

A Better Priest of a Better Covenant

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, I want to begin today by doing a quick review. And if you've been coming over the last month or so, you may know the answer to this question. Or if you've been reading my newsletters during the week through email, you might know the answer as well.

But we're going to do this by getting you to turn to the person next to you. Yes, you're going to have to talk to people again. But I want you to ask the question that's on the top of that page. What is the dominant picture of Jesus' role in Hebrews?

And you might like to flip through the book of Hebrews, flip back to give you an idea. But take the next minute or so and just talk about that with the person next to you. Okay, I think the first answer was the right one.

I'll get to it in a minute. The idea of king and prophet is there too. But I think if you read Hebrews carefully, the picture that clearly comes across is of Jesus as high priest.

But not only that, he's the high priest that is seated at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. And that second phrase is actually quite important. It's exactly what the writer actually says here in verse 1 of chapter 8.

[1 : 1 4] He's such a good preacher that he actually reminds us of what the main point is. Okay, that we, you know, he says, now the main point of what we are saying is this. All right, pretty clear.

We do have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. And now this is midway through the book, as it were. And he's trying to make sure that we've understood what the main point is that he's been trying to make.

After all, it's a point that he's been making from the very start. And he's been gradually building up this image of Jesus. So I want you to just come with me. Turn back to the very start, page 1204, which is in chapter 1 and verse 3.

And we'll see there that what it says is that after he, Jesus, had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

See that phrase there? Now, the word high priest is not used, but we see mention of priestly duties, that of purification for sins. It's not long, however, before we see it explicitly when we turn to chapter 2 of verse 17.

[2 : 2 3] So just on the next page. And we hear, we are told that Jesus has to be fully human so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God.

And so we have to follow this high priest as he leads us to our ultimate place of rest in God's presence. That's pretty much what he's trying to do in chapter 3.

And then finally, as we turn to chapter 4 and verse 14, which is on the next page, all is revealed because he says there, And so between chapters 4 and 8, what we're shown is that Jesus' high priest, high priesthood, is legitimate.

That it's in the order of Melchizedek, which Devin showed us last week. And it's also superior to that of the Levites, which was the earthly Old Testament priesthood.

He's done this in summary up to now. But from chapters 8 to 10, he's going to compare both the Old Testament priesthood and Jesus' priesthood in detail.

[3 : 47] And what he shows is that only Jesus' priesthood saves, because the Old was simply a shadow or a copy of the New. Now this week, however, chapter 8 focuses on Jesus' priesthood being superior because it's founded on a new and superior covenant.

That's the focus for this week. We'll get to that in point 3, you might see, from verses 6 to 13 in the outline. But I want to first return back to these two verses, 1 and 2, and think more about this main point.

Because we read in verse 2 that integral to his high priesthood is that Jesus, verse 2, serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

The point being, Jesus is still serving as a high priest. It wasn't something that he did on earth and then finished up and went back up to heaven.

Rather, as we saw last week in chapter 7, it says that his is a permanent priesthood. And in fact, he's actually only serving when he ascends to heaven, as we shall see in verses 3 to 5.

[5 : 01] Because he serves in the true tabernacle, not the earthly one, the true tabernacle that is set up by the Lord in heaven. Now, I have to say, this image of Jesus as high priest in heaven doesn't feature much in our church, or in our churches, as it were, does it?

So we get images of the manger at Christmas, like this, you know, reminding us of Jesus' birth and incarnation. Or we have images of the empty cross, of Jesus' death for us, or the empty tomb to remind us of his resurrection.

But this image of Jesus as a high priest is actually his present ministry. It's actually something he's doing right now.

And so I feel like that ought to feature more prominently in our thinking, shouldn't it? After all, if you mentioned my wife's name to me right now, Alyssa, what comes to me, what comes to my mind, is of her as she is today, isn't it?

It's not an image of her when I first met her, although I remember that day very clearly. I was, you know, I spotted her in the corner of my eye as I was packing away chairs at church, doing the right thing.

