship, and if death should come to me, you would say, "What do we do now?" You would have to undergo the uncertain and difficult task of finding a new shepherd. That is in part the problem of a fluctuating priesthood, a temporary priesthood.

But the perpetual priesthood of Christ is so much better. He does not die. He died once and for all, but never again. We must remember that our Lord was not only God but was also a man. Being a high priest, He must be like those whom He represents, but He can also identify with the Judge to whom He pleads the case of His defendants. The Lord Jesus lived as a man, a life He still lives. In order to perpetuate His priesthood He must continue as one of us. By no greater measure could God in the person of Jesus Christ show His love for His creatures than to remain one of us. He has become so wedded with us, truly one flesh with us, that He will not be divided from us in nature. He is always going to be the God-man in Heaven, clothed in a body like our own. What manner of love this is! What joy to know that my Kinsman Redeemer forever lives! Humanity sits on the throne of God, and therefore I can relate to Him as a man. He can relate to me as a man. That is an expression of love that we often overlook. Truly a thousand floods could not quench His burning love for us. Not even death itself could destroy this manifestation of love. In this state He will always remain. We have a perpetual priest who will continue in ministry for us. He will always be there offering up Himself on our behalf.

Oh, I thank God for that because that means I will never have to get acquainted with another priest. I will never have to wonder and worry about another priest being as compassionate as the last one. No, our Lord knows us. Yes, He knows all of our inadequacies; He knows all about our frailties, He

knows about our sins as well. But He still continues to plead our case. And, dear friend, I know no one else to trust more than a high priest who knows my weaknesses yet believes in me enough to plead my case. When it comes time for me to die, I know that He will be there to await me and to receive me. I too will enjoy His undying glory. His priesthood is better because it is eternal.

SUPERIOR BECAUSE OF A BETTER COVENANT

Third, the priesthood of Christ is better because it is built upon a better covenant. The new covenant is based upon better promises. In Hebrews chapter eight and verse six it says,

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises (Hebrews 8:6).

In our text it says that Jesus is made a “surety of a better testament.” The Greek word for “testament” is the same word for “covenant.” Therefore these verses are saying that Jesus is a high priest of the New Covenant which is a better covenant than the Old Covenant. The New Covenant is built upon better promises than the Old. We will look at some of those promises in the weeks to come, but there is one promise that outshines them all. It is this---Jesus is the guarantee of the New Covenant. What does this mean? The Father needs no guarantee. What is Christ guaranteeing and who needs the guarantee? We do. Jesus is the guarantee that the promise or the oath that the Father made will be kept. It is impossible for God to lie, and yet knowing the weakness of our faith the Lord gave us an oath and a surety for the oath. How sad it is that we should doubt the promises of God. It is an insult and indignity to Him who is called Truth to raise questions concerning His veracity. But such is proof of our corrupt and weak hearts. How merciful and kind it was that the Lord provided us a guarantee to bolster our feeble faith. Therefore, Jesus is our guarantee that the promise is going to be fulfilled.

When we meet death, we are safe. When there are calamities that befall us, we are safe. When we have sinned and have fallen greatly, we have an advocate with the Father. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us because Jesus Christ is the guarantee. He is our surety. He is there for you to have the comfort and assurance that the Father’s oath will be carried out.

There are only two ways in which the New Covenant made with the church can be broken. One is if God decides to break His oath with His Son. He would literally have to break His oath with His Son; now how many of you think that is going to take place? It will never happen. The only other way the covenant could be broken is if it could occur that Christ would one day cease to be. That too will not happen. He remains a priest forever. But some may interpose and comment that perhaps Christ cannot cease to exist, but is there not a possibility that Jesus could cease to act as my priest? If such were to occur then we would have no guarantee. If there is even the remotest possibility of this happening then I may not have hope that when my time comes to need a mediator He will be there. Oh, but dear friend, His priesthood is unchangeable. “Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedec.” Christ will not cease in existence or in priesthood. What better promises and therefore a better covenant!

SUPERIOR BECAUSE OF THE MORAL PERFECTION OF THE PRIEST

Fourth and last, the priesthood of Christ is superior because of the moral perfection of this priest. Look at verse twenty-six and note that first of all it says that He is perfect in His person.

For such an high priest became us, [who is] holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens (Hebrews 7:26).

Oh, but Pastor, I need somebody who can identify with sinners. Yes, you do, but to be separate from sinners does not mean He cannot identify with them. As our Lord walked upon this earth, His friends were notoriously known to be tax collectors. That would be like being a drug dealer today. Publicans were what the religious crowd called Jesus' associates. "Publican" is another word for sinners of the worst kind. When I was a child and heard the word "publicans" in church I always thought they were talking about Republicans. I am sure that to some liberal left wing activists there would be no difference in the words. But our Lord was a friend to sinners of the worst kind. When the Pharisees whispered about Jesus being a "friend of sinners," it was derogatory. It was inferring that Christ Himself was a sinner. Jesus was known to associate and befriend the social rejects of His culture. So to be separate from sinners does not mean He can't identify or even associate with sinners. It means He can't be polluted by sin. He is much purer and greater than the ability of even the worst of sinners to pollute Him. His character is above reproach. He was not as other priests who had to offer sacrifice for their own sins prior to offering sacrifice for another.

Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself (Hebrews 7:27).

Sir, He had no sin which needed a sacrifice. When He died, He died as a sacrifice for us, not Himself. Which leads me to this thought under this heading, He is perfect in sacrifice. Our Lord made this sacrifice only one time and His sacrifice was strictly for our sins alone. He did not offer Himself for His own sins; He offered Himself up once and for all for the people's sins. Verse twenty-eight says,

For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, [maketh] the Son, who is consecrated for evermore (Hebrews 7:28).

