

## **A Study of the Book of Hebrews**

### ***Jesus is Better***

#### **Sermon # 13**

#### **“He Is Able”**

#### **Hebrews 7:23-27; 8: 1,6,12**

I have to admit that I really wrestled with this message in the sense of what to emphasize. In chapter seven we are introduced to one of the most mysterious characters in all of the Old Testament, a man by the name of Melchizedek. He strides onto the pages of Scripture in Genesis 14 and after a brief interaction with Abraham he walks off the pages of Scripture just as suddenly. He is not mentioned again for 1000 years, until David prophesizes that the Messiah will be *“a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”* in Psalm 100:4. Then it is another 1000 years until he is mentioned again by the author of the letter to the Hebrews to emphasis to this struggling congregation the nature of the high priest they have in Jesus.

It would be easy for me to get involved in an intricate study of Melchizedek, as a history buff I find that kind of thing fascinating, but then I watch the History Channel for entertainment! Although that might be interesting at least to me, how beneficial would it be for you!

The title of our entire series has been *“Jesus is Better”* and in chapters seven and eight we are explicitly told that through Jesus we have a better hope (7:19) a better covenant (7:22), and better promises (8:6).

The main purpose of this passage is to explain why it was necessary for Christ to serve as man’s high priest. “Why do you need the priesthood of Jesus Christ?” Consider with me Four Reasons Why Christ Is A Better High Priest.

First, He Is A Better High Priest Because Of His Permanence. (vv. 23-25)

Israel had witnessed a long line of priests serving before God on behalf of the people. Verse twenty-three states, *“Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. (24) But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. (25) Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”*

Jesus as our High Priest is notable in that:

- He is Alive. (vv. 23-24)

The priests of ancient Israel served both man and God but at some point they all died. Verse twenty-three stated, *“Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. (24) But He (that is Jesus) because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood..”*

But *“death”* prevented or hindered all the priest all down through the centuries from continuing their duties. The priests of ancient Israel like the preachers of today live for a while to serve both man and God but someday they will die and a new man will come on the scene. But He, that is Jesus, *“continues forever”* literally that is *“He continuously continues forever!”*

As Christians we talk a great deal about the death and resurrection of Christ - and that is good and justified – but we need to remember that we serve a *living* Christ who is at God’s right hand and who has a ministry there for us. The emphasis is upon the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is living. He is not dead - He is not on a cross; He is not lying in a grave. He arose from the dead, and the emphasis is upon our living Christ.

- He is Able

Verse twenty-five says, *“He is also able to save to the uttermost”* this says literally *“He is always able.”* The sacrifice under the Old Testament never did more than temporarily cover sin, they never even partially or temporarily removed sin. Even though the High Priests down through the years may have wished to remove the people’s sin they were simply not able to do so. But not only is Jesus able, He is the only one who is able to do so.

Bible believing Christians are sometimes criticized as narrow minded or intolerant for maintaining that Jesus is the only way to God. Yet the reason that we make this claim is because that is what the Bible teaches. Jesus himself said in (John 14:6), *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* Jesus is not only able to save; He is the only one able to save. He is the only one with the power of salvation. The Apostle Peter is quoted as saying in Acts 4:12, *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

- He is Available (v. 25b) *“...those who come to God through Him...”*

*“Humorist Art Buchwald has described his frustration at being unable to reach an important person because of a secretary’s protectiveness. Questions such as, ‘May I tell him who is calling?’ and ‘What is this in regard to?’ have prompted him to reply.*

*‘Just tell him that this is his insurance agent. His house is a total loss, but the fire insurance will cover 70% of it. Buchwald reports an immediate connection with the ‘important person’ in almost every case.*

*Because of Christ, our High Priest, we never have to give our name or explain our business when we come to God. Through the son we have immediate access to the Father.” [Adult Teaching Guide (Sept –Nov, 1993) Hebrews. (Atlanta: SP Pub., 1993) p. 58]*

He Is A Better High Priest Because Of His Permanence and...

Secondly, He Is A Better High Priest Because Of His Prayers! (v. 25b)

The last portion of verse twenty-five says, “... *He always lives to make inter-cession for them.*”

Do you ever struggle what or how to pray? Of course you do, because it is true of all of us.

One of our struggles is wondering if we are praying for the right things and in the right way.

Kent Hughes offers us help on this point. *“How does he intercede for us? He, along with the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26,27) takes our feeble prayers, cleans them up, ennobles them, and presents them to the Father. St. Chrysostom, the great fourth-century preacher, provides a helpful analogy. A young boy whose father was away on a trip wanted to present his father with something that would please him. His mother sent him to the garden to gather a bouquet of flowers. The little boy gathered a sorry bouquet of weeds as well as flowers. But when his father returned home, he was presented with a beautifully arranged bouquet, for the mother had intervened, removing all the weeds.*

*The prayers of the church, prevailing, acceptable, and fruitful as they are, are not a thing of beauty as they leave the lips of saints. As they start their way heavenward, they are a mixed bag of weeds with a few stray flowers. When they arrive, however thanks to the intercession of Christ they are nothing but beautiful flowers. What blessed, comforting thoughts these are as we, amidst our frailties, pray* [[R. Kent Hughes. Hebrews: An Anchor For the Soul. Vol 1 ( Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993) p. 208].