[6 : 24] Nor is it a picture of her on our wedding day. Although, again, we have a picture of that, I have a picture of that in our bedroom. And I often admire that before I go to bed at night.

But why are you laughing? It's right to admire. But when you mention Alyssa, what comes to my mind is of her right now. Now, I'm not saying that we get rid of the manger or the cross or the empty tomb, because these are reminders of the most important events in history, without which Jesus wouldn't be that high priest in heaven.

But when the writer tells us in chapter 3 to fix our thoughts on Jesus, and you can look that up a bit later, or later when we get to chapter 12 and he says to fix our eyes on Jesus, what we're to fix on is Jesus as high priest in heaven.

If the cross reminds us constantly of Jesus as our sacrifice, then we need to also remember that we need Jesus as our high priest to offer that sacrifice on our behalf.

So I think it's an image that ought to predominate or feature more in our lives. But before we get to point 3 of the outline, what the writer now does is he argues again in verses 3 to 5, so we're on point 2 now, that Jesus' priesthood is better than the old, but this time he's saying it's better than the old because he serves in a better tabernacle, or the true tabernacle which is in heaven.

[8 : 06] And so we get to our second point, and I want us to just try and follow his logic here, beginning at verse 3. So he says, every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices.

In other words, that's what priests are there for, that's what their job is. And so it was necessary for this one, that is for Jesus, to also have something to offer. Jesus as a priest is no different.

He has to offer a sacrifice. Moreover, he needs a place to offer it. And he now says, the writer, if he were merely a priest at the earthly tabernacle, then verse 4, Jesus' services wouldn't have been required because there were already other priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law.

So these are the Levites. But as the writer now cleverly points out from the law itself, this sanctuary, this earthly one, was never the real thing. It's merely a copy. Because even the scriptures, and this is something that the Jews and the Hebrews honor, even the scriptures show that there was going to be something better, that the earthly one was simply a copy.

Which is why God then tells Moses in Exodus 25, in verse 40, which he quotes there in the passage. But I've got the verse up there.

[9 : 28] Exodus 25, verse 40, is at the end of the instructions on building the temple. And there, God says, see to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

That is, this earthly temple, or tabernacle that Moses was building, is actually patterned after another, a real one in heaven. And it's in this real one that Jesus serves as a high priest.

Well, that's all I'm going to say about this for now, because we'll come back to that again next week, where we've got a whole chapter on the tabernacle. But for now, I just want us to see again that this argument that the writer is making, that Jesus had a superior priesthood.

But now let's move on to point three, where again, the same argument that Jesus' priesthood is superior, but this time, Jesus' priesthood is superior because it's based on a superior covenant or better covenant.

So verse six, look there with me, it says, but in fact, the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he's a mediator is superior to the old one.

[10 : 43] Since the new covenant is established on better promises. Priests don't just need a place to minister, they also need a covenant on which to base their ministry.

That is, they need an undertaking from God that if they were to offer gifts and sacrifices in a certain way, God will honor that and bless them in return.

And the covenant on which Jesus' ministry is based is superior, it says in verse six, because it's established on better promises. And so, in verses seven to nine, we see firstly what was wrong with the old one and therefore needs replacing.

And then when we get to verses 10 to 13, we see what's great about the new one, the one which Jesus is the mediator. Now again, the writer uses the Old Testament.

I hope you're picking up this sort of trend here, how he keeps using the Old Testament. He uses again the Old Testament to show this. So, he uses Jeremiah's prophecy in chapter 31 this time, verses 31 to 34.

[11 : 50] And, that passage explains both the old being bad and the new being superior. Now, Jeremiah, as we know, he wasn't a bullfrog, for those of you old enough.

More importantly, Jeremiah was someone who spoke long after the first covenant was given. And so, verse seven says that if there was nothing wrong with the first covenant, that is the one that Moses got back in the day, then there is no need for another.

There was no need for God to give another through Jeremiah a long time after. But, the Lord did declare a new one in verse eight. And he says that he will make, there he says, he will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with the ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, that was the first covenant, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant. And, I turn away from them, declares the Lord.

