

Congregational handout; outline sermon text on following pages

Sermon Notes & References

A Better Priest, A Better Covenant

Hebrews 8

September 14, 2014

A. The Better Priesthood of Christ – A Review

1. By Christ's Indestructible Life ^A 7:15-17
2. By God's Confirming Oath 7:20-22
3. By Its Permanence 7:23-25
4. By Christ's Flawless Character ^B 7:26-28

B. Superior Priesthood Due to Its Reality 8:1-5

1. Heavenly, not Earthly (vv 1-2) ^C
2. Christ's Sacrifice Is Effective (v 3)
3. The Reality That Casts the Shadow (vv 4-5)

C. Superior Priesthood Due to a Better Covenant 8:6-7

1. Better by Better Promises (v 6)
2. Better Because Faultless (v 7) ^D

D. The Superior New Covenant 8:8-13

1. The Fault of the Old Covenant (vv 8-9) ^E
2. The Promises of the New Covenant (vv 10-12) ^F
3. The Obsolescence of the Old Covenant (v 13) ^G

^A Hebrews 2:14, 18; Acts 2:24, 32-33; John 1:4, 10:15-18

^B Hebrews 4:15

^C Hebrews 1:3

^D Romans 7:12

^E Jeremiah 7:23-26

^F Romans 8:3-4; Colossians 3:1; Ephesians 2:6, 18; Romans 5:5

^G Revelation 7:9

A. The Better Priesthood of Christ – a Review

Hebrews 7:15-28

- a. because it is several weeks since our last message from this book of Hebrews, let us look back for a few moments to what was then said.
- b. we were in the latter half of Hebrews 7 and we were looking at the reasons given there that the priesthood of Jesus Christ – our High Priest – was better than the priesthood we find in the Old Testament – the priesthood of the descendants of Aaron
- c. here are some of the reasons by which this is shown

2. By Christ's Indestructible Life. Hebrew 7:15-17

- a. "15 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life." (Hebrews 7:15-16)
- b. note first of all that the priesthood of Jesus Christ is based on His power rather than a legal requirement
 - (A) the OT tells us that the tribe of Levi was taken to be the full-time servants of God in place of the first-born in each family
 - (1) the first-born belonged to God because He devoted them to himself when they were spared because of the blood on the lintel and the door-posts when the angel of death passed over the houses of Israelites but slew the first-born of Egypt
 - (2) so the first-born would serve Him as His priests and servants
 - (3) but God's laws of inheritance of Canaan required that there should be a substitution of the tribe of Levi for the first-born
 - (4) so, the Levitical priesthood was from legal necessity
 - (B) but Christ's priesthood was based on His innate power
 - (1) Hebrews 2:14, His power over death and Satan
 - (2) Hebrews 2:18, His power over temptation
 - (3) Acts 2:24, 32-33, the power shown by His resurrection and ascension into heaven and His sending forth the Holy Spirit
- c. second, the priesthood of Jesus Christ is based on the character of His life rather than upon ancestry

- (A) the Levitical priesthood depended upon being a descendant of Aaron of the tribe of Levi and of having no external deformity
- (B) it was purely external: men could and did become priests, without regard to how ill-suited or reluctant they might be
- d. but Christ's priesthood was founded upon His life
 - (A) it is an indestructible life – endless, indissoluble
 - (B) John 1:4 as well as John 10:15-18 informs us that this He has a self-sufficient liveliness, dependent only upon His own self
 - (C) He is the ever-living Son of the living God; such is His priesthood:
 - (D) "For it is attested of Him, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."" (Hebrews 7:17)

3. By God's Confirming Oath. Hebrews 7:20-22

- a. "20 And inasmuch as it was not without an oath 21 (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "The lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'you are a priest forever'"); 22 so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant." (Hebrews 7:20-22)
- b. Christ's priesthood is superior because it will never change
 - (A) God has appointed Him and unlike the Levitical priests, has confirmed Christ's appointment by a solemn oath
 - (B) and as God cannot lie – and puts His own integrity on the line by this oath – there can be no change in the status of the priesthood of Jesus Christ
- c. it is superior because He is a warranty for a better covenant
 - (A) the OT priest was a mediator
 - (1) but the guarantee that God would honour the sacrifices did not rest upon the priest, but upon God's word
 - (2) and the priest could not guarantee that the people would keep God's covenant
 - (B) Jesus however can provide such a warranty or guarantee
 - (1) He can assure God that those whom He represents – us who believe in Him – will be made acceptable to stand before God
 - (2) and He can assure us that God will accept us in Himself
 - (C) and on this matter of the better covenant we shall look further in a few moment in chapter 8