We have an example of the intercession of Jesus in his prayer for Peter when Satan wanted to destroy him (Luke 22:32) and his High Priestly prayer in John 17.

He Is A Better High Priest Because Of His Prayers and...

Third, He Is A Better High Priest Because Of His Purity! (vv. 26-28)

*“For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; (27) who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered*

*up Himself. (28) For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever."*

The problem of sinful men attempting to mediate for sinful men is that it leaves sinful men in their sin!

John Philips portrays an imaginative scene in which an unbelieving pagan (Moabite) is observing the annual Day of Atonement in Jerusalem. The man sees the high priest in his distinctive garments and asks who he was. He then notices the large crowd of onlookers and asks if it was a special day. He is told that, yes, it is the Day of Atonement, on which animals that have specially prepared are sacrificed for the sins of the people. The man looks around and says, *"I see some animals tethered over there. .... There is a bullock and a couple of goats, as well as some rams. I suppose that they are going to be sacrificed."* His informant tells him that he is correct and points to the Tabernacle and points out the pillar of cloud above it that indicates the presence of God. He says, *"The high priest will go over there. Then he will come out and he will take those two goats. He will slay one of them and then he will go back into the Holy of Holies with the blood, which he will sprinkle on the mercy seat. Then he will come back out again and take the remaining goat. He will confess all our sins over the head of that goat. Then he will be given into the hands of ritually clean man who will lead it out into the desert, bearing our sins, there to be abandoned and alone. Thus our sins are cleansed and carried away of another year.*

*That's very interesting, says the man, but what's that big bullock for? He seems like a fine animal. It's the biggest bullock I have ever seen.*

*'Oh, I forgot to tell you about that. That bullock is for the priest. Before He can do anything about our sin, he has to do something about his own. That's what the bullock is for.'*

The visitor *"looked astonished, 'Two small goats take care of all the sins of the vast crowd...and a great bullock for the sins of the priest! Why is that?'*

*'Well, you see,' says his friend, 'sin in us is bad enough but sin in him is far more serious. His sin looms larger in God's sight than all of ours!'* [John Philips. Exploring Hebrews. (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992) pp. 84-85]

Unlike the priest who descended from Aaron, Jesus is *"holy"* – in relation to God, *"blameless"* – in relation to other men and *"unstained"* – in relation to his integrity. Unlike the priest who had gone before he had no need to offer sacrifices for His own sins.

It was a impossibility for the priests who descended from Aaron to offer themselves as a sacrifice for the sins of others. They could not even atone for their own sins much less those of all the people. But in verse twenty-five says that Jesus *“offered up himself”* as the once for all time sacrifice for sin.

He Is A Better High Priest Because Of His Purity and...

Fourth, He Is A Better High Priest Because Of His Perfected Work!

(8:1) *“Now this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”

When the writer says, *“This is the sum.”* He is not just summing up, he is doing more than that. A literal translation would be: *“In consideration of the things which are spoken, this is the focal (chief) point.”* What is the focal point? That we have such a high priest, who sat down in the heavens on the right hand of the Majesty. This is the high watermark of Hebrews.

Kent Hughes says, *“Think of it! Jesus our eternal priest, who sits at the Father’s right hand is indescribable (ineffable) glory enthroned .... atop a crystal sea amongst the adoration of millions, serves in our behalf. God serves me!”* [R. Kent Hughes. Hebrews: An Anchor For the Soul. Vol 1 ( Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993) p. 215]

As we noted in the very first sermon in this series as we examined Hebrews 1:3 it says that when Jesus *“...had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of Majesty on high.”* When He had completed the redemption of man, he was escorted by the angels to the throne of Almighty God. He sat down at the favored place of the Father with calmness and confidence. We noted that the implications of the phrase *“he sat down”* are staggering. Few other statements in the Bible are filled with greater importance.

*“We know a great deal about the temple (in Jerusalem) and its furnishings, but, fascinatingly, there were no chairs in this billion dollar building that took 46 years to complete. There were no chairs because the priest of Israel never sat down. They never sat down because their work was never done. Their work was never done because the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. It was a stop-gap; it was temporary; it was incomplete. And so, priest after priest, course after course, year after year, century after century, with monotonous repetition, would come to the Temple; and they would function, but they would never sit down. They could never rest for their work was never done, the task was never completed.”* [Marv Rosenthal. Israel My Glory. *“He Sat Down”* (April/May, 1987) p.

But Jesus once for all time paid the penalty for sin! How this concept must have gripped the heart of the writer of Hebrews because he will exclaim for a third time in (10:11-12) *“And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (12) But this man (Jesus), after He had offered one sacrifice for sin forever, sat down at the right hand of God.”*

Jesus offered himself as the *“once for all time”* sacrifice for sin. The work was now done and never needed to be repeated. *“He sat down”* – that is the significance of His triumphant words from the Cross when he shouted (*telestai*) *“It is finished”* (John 19:30). And then *“He sat down”* – his work is finished. *“He sat down”* – his position is fixed.