Now, people often get slightly confused as to how we are to treat the old covenant. So, some may think, for instance, that because the new covenant is here, that the old is now irrelevant, right?

[13 : 02] Just throw it away. They might even think it's bad. And you hear a lot of people say, you know, stuff in the Old Testament, it's all bad. It's the new that's good.

But, that's not what verse eight says, if we look carefully. If you look at verse eight, the old was deficient, not because it was wrong or that the promises or instructions in them were faulty.

After all, they were actually given by God himself. Rather, it was deficient because God found fault with the people. Not with the law, but with the people.

And that's what Jeremiah's prophecy itself says in verses nine, that the people were unfaithful to the covenant. So, you see, there are actually various aspects of the covenant.

So, one aspect of the covenant is that it spoke of how God chose Israel through Abraham and saved them from slavery. so the whole narrative of how that all happened is there. That's in the law.

[14 : 03] Second, the covenant or the law also contained promises and undertakings of how God's people would be blessed in the land provided they lived under his rule.

In other words, the covenant provided God's standards as well for living. And earlier, when Brendan read the Ten Commandments, that was actually a summary of God's requirements.

They reflect his character and in turn, they set the standards for what he needed the people lived to. Finally, the covenant also provides for how the people would then maintain their relationship with God even when they fell short.

And this was true the sacrificial system, the priesthood and all that. And so, when we hear that something's wrong with the first covenant, what was wrong with it wasn't its content because it reflects God's character.

Rather, what was wrong with it was the people's failure to obey it. They couldn't remain faithful to it. And chief among their failure was their failure to keep that first commandment which Brendan read, which is on the slide, the one that says, you shall have no other gods before me.

[15 : 23] And so, for example, when you have a pianist who fails to perform a piece perfectly, we never fault the composer, do we?

We don't say, well, it's Tchaikovsky's fault that this pianist couldn't play properly. We don't fault the composition either, do we? No. Rather, we fault the pianist. And so, likewise, when we look at the covenant, the first covenant, it's not the content of the covenant or the giver of the covenant which is at fault, rather, it's the people who failed to obey it.

That was what God was finding fault with. And so, when after many years the people proved that they couldn't live up to this, then God comes along and he promises a new one in Jeremiah, one in which he alone will fulfill and therefore can guarantee that this time the covenant would work.

So, that's where we get to in verses 10 to 13. We find out how great or how good this covenant is because it provides for better promises as well.

So, not only does this new covenant work, it provides better blessings than the first one provided. And so, there are three which I will touch on under part B of point three.

[16 : 41] The first is that under the new covenant verse 10, God will put his laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. He will be their God and they will be his people.

God's law, in other words, will be internalized by his people. It's sort of the ultimate in parenting as well, isn't it? The goal of parents is to see their children internalize what we teach them.

So, as parents, we long for the day where we no longer need to nag them to pack their rooms. Or to pack for school. We look forward to the time. They don't need a reminder to be kind to their sister.

Or to be respectful to others. I'm not having a go at Emma, even though I've used the word sister. This is actually very good. But when that happens, that's when we know that our work as parents is done.

You know, when children or kids are no longer forced to do these things because they have to or because mom and dad says so, but because it's part of their character. They are self-motivated to do these things.

[17 : 49] They want to do these things. Well, this is now the promise under the new covenant. God's people will have a deep-seated desire to do his will because his laws are now written in their hearts and on their minds.

Now, how is this possible under the new covenant? Well, it's because God will give us his spirit and he's already given us his spirit who will dwell with us and dwell among us. But again, that's only possible because Jesus has provided purifications for our sins.

That's the only way a holy God with a holy spirit can dwell among his sinful people. Up to now, up to this point, up to the time Jesus came, the best that could be done was God being present in the tent, in the tabernacle.

But he was separated, wasn't he? And we'll see that next week by walls and curtains and all manner of barriers. But that's no longer the case.