4. By Its Permanence Hebrews 7:23-25

- a. "23 The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24 but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:23-25)
- b. in the OT priesthood there was a constant turnover
 - (A) high priest came and went
 - (B) being of changing and changeable men, its ministry inconsistent
- c. but Christ Jesus holds the high priestly office permanently
 - (A) with Him there is no succession plan, no need for it
 - (B) since He ever lives, He ever intercedes, He ever saves
 - (C) the Jesus Christ who saved us in the past is the same one who is ever sympathising with our weakness and cleansing us anew

5. By Christ's Flawless Character Hebrews 7:26-28

- a. "26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 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. 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." (Hebrews 7:26-28)
- b. the Levitical priests sinned
 - (A) there were given detailed instructions that they had to follow to undergo their own cleansing in order to exercise their office
 - (B) and the OT records and tells of the extent of some of their sin
- c. but Jesus Christ, our High Priest, was without sin
 - (A) as the only perfect priest, He has offered up Himself as the only perfect sacrifice
 - (B) so then, Jesus is on the one hand a man who lived under the same pressures and difficulties as we face,

while on the other He overcame to live a totally victorious life

(C) hence, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

d. now, that is a rather lengthy review, so let us go on to Hebrews 8, which continues with the superiority of Christ's priesthood, that it is

B. Superior Priesthood Due to Its Reality Hebrews 8:1-5

1. Heavenly, not Earthly (vv 1-2)

a. "1 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."

b. now the crowning point is this, that our High Priest

(A) is not to be sought out in some tent, impressive as it was

(B) nor in some gold-embazoned temple, a wonder of the world

(C) nor in a beautifully furnished office in a wonderful church edifice

(D) but rather in heaven, in the very presence of Divine Majesty

c. there He is

(A) in the place of honour and glory – with a name above every name

(B) but He is seated, not only in a place of authority, but in the place of rest of having completed His work –

"... When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," (Hebrews 1:3)

d. but there also He ministers

(A) as the man Christ Jesus He is the mediator between God and man

(B) carrying out His high priestly duties on our behalf

(C) in the sanctuary – the place made holy because it represents God's own and special dwelling place; His residence as it were

(D) not in the tabernacle – the tent – that Moses and the Levites after him pitched as they moved through the wilderness; nor in the temple first constructed by Solomon, later rebuilt on the return of the Jews to Jerusalem, later embellished by Herod – but in such a sphere as God established to be surrounded by His holy angels

2. Christ's Sacrifice Is Effective(v 3)

- a. "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."
 - (A) the necessary and primary duty of a priest was to offer gifts and sacrifices – without being specific to the details of these – on behalf of the people who brought them to God
 - (B) and so, too, there was a divine necessity for Christ to do so
- b. but at this point the writer of Hebrews says no more on this for he already described that offering in 7:27 '... He offered up Himself'
 - (A) and in the following chapter we shall see that enlarged upon
 - (B) but the emphasis for now is that His sacrifice was completely effective – it was as we have read, '... one for all ...' in graphic contrast to the many sacrifices of the Levitical high priests, which only covered over the sins of the offerer for a season.

3. The Reality That Casts the Shadow (vv 4-5)

- a. "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.""
- b. here we discover the implications of the fact that Jesus Christ is the heavenly High Priest, rather than the one in Jerusalem of Jesus' day
 - (A) if Jesus as man had still been upon earth, even if He had assumed the kingship that was His by Messianic right – and the gospel tells us of how carefully He avoided being made king – then He could not be our High Priest ... that right was given to Aaron's sons
 - (B) but there was no loss to Jesus in this fact
 - (C) because the earthly worship that was established in the OT that depended upon hereditary priests, and a tabernacle (and after it the temple) and furniture beautifully made by skilled men was not reality – it was but a shadow, a copy or earthly, material representation of the real thing
 - (D) for a shadow to exist, there must be a solid reality casting that shadow; so the OT worship was but the shadow cast by the spiritual, eternal reality which resided in the Presence of God

- c. in some fashion, Moses, as he spent that 40 days in the Presence of God on Mount Sinai was permitted to catch sight of that heavenly reality and then in the latter chapters of Exodus to transmit it as instructions to construct the earthly representation
- d. our High Priest serves in the reality of heaven, not the earthly shadow

