

The Superiority of Our High Priest
Hebrews 7:20-28
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In our world today most people would see no need for priests and would think it unnecessary to talk about them. But in fact there are priests all around us in society today and many people are seeking them out. A priest is one whose role is to bring us to God and to give us peace in our soul by removing the guilt that oppresses us for the sins that we have committed. The new priests in today's society are the psychotherapists. These professional counselors make it their aim to fulfill the role of a priest, not by removing sin and making people acceptable to God, but by denying the existence of sin and thereby trying to give people peace with what they have done. They tell people that the problem is not that they have violated God's laws or done anything wrong, but that their parents and church have made them feel guilty. If they would reject what they have been taught, they would find peace and freedom from guilt. But feelings of guilt for wrong and sinful behavior are not merely the result of what others have taught us. God has placed a conscience within people. Our conscience convicts us of our violation of God's law, even when we try to deny that what we did was wrong. The conscience is a very strong part of us and it continues to convict us of sin even when we will not face up to our sinful behavior. Many people today have tried to deny the sinfulness of their actions, and they have ended up in mental hospitals, because they are crushed by the guilt of their sins.

500 years ago Martin Luther went to the priests of the Roman Catholic Church to find forgiveness of sin and peace for his soul. They told him that Christ had paid the spiritual punishment for his sin, but that he still had a temporal punishment that he had to pay for his sin in order to find peace with God. Martin Luther tried in every way possible to pay for his sin. He denied himself every pleasure and comfort. He whipped himself, and slept on the cold floor of the monastery, but he could not find any peace with God. He came to realize just how impossible it is for a person to pay the penalty for his own sins. This is something that only God can do. And he discovered from the Scripture that that is what God did. God sent Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the one priest who can remove all penalty for our sin and give us peace in our soul and peace with God.

The Jewish Christians to whom the book of Hebrews was written had come to Jesus Christ as their Savior and their Prince of Peace, but their Jewish friends and relatives were telling them that they needed to come back to Judaism in order to have a temple and a priesthood. They claimed that Christians had no priest to take away their sins. The book of Hebrews is an answer to that claim. It shows that the Old Testament temple and priesthood could not take away any sin or provide any peace for the soul. They were just types and shadows of the true temple in heaven and the one true priest, Jesus Christ, who could take away sins and give us peace.

In Hebrews 7:20-28 the Pastor continues his comparison of the Aaronic priesthood to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Here he demonstrates that the priesthood of Jesus Christ is Superior to the priesthood of the Aaronic Priests. He shows us that Christ is a superior high priest because of his Position, his Permanence and his Perfection.

I. The Position of Our High Priest – Verses 20-22

Verses 20-22 say: *“And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath,²¹ but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever.’” Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.”*

These verses show us the first evidence of the superiority of Christ's high priesthood over the Aaronic high priesthood. It is that Jesus' Position as high priest came about through an oath of God, whereas the Aaronic priests did not receive their priesthood through an oath.

God gave a divine command for Aaron and his sons to serve as priests. Exodus 28:1 records God's words to Moses: *"Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests."*

But our writer quotes Psalm 110:4 to show that the Messiah would be appointed a priest on an oath of God. Now, as we noted before, God has no need to swear an oath, for God's word is always true. Only people need to make oaths, because they are prone to lie. Hebrews 6:17 told us why God swore an oath. *"Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath."*

The Old Testament only records that God ever swore two oaths, which brings these two events to our attention as being very important and very significant in God's eternal plan of salvation. The first oath was given to Abraham to assure him and all his heirs that God would most certainly bring his covenant promises to pass. The second oath was given to confirm that the Aaronic priesthood would definitely be replaced by the high priesthood of the Messiah, which would be a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. Now both of these were fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the descendant of Abraham who brought the blessings of salvation to all the nations of the world through his death for sin, and it is through Jesus that Abraham becomes the father of a great nation of people of all races who have faith in the Messiah. Jesus is also our high priest.

Now, Jesus Christ's Position – as the high priest that the Father appointed to replace the Aaronic priesthood – brings us to a powerful conclusion, which is stated in verse 22, in these words: *"Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant."* The coming of a new priesthood means that the old priesthood was no longer needed and was passing away. Verse 18 told us that God had set the Aaronic priesthood aside as weak and useless. We saw that it was weak and useless in the sense that it was just a shadow. It pictured how the Messiah would save men from sin, but it could not save men from sin, for the Aaronic priests were themselves sinners and the offerings they offered were merely animals, that could never be a substitute for men.

But the priesthood and covenant that Jesus Christ established was not merely a shadow, but the reality. Christ is the eternal sinless God who became man and offered himself as a sacrifice in our place, that our sins may be taken away.

And Jesus is called the "surety" or "guarantor" of the better covenant. When I requested phone service and electric service and gas service, they all required either a down payment or someone to sign as a surety. A surety is someone who guarantees that the payment will be made. If the company can't get the money from the user, then they would go after the person who signs as a surety.

The book of Proverbs warns us against becoming a surety for someone. Proverbs 6:1-5 says: *"My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor, if you have struck hands in pledge for another, if you have been trapped by what you said, ensnared by the words of your mouth, then do this, my son, to free yourself, since you have fallen into your neighbor's hands: Go and humble yourself; press your plea with your neighbor! Allow no sleep to your eyes, no slumber to your eyelids. Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler."* It tells us to realize that if we promise to pay a person's debt if they cannot pay it, then we will most certainly end up paying it.