God dwells with us now by his spirit. Second, the new covenant is better than the old because there's now a possibility for everyone to know the Lord. Verse 11, no longer will they teach their neighbor or say to one another, know the Lord because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest.

[19 : 09] And again, this is only possible because of the spirit. Recall again that first reading in Deuteronomy, chapter 5 and verse 5, which I've got on the next slide. There, we see that actually Moses had to be the mediator of God's word.

He had to stand between the Lord and the people to declare to you the word of the Lord because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up to the mountain. There was God's holiness.

There was the people and they needed Moses to be the mediator. So, it's a bit like what I've got on the next slide. The people only knew God through Moses.

And after Moses died, then there were other prophets and priests and scribes and leaders. But they were the ones that stood between God and the people. They had to teach the people God's law.

Otherwise, they would not know it. But under the new covenant, God's relationship with his people now looks a bit like this. On the next slide. So, I've got the Holy Spirit as a dove.

[20 : 16] But it's the same Holy Spirit now which has inspired God's word that also works in all of us. As we read and listen to God's word, the same spirit that inspired the word is the same spirit that now inspires us and teaches us.

So, it doesn't matter whether you're a pastor like me or a new Christian of only a few weeks old sitting in the pews. We actually all have the same spirit if we trust in Jesus.

We all have the same capacity to know God just like Moses did. Just like every other hero in the Old Testament whether it's King David or the prophets like Jeremiah.

All of us, all of us have a personal knowledge of the Lord which, something which the Old Testament people couldn't do in general. That's not to say that we don't need teachers or preachers.

God still uses them to be his servants of the word. But they are no longer standing between us and God. Jesus is the only one that does that now. He's the only mediator.

[21 : 25] We don't need to rely on special prophets. people that have claimed to have special access to God. No, that doesn't work. Even here, as God has inspired me to prepare the sermon and as I speak, you guys read God's word and the Spirit is teaching you to work out whether what I'm saying is from God or not.

That is the way it works. We have all got the ability to know the Lord from the youngest to the oldest. And so when we pray, everyone from the youngest in the church, Jemima, when she knows how to speak, the moment she can say her first prayer, she has the same access to the Father as any of us does.

Any leader of denominations even. The Archbishop of Canterbury. He doesn't pray more special prayers than Jemima does. And that is a wonderful thing, isn't it?

That we have these blessings right now because of Jesus. And for a lot of us, we probably, because we're so used to it, we don't quite realize how difficult actually it was in the Old Testament under the Old Covenant when people wanted to meet the Lord.

All this is now possible because of the third promise in verse 12. Actually, this blessing, this third blessing is actually the basis for the other two because we see here in verse 12, it starts with the word for, for I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

[23 : 09] That is, it's because our sins are forgiven through Jesus' work as a high priest that we have the spirit to know the Lord. But again, we need to appreciate how wonderful this is because all our weakness, all our sins, past, present, future, all are to be remembered no more.

That is, if we are in Christ, there's actually no risk that our sin can be used against us. And some of us were looking at Romans chapter 8 this afternoon and that's exactly what Paul says in Romans 8 as well.

It's not that forgiveness wasn't available under the old covenant but as we now know, it wasn't effective. And we'll see in the next couple of chapters again that all of this in the Old Testament was pointing to something better, that they needed something else in order to be forgiven.

Even the Old Testament heroes who trusted in the Lord were not forgiven on the basis of the blood of animals. No, they were actually forgiven in anticipation of what Jesus would do for them by being their sacrifice.

But now that Jesus has come and has fulfilled all the requirements in full, the new covenant, the one promise in Jeremiah is now signed, sealed, and delivered.

[24 : 31] It's a bit like when you buy a property, right? You may have been the successful bidder, the highest bidder. You may have even put down your 10% deposit. But it's only when you settle and pay in full, or your bank does it for you, more likely, it's only when you've paid in full that the deals signed, sealed, and delivered.

Likewise, it's only when Jesus ascended into heaven offering his own blood as the high priest that the new covenant was signed, sealed, and delivered.

