

“The Superiority of the New Priesthood”

Heb. 7:20-28

- INTRO. - In 1962 American philosopher and science historian Thomas Kuhn published a book called *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. This book sent shock waves throughout the academic world, and provided us with the whole concept of the “paradigm shift.”
- The primary premise of the book is that scientific investigation is always dependent upon prevailing social values and presuppositions. After analyzing the Copernican revolution, Kuhn concluded that what could be called “normal science” is based on a paradigm (or worldview) that is prevalent in a given society. But “revolutionary science” is that which brings in a brand new way of thinking. It produces a new way of viewing reality.
- And (as I’m sure you know) the concept of the “paradigm shift” has been applied to just about every area of life. It has been applied to science, to education, to business, and even to religion. I have even heard church growth gurus talk about how certain things (like teaching the Bible) are part of the old paradigm and need to be discarded.
- But we *do* see certain (very important) paradigm shifts in the New Testament. We would have to say that Paul’s conversion (in Acts 9) was a very important paradigm shift (that has had a huge impact on history).
- George Guthrie points out that such paradigm shifts depict both trauma and fulfillment. The trauma is that which shakes you free from the old, and the fulfillment is coming to the new.
- And what happened to the Apostle Paul is the embodiment of what occurred in the lives of every first-century Christian who came out of Judaism and a life oriented to the OT law.
- What was the trauma that shook these Jewish believers free from their rabbinic traditions? It was the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. It was ultimately the resurrection of Christ from the dead. This forced a great paradigm shift. In light of the new revelation in Christ, the understanding of the OT Scriptures radically changed.
- The revelation of the NT, and especially this Book of Hebrews, brought about an enormous shift in understanding God’s salvation plan. As we have seen in our study, the old covenant was replaced by the new. The old system was replaced by the new. The old priesthood was superseded by the new.
- And what we see (in this middle section of Hebrews) is the author’s desire (inspired by the HS) to magnify Jesus’ high priestly office as superior – and he does that in two steps. First, he

deals with the Son's *appointment* as high priest. That's what chapter 7 is about. *Then* (secondly) he moves on to detail His offering of Himself as the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice for sin – which he will address in the following chapters.

- *That* concept will get *introduced* in this final section of chapter 7. And (as we have seen) this chapter is an exposition of Ps. 110:4. The main point of that Psalm is that Jesus' priesthood is *forever*. That is in contrast to the old priesthood, which was temporary.
- And by the time we get to this last section of this chapter, there is no more mention of Melchizedek because the focus is now on Jesus Christ and His superior priesthood.
- We will take this last section of the chapter in three main divisions. We will see the certainty of the new promise, the salvation of the new priesthood, and the sinlessness of the new priest. Let's begin with:

I. THE CERTAINTY OF THE NEW PROMISE (vv. 20-22)

- Look with me at v. 20, "And inasmuch as *it* (the better hope) *was* not without an oath (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,

"Thou art a priest forever"); so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant."

- Here we see a contrast between the old priesthood and the new. The old priesthood was *not* established with an oath by God, but the new one was.
- God never made a promise to Aaron (or anyone else in the OT) that the Levitical priesthood would be forever. In fact, this passage will emphasize just how temporary it was.
- But the priesthood of Christ is unique. It is established by an oath from God that it would be eternal. As it was revealed to David in Ps. 110:4, God swore that He would establish an eternal priesthood in His Son.
- In fact, this is the fourth time the author of Hebrews has quoted this, and emphasized this truth. The fact that God has sworn and will *not* change His mind, means that God has made an absolute decision about this new priesthood.
- Because of the unequivocal nature of God's oath, all danger of some change in the future is wiped away. We've already seen the assurance that is affirmed through a divine oath, but here it is reiterated.

