**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (21): The Book Of Better Things**

**“Our Great High Priest: Perfectly Suitable for Us!”**

**Hebrews 7:26-28**

**May 26, 2024**

When the Hebrews received this letter, some were tempted to go back to the faith of their fathers. After all, the temple was still standing, and all the priestly ministries were still being carried out on a daily basis. It would have been easy for these readers to escape persecution by returning to the old Mosaic system which they had known before.

We today, of course, don’t have that problem. We aren’t tempted to bring a goat or a lamb or a turtle dove to the communion table and slit its throat, thinking that its shed blood will help us get right with God. However, we can be tempted to think that we need something other or more than Jesus Christ, and what He does for us as our merciful and faithful high priest. But there isn’t any other priest, or saint, or sacrament that can ever supplement, or be a substitute for the high priestly ministry of Jesus.

That’s why the author wrote the verses we looked at last week (7:11-25). He began by pointing out the imperfections of the Old Covenant priesthood (7:11-14). Then he compared those flaws and shortcomings with the New Covenant priesthood of Christ (7:15-19). He also emphasized that no priest in Aaron’s line was ever placed into office with a divine oath (7:20-22); and he stressed that unlike all those other priests, Jesus is the ever-living, unchanging High Priest who is able to save us “to the uttermost” (7:23-25a). And how can we know this? It’s “*because he always lives to make intercession*” for us (Heb. 7:25b).

In the verses before us today, our author is giving us one final reason why this new priesthood is better, and that’s because the new priest is Jesus! He is telling us in no uncertain terms that we have a high priest who is perfectly “suitable” for His saving work on our behalf. The little word “For” at the beginning of verse 26 links this statement to the preceding one (v. 25b) as reflected in the NASB and ESV: “*For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest*” (v. 26a). It’s precisely *because* Jesus is who He is (a “fitting” or “suitable” high priest”) that He intercedes as He does (v. 25b).

A seven-fold description of Jesus then follows, which is the reason why He “suits us perfectly” (vv. 26b-28): “*Such a high priest is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 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. 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*.” Perhaps the best way to fully appreciate this “glowing description of Christ as our high priest” (Morris) is by looking at each of these descriptions one at a time.

 *First,* Jesus, our high priest, is “holy.” Admittedly, this word has fallen on hard times. For example, it wasn’t too long ago when I said, “Holy mackerel!” in the presence of a dear Amish friend. She looked at me and said, “Ron, there’s nothing holy about a mackerel – why would you say that?” She’s right, of course, and the reason I said it was because, like so many today, I often lose sight of the real meaning of the word.

In the New Testament, there are two Greek words for “holy,” and the one our author is using here is the less common of the two. When applied to Jesus, it points to His personal piety, with no hint of moral pollution. Despite the onslaught of temptations He faced throughout His earthly life, He never once yielded to them – not once. He remained perfectly committed to His Father and His will. That’s why there is no question of His fitness to appear in the presence of God on our behalf, interceding for us (24/7).

*Second*, He was “innocent,” or blameless. That doesn’t mean He was immune from being accused of sin and evil (the Pharisees attempted to do this on numerous occasions.) It simply means they had no grounds for making such accusations. Whether it was in reference to the law of God, or the law of the land, He was without blame. As we have already seen, it was imperative that He be “without sin” (4:15) to be qualified to enter the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf (7:18-20).

*Third*, He was “*pure*,” or “*unstained*” (ESV) or “*undefiled*” (NASB). This word has in view the ceremonial purity that was required of high priests under the Old Covenant. There were any number of “blemishes” that would disqualify a man from serving in the tabernacle, such as contact with a dead body; having a bald spot on his head; shaving off the edges of his beard; having any self-inflicted cuts on his body; having an arm or leg that was longer than the other; being a hunchback or a dwarf (See Leviticus 21:1-23 for the full list!) But in the case of Jesus, there was no moral or spiritual blemish on His record; there was nothing that could possibly mar His effectiveness as our High Priest in the presence of our infinitely holy and righteous God.