But the great thing is that once that's occurred, and that has occurred, nothing can take away the blessings of the new covenant. Do you get what I'm saying?

It's been delivered. Jesus has gone up into heaven. That's why it's so important that he's seated there as high priest with the blood, his blood, because when he's there, it's done.

It's a done deal. Nothing can change that, and nothing can reverse that. And further, in verse 13, as we finish, now that the new has come, then as verse 13 says, actually the old is done away with.

[25 : 46] That is, you don't need the old. Why do you need the old when the new is much better? You can't actually get to God now by the old covenant, is what he's trying to say. Only the new, you can only go to God through the new covenant.

And so I guess, to some of you, I need to ask, have you come to Jesus as your high priest so that the blessing of the new covenant is yours? Jesus has already signed, sealed, and delivered the new covenant.

Are you coming to him to get access to God? Or, are you searching for blessing your own way? You see, one way or another, we're all searching for the promise of a better life, aren't we?

We all make choices or we channel our energies based on the understanding that if we do the right thing, then we get a promised return. And the things that we look for, the blessings we hope for, are in a sense, gods, aren't they?

They are our idols. So for example, if it's worldly success or ambition that you worship, then you'll make sacrifices to it, hoping that it will bring you recognition or reward.

[27 : 00] If on the other hand, your God is leisure, then you devote time and money to it, go on holidays or whatever it is that you're chasing, and hope that you'll find comfort and pleasure in return.

There's always a deal to be done, isn't it? You put this in and you're hoping to get that in return. But friends, it's only in Jesus that we have a mediator that brings us to God.

Everything else falls short of that. It's only through Jesus that we come into a true relationship with Him that brings lasting blessing.

Now as for the rest of us, we should give thanks, show me, that we have this wonderful thing that we're now living under this new covenant. But here, my encouragement to you is this, for those of us who are already living under the new covenant, and it's that question at the bottom there.

And the question is, you may be living under the new covenant, but are you living fully under the new covenant? Are you craving the blessings that are promised by the new covenant?

[28 : 07] So for instance, if we know that in Christ all our sins are forgiven, well, let's not be ashamed to confess our sins regularly and confidently. Of course, we need to accompany that with true compassion, sorry, true repentance, but never let the devil deceive you to think that your sins are beyond forgiveness.

never live under the weight of shame and guilt because the blood of Jesus has set us free. Instead, we need to come before God with our wrongs all the time, confess them, and know God's forgiveness in Christ.

Likewise, because we know we have God's Spirit teaching us God's law, then let us hunger for God's Word. Let us give time and space in our lives to meditate on, to really feed on it so that it can be written in our hearts and in our minds so that we can come to know God fully, as fully as He would like us to have.

You see, we're at this great spiritual buffet, isn't it? It's all we can eat. God's Word is all we can eat. And we can keep coming to it and no one's going to say, sorry, you've had your quarter of oysters.

Time to go back. It doesn't work like that. We can keep coming and feeding on God's Word and He will give and give and keep giving us more.

[29 : 29] So, let's make the most of it. Let's live fully under this great blessing under the new covenant. Let us eat, let us pray, and let us grow in the Lord.

What a wonderful blessing it is to be living under the new covenant. What a great blessing it is to have Jesus as our High Priest. So, let's keep fixing our thoughts on Him and let's live this life to the full.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You that You've sent Your Son to be our great High Priest. Thank You that He's seated right now at Your right hand and interceding for us so that we can be completely saved.

Father, thank You for all these great blessings under the new covenant, great promises. We've only dealt with three in Jeremiah, but as we read the rest of the Bible, all these spiritual blessings are ours in Christ Jesus.

So, Lord, help us to feed on it, help us to really live it out fully because of the great promises that You've given to us. help us by Your Spirit to love Your Word.

[30 : 45] Help us to desire a growing relationship with You. Help us to come to You humbly in confession each time we're wrong, knowing that our sins are forgiven.

We pray and ask this in the name of our High Priest, in the name of Jesus. Amen.