- As I mentioned earlier, this is *not* to say that God's oath is any more certain than His spoken word, but He does this to assure us that this is an eternal transaction that cannot be altered in any way. The oath emphasizes absolute certainty.
- We know this is true because we see examples of this in history. When God swore to Moses that the generation who rebelled would die in the wilderness, that is exactly what happened.
- When God swore to Abraham that He would make of him a mighty nation (with descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven), that is exactly what happened. So we know that when the Bible says that God swore with an oath, it is absolutely certain.
- And notice that there is a double assurance here. *Not only* is there the oath from God the Father, but there is the guarantee from God the Son. Look again at v. 22, "so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant."
- The word for "guarantee" (in the NASB) is the Greek word "engyos." It is sometimes translated "surety." It essentially means "a co-signer." It is a legal term which appears only here in the NT, but was commonly used in Hellenistic Greek to refer to someone who took on the responsibility of another person's debt.
- But in this case we are told that Jesus is the guarantee of "a better covenant." This is the first used of the word for "covenant" in Hebrews, but this will become a major theme for the rest of the book.
- It is the Greek word "diatheke" and it is often translated "testament" (as in the Old and New Testaments).
- *Here* it is an obvious reference to the new covenant. *That* is the "better covenant." A better priest guarantees a better covenant. It is better than the old one because that one was temporary – this one is eternal.
- It is that covenant that was prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah (in Jer. 31) and it is referred to in the NT as the second covenant, the new covenant, the better covenant, and the eternal covenant.
- It is the "better covenant" that produces the "better hope" (that he mentioned in v. 19). Jesus Christ guarantees that "better hope" on the basis of the "better covenant" He has established.
- And by the way (going back to the word "guarantee") we usually think of a guarantee in connection with some future event, but *here* the guarantee is based on something in the *past* – the finished work of Christ on the cross.

- Yes, it carries with it the future promise of eternal salvation, but it is a guarantee based on what Christ has already accomplished for us. The resurrection is the ultimate confirmation of that guarantee. So this brings us to a second main division, which is:

II. THE SALVATION OF THE NEW PRIESTHOOD (vv. 23-25)

- Look with me at v. 23, “And the *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing, but He, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently.”
- The Levitical priests had one big problem when it came to their priesthood. It’s called death. Every last one of them died, so the only way the priesthood could continue was to have a large number of them. They always needed to have the next generation take their place.
- In fact, this is dramatically portrayed in the OT (in Num. 20:23-29). God told Aaron (the first high priest) that he was going to die, so Moses took him up on Mount Hor (along with his son Eleazar).
- When they got to the top of the mountain, Moses stripped Aaron of all his priestly garments and put them on Eleazar. Aaron stayed on the mountain to die, while Moses and Eleazar went back down to the camp. After Aaron died, the people mourned for him for 30 days.
- This is a graphic portrayal of the exact point the author of Hebrews is making. It was as if God was impressing on the people that the Levitical priesthood was temporary.
- The priests (including the high priests) were going to die. John MacArthur says, “In this brief demonstration (of Aaron’s death)...two things about the Old Covenant were symbolized: it was *not* permanent, and it could *not* bring the people into the Promised Land. It was temporary and it could *not* save.”
- The former priests existed in greater numbers because they kept dying. In fact, according to Josephus, there were 83 high priests from the time of Aaron to the time when the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.
- In addition to that, there were thousands and thousands of regular priests – and they were all prevented by death from continuing.
- Then we see (in v. 24) the contrast: “but He (Jesus Christ), on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently.” It is a contrast from the *many* to the *one*.

- Because Christ is eternal (and abides forever) He holds His priesthood permanently. Do you remember what was said in v. 16? "...who has become *such* (a high priest) not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life."
- Jesus is the superior priest because He is eternal and needs no successor. His priesthood is permanent and eternal. Significantly, the word for "permanently" (in v. 24) means much more than sticking around. It means "something that cannot change."
- It is part of His eternal nature. This priesthood is incapable of being anything other than eternal. He is the final high priest and no other will ever be needed.
- And this leads us down to v. 25, "Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."
- If He is a priest forever, then He is able to save forever all those who belong to Him. This verse is (really) one of the most beautiful verses in all of Scripture. It is like John 3:16, in that it contains the message of the gospel in a nutshell.
- As I'm sure you know, salvation is the message of the entire Bible. Everything in the Bible points to

God's eternal plan of salvation. And in just a few words we see (in this verse) a vital summary of that plan of salvation. We see five key elements of the gospel here, beginning with:

A. The Inference

- Notice the first word, "hence." This is a connecting word. Other translations have the word "therefore." It points back to what has just been said – namely that Jesus' priesthood is eternal and permanent.
- You see, soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) is always tied to the doctrine of Christ's eternity. If Christ is *not* eternal He cannot save forever. These two must go together. You can't have one without the other. But secondly, we see:

B. The Efficacy

- *Not only* must Christ be eternal, He must also be able to save. So notice, the author of Hebrews says, "He is able to save." No other priest ever had this ability. He alone is able to save.
- The best the Levitical priests could ever do was to temporarily cover over sin – they could never remove it permanently. They could never deliver anyone from sin and thereby bring God's eternal salvation – but Jesus Christ is able to do that.