But Jesus has stepped up and signed for us as our surety. And indeed we never had any hope of paying our debt of sin. And God the Father has collected the payment from Jesus. And it was a most terrible price to pay. There on the cross Christ not only poured out his life for us, but he bore the very wrath of the Father against Christ for all our sins that Jesus took upon himself. Jesus has secured our salvation and we are most definitely safe in him.

II. The Permanence of Our High Priest – Verses 23-25

Verses 23-25 say: *“Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”*

These verses show us the second evidence of the superiority of Christ’s high priesthood over the Aaronic high priesthood. It is that Jesus has a permanent priesthood, whereas the Aaronic priests were unable to continue in office.

Numbers 20:28 says: *“Moses removed Aaron’s garments and put them on his son Eleazar. And Aaron died there on top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain . . .”* And many more high priests followed. Josephus said that there were 83 high priests from Aaron to AD 70. The Talmud asserted there were over 300.

We can get some idea of what it may have been like for believers in the Old Testament when we think of how pastors today vary. Now, pastors today are not priests, but like priests, they minister to God’s people. Some people relate better to one pastor, some better to another. One pastor is a better preacher than another. Another pastor struggles to present his sermon. One pastor is a better intercessor than another. Another does not pray as diligently and fervently for the people. One relates well to people. Another does not do as well talking to and counseling people in their needs.

But Jesus is always our high priest and intercessor. He is always available to us to hear our prayers and care for us. And he is the perfect priest and pastor for us. Verse 25 tells us that the result of Jesus’ permanent priesthood is that *“ . . . he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”* Jesus is able to completely save those who draw near to God through him. Not only is our salvation secure forever, but Christ is able to completely save us. Jesus is able to save you from your sins no matter how terrible a sinner you may be. And Jesus is able to sanctify you in this life and make you holy no matter how tightly your sins hold on to you.

It is clear from reading secular counseling accounts that there are many disorders that secular counseling has no answer for. In fact, instead of producing a virtuous life of selfless kindness toward others, they often make it their goal to increase selfishness and self-centeredness. But Jesus’ power is great enough to break all selfishness and self-centered addictions in our lives, because he always lives to make intercession for us. And our prayers are feeble, but Jesus’ prayers to the Father for us are glorious and powerful. Do you believe that? Jesus is able to completely save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. This isn’t self-help or expert-help. This is Jesus-help. God tells us to draw near to God through Jesus, with full assurance that Jesus can deliver us from the guilt of sin and the bondage to sin.

III. The Perfection of Our High Priest – Verses 26-28

Verses 26-28 say: *“Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.”*

These verses show us the third evidence of the superiority of Christ’s high priesthood over the Aaronic high priesthood. It is that Jesus is a perfect high priest, whereas the Aaronic priests were weak and sinful.

Jesus is a high priest who is fitting, appropriate for us. We are sinful, but he is sinless. Great emphasis is placed upon this point. Jesus is called *“holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners.”* The last statement, *“set apart from sinners”* does not mean that he does not associate with sinners, but that he is in a separate class; his nature is completely separated from sin. All these terms tells us that Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life on earth, completely free from all evil actions, speech, thoughts and motives. This is something we could never begin to do for even one day’s time, but Jesus does it constantly.

Again the contrast is to the Aaronic priests. They were sinful men like us and they had to first offer sacrifices for their own sins before they could offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. But Jesus had no need to offer a sacrifice for himself, for he was and is sinless. He offered himself as the only sinless man who has ever existed and therefore could be our substitute to die in our place for our sins. Jesus is both perfect priest and perfect sacrifice.

The phrase *“exalted above the heavens”* refers to Jesus’ resurrection, ascension and enthronement at the right hand of the Father. The final phrase in verse 28 says, *“who has been made perfect forever”*. Hebrews 2:10 and 5:8 told us what this means. Jesus was made perfect through suffering. As man he experienced temptation to sin and he overcame it completely. He has experienced the temptations we experience and he has overcome them.

Conclusion

This makes Jesus a perfect high priest for us. Jesus is a perfect intercessor for us. We pray for ourselves, our spouse, our children, for one another in the church and for those who do not know Christ. But our prayers are infrequent; they are not too fervent; they are saddled with our sinfulness and impure motives. James 5:16 says: *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”* Jesus is that righteous man whose prayers are always powerful and effective. Jesus hears our feeble prayers that we offer and he intercedes in prayer for us before the father. His prayers for us are perfect, sinless, unbroken, and never-ending. Day by day, hour by hour, year by year, millennium by millennium Jesus prays for us. And because his prayers are always in his name, the father will always answer them. Do you believe this? Jesus is interceding for you and is able to completely save you. Jesus said in Luke 22:31-32: *““Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.””*

A young boy wanted to give a gift to his father who was returning from a trip. His mother sent him into the garden to gather a bouquet of flowers. What he returned with was a handful of flowers mixed with weeds. But when the father returned he was presented with a beautifully arranged bouquet, for the mother had removed all the weeds and arranged the flowers.

The prayers of the church are a mixed bag of weeds with a few flowers as they leave the lips of God’s people, but when they arrive at the throne of the Father they are nothing but beautiful flowers. What an encouragement to us this should be for us to pray, knowing that our every prayer receives the aid of Christ. What a wonderful blessing that we have a high priest who always lives to make intercession for us.

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