The word "consecrated" is the same word for perfection used in verse eleven in the seventh chapter. Jesus was already perfect. He needed not perfecting in the sense that we do. Rather the words "perfection" and "consecrated" convey the idea of completion. In other words, Jesus' death was a completion of the Father's plan of redemption, and His sacrifice was acceptable to God. Listen, sinner, please hear me, it matters not how great your offense to God is. The offense is not beyond God's ability to be merciful and to forgive. This is crucial, for often many men have come to me and said, "I have sinned so terribly that I don't know if even God can forgive me." There is no such sin, no such sin that God cannot forgive through the sacrifice of the Lamb of

God. Read again verse twenty-five where it says “He is also able to save to the uttermost.” “Uttermost!” How deep into the regions of hell have you fallen? How far out into rebellion against God have you gone? How far down in the depths of depravity have you sunk? Believe it when the Bible says to you that to the very uttermost of hell’s depravity and sin’s corruption extends the power of our High Priest to forgive.

All of your sinning when you were in your prime, sowing wild oats, is not beyond the “uttermost” reaches of grace. The horrid evil you did seems so wicked that you cannot believe God will simply wipe it out by the blood of the eternal Sacrifice. Remember this promise that the Lord Jesus Christ’s sacrifice is perfect. It can save to the uttermost even those sins whose memory still haunts. Dear friend, there is not a sin that will stand between you and God except the sin of unbelief. Not believing that His sacrifice is capable of even removing your sin from you is the only sin that will keep the blood from the doorpost of your heart. The Sacrifice is eternal, and its effectiveness will not grow old or fade in power.

Not only is our Lord morally perfect and His sacrifice perfect for saving the sinner, but Jesus is perfect in His intercession. Notice it says in verse twenty-five, “He ever liveth to make intercession.” Notice who He makes it for---those who come to God through Him. Now it is interesting that the way in which our writer wrote this is in the present tense. The words “come unto God” in the Greek are in the present tense, meaning those who are “coming to God.” I think it is important that we make a note of this at this moment. Some preach today that salvation is a past event. They speak of it in a purely historical reference as if salvation is a one-time experience that occurred in your past. Dear friend, that is not true. I have been saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved. The new birth is a past event; it happens only once and can never be repeated again. I don’t believe you can get saved over and over again. But I still need to be saved. There are things in my life I still need salvation from. There is yet a work of the Holy Spirit in my heart and life that is necessary. Coming to God must not be a past event that is never repeated.

You ought to still be coming to your God through Christ Jesus. It is those who continually avail themselves of His priesthood that He makes intercession for. Those who believe that the one prayer forty years ago saved them and they haven’t presented themselves to God since, nor even care to, have no surety of salvation. They have no priest interceding for them.

Now I have always asked myself concerning this text how does our Lord intercede for us? When you have millions of Christians simultaneously living, sinning, praying, confessing, and crying out to God, how can He intercede for all of them at the same time? Is Jesus always praying without ceasing? Does it mean this and if so how does He do it? Well, let me share some thoughts with you concerning this. I think His very appearance before the Father is a plea of prayer. When the Father looks on His Son, and He is continually beholding the beauty of His Son, there is the beholding of the Sacrifice which in itself becomes a form of prayer. The beholding of the Sacrifice is a constant reminder of those whom the sacrifice was completed for. There is a constant communication going on between the Son and the Father, and this much we know, He is always praying and thereby always prevailing on our behalf. What blessings are ours as a result of this

intercession! Blessings that we need but do not deserve are ours through the superior priesthood of Christ.

Jesus is always praying and interceding on my behalf. He knows the weakness of my heart as He knew Peter's weaknesses. Christ told Peter before it happened that he would be tempted and he would deny Him three times. But speaking as a high priest, our Lord said to Peter, "Peter, I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." Although Peter sinned grievously, Jesus' prayer had come to pass, which means Peter's faith was not extinguished. It was very little, but it didn't fail and vanish. Our High Priest is praying for you and me. Right now you seem very weak in your faith, and you are discouraged. Remember, it is not our prayers that are the most important, but it is the intercession of Jesus our high priest. He is praying for you. You will get better. You have got to get better.

Now, dear sinner, I conclude by telling you to reject Christ is to reject mercy. He is your high priest and the only way you can get to God the Father and receive pardon for sin. To reject Christ is to reject your only hope of mercy. Dear saint, with Christ as our mediator and intercessor, what is it to obstruct our way? What is it that hinders us from coming to God? It is nothing but our unbelief in our Lord's priestly work. What is it that would obstruct our way to victory, and becoming, as we have been promised, more than conquerors through Christ Jesus? At this very moment I know and I am assured that God is praying for you. The Son of Man prays and He is lifting up your cares, even the ones that you don't know about yet. He knows the frailties, and the infirmities, and the weaknesses in the depths of your heart and He pleads your case before the Father. Therefore, I ask you, no matter how great the weakness might be, what can they be when compared to the prayers of our High Priest? How can anything succeed against you? How can any enemy have its ultimate way with you when Christ pleads for you? Of course these are rhetorical questions. The answer is obvious. Nothing can withstand the intercession of our High Priest. As a church we ought to be thrilled this morning to know that our High Priest and Chief Shepherd is praying for us. How can we not expect victory? May God be praised this morning.

Surely now you see why our hope depends upon His priesthood? Your entire salvation hinges upon His ability to intercede. Thank God it rests upon Him and not upon you or me. Amen.