- Listen, Evangelicals are often accused of saying that there is only one way to God – well, guess what? There *is* only one way to God! No one else can save. No one else has the power to save. Only Jesus Christ.
- Of course, the Bible is absolutely clear on that. Acts 4:12 is about as clear as it gets. It says, “...there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”
- In John 14:6 Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.” Jesus is *not only* able to save, He is the *only* One able to save. Thirdly we see:

C. The Essence

- Heb. 7:25 says, “...He is able to save forever...” The KJV has “to the uttermost.” Some translations have “completely.” The Greek word is “panteles.” It is comprised of two words: the word “all” and the word “completion.”
- Scholars have debated its usage, but it likely includes *both* the concept of “eternally” and the concept of “completely.” In other words, His salvation includes justification, sanctification, and glorification. It is salvation that is guaranteed all the way to the end of the entire process.

- Jesus Christ is able to save through all eternity. He is able to save forever. He is able to save completely. In contrast to the temporary covering of sin under the old covenant, His salvation is no halfway measure. It is absolutely unlimited in its scope. Fourthly, we note:

D. The Objects

- Who are the objects of this promise? Who are the recipients of this great salvation? “Those who draw near to God through Him.” This salvation is *not* for everyone. It is *only* for those who draw near to God through Christ.
- That, of course, is a way of describing true spiritual conversion. There are many ways the Bible describes this experience, but it is talking about those who put their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.
- Jesus Christ is the only door – and only those who go through the door draw near to God. The Greek word for “draw near” is in the middle voice, which means this is a voluntary coming to God through faith in Christ.
- Someone might say, “Well, how does that work with the doctrine of election?” It’s pretty simple – if you are elect you will do that and if you are *not* you won’t.

- I don't want to get bogged down on the doctrine of election, but this salvation is for those who come to God through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Jesus said in John 6:37, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." If you're elect you will come, and if you come you will *not* be cast out.
- You say, "How do I know if I'm among the elect?" Come to Christ and then you'll know. Remember, half of that verse deals with the divine side, but we need to be focused on the human side. Our response needs to be that of drawing near to God through Christ. Then (fifthly) we see:

E. The Intercession

- Going back to Heb. 7:25 it says, "Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."
- The security of our salvation rests in the fact that Christ makes perpetual intercession for us. We could not save ourselves to begin with, and we cannot keep ourselves saved. He must do it for us – and (praise God) He does exactly that!
- He has the power to save us – and He has the power to keep us saved. Constantly, eternally,

perpetually Jesus Christ intercedes for us before the Father in heaven.

- Now, this is *not* the only time in Scripture where His intercession is referred to. Paul wrote (in Rom. 8:33-34), "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."
- What is the message there? No one can ever condemn us because our faithful intercessor is there (at the right hand of God the Father) constantly interceding for us.
- Interestingly, this is even alluded to in the OT (in the well-known Servant Song of Is. 53). Is. 53:12 says, "Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors."
- His role of divine intercessor is (apparently) an important part of our complete salvation. Back in the NT, 1 John 2:1 says, "if anyone sins, [that includes all of us] we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous..."

- The word for “Advocate” (there) is the word “parakletos.” It means “one who comes alongside” and is the same word that is used of the HS. In this case, it is Jesus Christ, who comes to our aid when we are tempted and intercedes for us when we sin.
- The word that is used here is the same word that was used for a defense attorney in a court of law. That’s what Jesus Christ is, and since He is perfect, He has never lost a case. He perfectly defends us before the Father in heaven.
- Now, theologians like to debate about how this intercessory role fits in with Christ’s atoning work on the cross, but I won’t go into all that this morning, other than to say that the Bible is clear: All our sins were completely paid for on Calvary.
- In Heb. 1:3 we read where the Son of God had already “made purification for sins” before “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”
- Later (in 9:26) we will see where it says He appeared at the end of the age “to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” In 10:12 we’re told He “offered one sacrifice for sins for all time.” That is an obvious reference to His atoning work on the cross.
- So we have to say that the atoning work of Christ on the cross was totally sufficient to pay for our sins once and for all. We know that this was fully

accepted by God the Father because of the fact that He raised Him up from the dead.