*Fourth*, He was “*separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens*” (NASB, ESV). As reflected in both translations, these two descriptions are best understood as belonging together. When Jesus’ work on earth was done, He was exalted above the heavens where He is now separate from sinners. But He is not separated from the people to whom He ministers. Hence, it’s because of His resurrection, ascension, exaltation, glorification, and session at the Father’s right hand that He is always available to us at His throne of grace.

*Fifth*, unlike all the Old Covenant priests, Jesus had no need to offer a sacrifice for Himself, and then for the people. Our high priest fully and finally dealt with sin when He “*once for all offered himself*” (v. 27). One of the great flaws of the Old Covenant sacrificial system can be seen in the instruction given to the High Priest on the Day of Atonement: “*Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself*” (Lev. 16:11). But Jesus approaches God and offers only Himself. He did this “*once for all*,” which means “once for all time.” There is no need for any continuing sacrifice. His death on Calvary’s cross is sufficient and has settled the matter forever. He is perfectly suitable for what we need most – the cleansing of the guilt of our sin through faith in Him, and in Him alone.

*Sixth*, while all other high priests were appointed to their office by the law of Moses, Jesus was appointed to His office by God’s oath (v. 27). The oath that’s referred to here, once again, is Psalm 110:4; “*The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek*.”This would come several hundred years after the Law of Moses and was designed to supersede the earlier priesthood established by the Law. And all those priests who were appointed by the Law were still sinful men, which is why our author describes them as “weak.” But not Jesus!

The *seventh* and final characteristic of Jesus as our high priest, which makes Him far superior to all other priests, is that “*he has been made perfect forever*.” This is the third time our author has referred to the “perfecting” of Jesus (Cf. Heb. 2:10; 5:9). As we have already noted, the author is *not* suggesting that Jesus was once sinful, or imperfect. Rather, His “perfecting” points to His vocation, or His calling to be the Savior of His people. He *learned* to obey the Father by *submitting* to a lifetime of trials, testings, and temptations; and thus proved Himself to be the “perfect” man for the ultimate “job” that God had called Him to do (His once for all sacrifice for our sin).

This high priestly ministry also continues “forever,” since He has been raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father. He will never die, unlike all the previous Old Testament priests. Nor will He ever be replaced by any other, nor does His ministry on our behalf have any expiration date. It is never-ending, eternal, and everlasting.

So, what difference does this make to you and me? At least two primary applications come to mind: *First*, we are living in a world that is becoming increasingly pluralistic. To even suggest that salvation is available *only* to those who come to faith in Christ is now thought of as both arrogant and offensive. But’s that’s precisely what these verses are emphasizing!

There is *only one person*, Jesus Christ, who qualifies as the mediator between God and man. There is *only one sacrifice*, the “once for all” sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that can atone for our sin. There is *only one great high priest*, Jesus Christ, through whom we can gain access into the very presence of God himself. These verses ought to *encourage* us to stand firm in our faith, and to *embolden* us to share our faith with those who don’t know Christ. He is the one and only pathway to God.

Second, Jesus is *our* great high priest, the only person who is “suitable” and “fitting” to meet the deepest needs of our souls. He has cleansed us from the guilt of our sins. He is an ever-faithful friend who will never cease praying for us. He can heal the broken-hearted, impart His peace to those who are filled with anxiety and worry, and restore hope in His promises and His purposes for our life. It’s the sort of hope that will *energize* us in the present day and sustain us in the difficult days that lie ahead.

Why, then, do we not come to Christ more often than we do? He will never fail to comfort us when we are hurting, encourage us when we are despairing, love us when we feel unlovely, and save us when we have believing hearts. So, why wouldn’t we want to come to Him, draw near to Him, and find in Him grace and mercy to help us in our time of need – not just today – but each and every day, for the rest of our lives?