C. Superior Priesthood Due to a Better Covenant Hebrews 8:6-7

1. Better by Better Promises (v 6)

- a. "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."
- b. the measure of the superiority of Christ's High Priestly ministry which He is rendering on our behalf, is to be found in the comparison of the new covenant in Christ's blood with the old covenant
- c. the first yardstick of superiority is that as our Mediator He is, as has been described, far superior to the OT mediators, the high priests
- d. but the second yardstick of superiority is to be found in the nature of the covenant which He administers and its superiority over the OT covenant, because of its better promises – to be seen in a moment

2. Better Because Faultless (v 7)

- a. "For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second."
- b. the new covenant is better because it doesn't have the faults of the OT
- c. how could that OT covenant be faulty; was it not given by God?
- d. the faultiness, as the book of Jeremiah makes very clear, lay not in the law – "So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." (Romans 7:12) – so how was it faulty; let's see

D. The Superior New Covenant Hebrews 8:8-13

1. The Fault of the Old Covenant (vv 8-9)

- a. "8 For finding fault with them, He says, "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; 9 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord.""
- b. the fault lay not in the covenant but in the inability of man to keep it
- c. "23 But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.' 24 Yet they did not

obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward. 25 Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them. 26 Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did more evil than their fathers.” (Jeremiah 7:23-26) – it gave no power to obey

d. but to Israel and to Judah – the entire people of God – there are given

2. The Promises of the New Covenant (vv 10-12)

a. “10 “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 11 And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘know the Lord,’ for all will know me, from the least to the greatest of them. 12 For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” – let us single out these promises for they apply to Christians – to the Israel of God as Paul calls us in Galatians

b. one: a change from external symbols to an internal reality

(A) the OT people were enjoined to memorise, meditate upon the law

(B) some, we shall see, by faith could rejoice in its promises

(C) but those who are in Christ are a new creation – and recipients of His Holy Spirit so as to have God’s laws in us: “so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:4)

c. two: an accomplishment of fellowship with God

(A) the same purpose was expressed to Israel, as seen in Jeremiah 7 quoting from Exodus; but the weakness of the flesh (Romans 8:3) prevented it being accomplished for the nation as a whole

(B) but that is not the case for those who are in Christ, trusting Him

(C) we are ‘risen with Christ’ (Colossians 3:1), have been seated down ‘in heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:6), and ‘through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father’ (Eph 2:18)

(D) what a fellowship with God we have in Jesus Christ

d. three: an intimate knowledge of God

(A) this arises out of the fact that “... the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Romans 5:5 NAS95)

(B) thus the NT believer receives a direct knowledge of God

(C) this does not reduce the importance the NT places on spiritual teachers – the contrast is that the OT

covenant required human mediation – such as from priest or prophet – for such knowledge

e. four: the forgiveness of sin – God’s effectively forgetting our sin

(A) ever heard of Fred Snodgrass? A player for the New York Giants 102 years ago he dropped a pop fly in the World Series. This set up the winning run. He died in 1974 and the headline in the New York Times read, ‘Fred Snodgrass, 86, Dead; Ballplayer Muffed Fly in 1912’. His failure, remembered; all his successes, forgotten ^{-{2}}.

(B) God promises that He will forget our failures, not our successes.

3. The Obsolescence of the Old Covenant (v 13)

a. “When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”

(A) by this then, we are given to understand that the covenant that God made with the children of Israel – at Sinai and as renewed within the land of Canaan – was but a temporary measure

(B) it was even growing obsolete as the writer of Hebrews wrote

(C) its provisions and promises have been superceded by the new

b. and as we now discover in the NT revelation, that new covenant has been expanded far beyond the old, beyond the nation Israel, to encompass “... a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands” (Revelation 7:9)

E. Conclusion – Let us praise our great God an Saviour who has brought all these blessings to pass.

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

Barnes	- <i>Notes on the New Testament, et alia</i> , by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh
BM	- <i>Biblical Museum</i> , Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
EBC	- <i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> , © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan <i>Hebrews</i> , by Leon Morris
EGT	- <i>The Expositor's Greek Testament</i> , Hodder & Stoughton <i>Hebrews</i> , by Marcus Dods
Gill	- <i>Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament</i> , by John Gill, D.D.
Kerux	- The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com .
NICNT	- <i>The New International Commentary on the New Testament</i> <i>The Epistle to the Hebrew</i> , by F. F. Bruce
RWP	- <i>Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament</i> , by Dr. A. T. Robertson
TYN	- <i>The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</i> <i>Hebrews</i> , by Donald Guthrie

2. Adapted from '*They Never Forget the Muff*' by Rev. Eric Ritz – Kerux illustrations 2235