- But even though that is absolutely true, apparently this intercessory role is an ongoing *application* of that atoning work. It is part of His preserving our salvation.
- I like the way Peter O’Brien puts it. He says, “Whatever precise form the ascended Lord’s intercessions for his people take, we may assume that they cover anything and everything that would prevent us from receiving the final salvation he has won for us at the cross.”
- So we have this incredible salvation brought about by the new priesthood, but all that is based upon:

III. THE SINLESSNESS OF THE NEW PRIEST (vv. 26-28)

- That’s what we see in vv. 26-28. Look with me at v. 26, “For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens...”
- The final argument of this chapter is a powerful one: The new priesthood is better because the new priest is Jesus. His sinless perfection makes Him absolutely “fitting” to be our eternal High Priest.

- This word carries with it the idea that it was *necessary* that He be such a person. He *had* to be completely righteous to accomplish our complete salvation.
- And notice how His sinlessness is described here. All these terms are synonyms but they have slightly different nuances. “Holy” means “devout, pious, pleasing to God.” This is certainly true of Christ – in fact, the Bible indicates that He is eternally holy and incapable of sin.
- “Innocent” means “blameless, free from all guile, or harmless.” You *could* say that holiness points toward God while innocent points toward men. Jesus has never injured any man.
- Then there is the word “undefiled.” This means free from any moral or spiritual blemish. It can be translated “pure or unstained.” MacArthur says, “Just as the rays of the sun can shine into the foulest stagnant pond and not lose their radiance and purity, so Jesus lived his life in the sinful, defiled world without losing the least of His beauty and purity.”
- In addition to these terms, we are told that Jesus was “separated from sinners.” Of course, this does *not* mean that Jesus never associated with sinners in His earthly ministry. It means that He was *not* a sinner Himself, as they were. He was totally separate from sin by His very nature.
- And then notice He is also described as being “exalted above the heavens.” His exaltation is based on His sinlessness. This is a “spatial metaphor” to convey the idea that He is exalted as high as possible.
- We know He is *not* above heaven – He is in heaven. This is *not* a literal statement. It is a metaphor. It points to the highest possible exaltation.
- But go on to v. 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.”
- Here is another contrast between Christ and the Levitical priests. Because they were sinners, they had to offer up sacrifices continually, for themselves (first of all) and then for the people.
- In contrast to that Jesus Christ offered up the sacrifice of Himself, which was sufficient once and for all. Now, this is a theme the author of Hebrews is going to develop in detail over the next few chapters – but he introduces it here.
- Because Christ is perfectly sinless, He doesn’t have to offer up a sacrifice for His own sin. He can

(instead) become a substitute in the place of sinners.

- And because His sacrifice was a perfect sacrifice, it did *not* need to be repeated over and over again. In fact, any idea of a re-sacrificing of Christ (such as the Catholic mass) is completely unbiblical.
- His sacrifice was a once for all sacrifice. It never needs to be repeated, and it is absolutely sufficient to atone for our sins. Because Christ was sinless He was able to make the definitive and final sacrifice.
- Now, v. 28 is a summary of the argument of this chapter. It really completes the argument that began in 5:1. O'Brien says, "In a series of neatly balanced antitheses, the author sums up what has been said about the Levitical high priest and the new high priest, and clearly proclaims the superiority of the Son as the high priest who is perfected forever."
- There really is no new information given here, but it is a summary of the whole thing. Look at it with me, "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."
- Notice the contrasts in this verse. First, you have the Law and the oath which came "after the Law." The Law was ineffective in establishing a

priesthood that could achieve God's intended goal for his people, which was perfection. That's why God swore an oath to establish a new priesthood that could accomplish that.

- Second, there is the contrast between the many priests as opposed to the one. It is the high priests (plural) in contrast to the one Son of God.
- Thirdly, the Levitical priests were "weak." They were sinners who could never bring about God's salvation. But Jesus Christ was "made perfect forever."
- What does all this mean? I'll close with the words of F. F. Bruce, "His once-completed self-offering is utterly acceptable and efficacious; his contact with the Father is immediate and unbroken; his priestly ministry on his peoples' behalf is never ending and therefore the salvation which he secures to them is absolute."
- MAKE APPEAL
- PRAYER