**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (22): The Book Of Better Things**

**“A New and Better Covenant,” Part One**

**Hebrews 8:1-13**

**June 2, 2024**

Just before His betrayal and crucifixion, our Lord celebrated the Passover with His disciples in the Upper Room. At that Supper, He instituted what we call “the Lord’s Supper.” Here’s what we read in Luke’s gospel: “*And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after the supper he took the cup saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood’*” (Luke 22:19-20).

When Jesus spoke those words, He was anticipating His substitutionary sacrifice on the cross. And when He offered up His body on that cross and poured out His blood so that we might be forgiven of our sins, He was inaugurating and establishing the New Covenant. So, when we come together each and every Sunday to take the Lord’s Supper, we are remembering and experiencing all the blessings that are now ours because of this New Covenant in Christ Jesus. It’s a covenant in which all who believe in Him are members.

The eighth chapter of Hebrews says more about the New Covenant than any other passage in the New Testament. The reason is not hard to find. In the previous chapter our author has demonstrated that Jesus is God’s *superior* priest (7:1-28). Now he proceeds to tell us that Christ’s *superior* ministry in the heavenlysanctuary shows that He mediates a *superior* covenant with *superior* promises (8:1-6).

This leads to a lengthy citation of Jeremiah 31:31-34, which specifies the better promises of the New Covenant (8:7-13). They include the forgiveness of sins, the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the knowledge of God inscribed in our hearts. They were initially given to “*the house of Israel and the house of Judah*,” but they now find their fulfillment in the church of Jesus Christ, which is the true “*Israel of God*” (Gal. 6:16). That’s just one of the reasons this second half of the chapter is worthy of a separate study (next Sunday). Today’s message, therefore, will only focus on the first half of the chapter (vv. 1-6).

In these introductory six verses, our author begins his argument by pointing us to our High Priest’s enthronement and ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (vv. 1-2). Then he turns our attention to the offering which Jesus had to make as our high priest (v. 3), and to His present priestly ministry in heaven (vv. 4-6).

**A. The greatness of Christ’s heavenly priesthood (vv. 1-2):** “*The point of what we are saying is this: we do have such a high priest* (as described in chapter 7), *who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man*.”

Yes, says our author, we do have such a high priest as the one I’ve just described (7:1-28). But this high priest is *so* great that He has been enthroned at the right hand of God in heaven (v. 1). Once again, Psalm 110:1 takes center stage; “*The LORD says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet*.” But until that time comes, this is the place from which Jesus now serves, interceding on our behalf (Cf. 7:25). He shares the “throne” of God,” located in the “sanctuary,” which is the “true tabernacle” (or tent) which the Lord has pitched, not man (v. 2). Thus His priestly ministry stands in direct contrast to, and is far superior than all the Levitical high priests.

**B. The Offering that Christ had to make (v. 3):** “*Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer*.”

**Q.** What offering does our authorhave in view? **A.** The one made “once for all,” when Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins (Cf. 7:27). This once for all atoning sacrifice will be developed in Hebrews 9:11-28.

**C. The present ministry of Christ as High Priest in heaven (vv. 4-6):** “*If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’*” (Ex. 25:40). *But in fact, the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which He is the mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises*.

Jesus was not a priest in the earthly Levitical order of priests because He was not qualified for it (Cf. 7:13-14), and because that priestly order already had enough priests. Those priests could only offer gifts and offerings prescribed by the Law, and only in the earthly tent, or tabernacle. But Jesus is now serving in the true, heavenly sanctuary. Further, the plan or “pattern” (blue print) of the heavenly tabernacle was revealed to Moses, and the earthly tabernacle was built accordingly (Cf. Ex. 25:40). That earthly tabernacle then became a “copy” (an example) and a “shadow” (a foreshadowing or prefiguring) of the heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus now serves as our heavenly priest (8:1-2).

Jesus, therefore, has received a superior, or “more excellent ministry” (NASB) than that of the Levitical priests; *and* as a result, the New Covenant which He mediates is superior to the Mosaic Covenant, one which is “established on better promises” (which will be specified in vv. 8-12; and later in 10:15-18). As the “mediator,” Jesus is the “middle man” between a Holy God and sinful man. His substitutionary sacrificial death has satisfied (turned away) the wrath of God which we justly deserved, and has brought the New Covenant and its promises into effect for those who come to faith in Him (Cf. Heb. 9:15; 12:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).

The stage is now set for us to look directly at the blessings of the New Covenant, which we will do in next week’s study. But until then, it’s important that we consider the implications of what these verses are saying.

First, the very existence of this New Covenant is but one more proof that the high priesthood of Christ is better than any other priestly ministry. It’s better than Aaron’s because the covenant He established is better than the one that came through Moses. Why, then, would anyone ever be tempted to turn away from such an all-sufficient and far superior High Priest?

He is “seated” in the heavenly tabernacle because His priestly work has been completed. But He is not just “seated,” He is seated on a “throne.” Only a priest “*after the order of Melchizedek*” could be enthroned since Melchizedek was both King and Priest (Cf. 7;1).

Second, these readers knew that there was a real temple in Jerusalem, and that in the temple there were priests who were offering gifts and sacrifices (Cf. 8:3-4). How easy it would have been for *them* to go back into the traditional Mosaic system, one which could be seen and tangibly experienced. How did they know that the Lord Jesus is ministering in a better sanctuary? The same way we do today; we “*walk by faith, not by sight*” (2 Cor. 5:7). The more we set our sights on Him – ministering on our behalf at the Father’s right hand – the more strength and encouragement and hope and confidence we will experience, each and every day.

Third, Jesus Christ is the one and only “mediator” between God and man. As our risen and ever

living, unchanging Savior, He guarantees that the terms of God’s new covenant with us will be fulfilled completely (Cf. 7:22). He has saved us to the uttermost, and He will keep us. There is no other “mediator” or “mediation” that we will ever need. There is no saint, or sacrament, or priest or ritual, or church that can ever add to the work that Christ has done on our behalf, or serve as a substitute for what He has accomplished. In the words of a wonderful hymn, “I need no other sacrifice, I need no other plea, it is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me!”

Fourth, it should be self-evident that the old Mosaic covenant was *temporary*. God designed it with a built-in obsolescence. He never intended for it to be the final revelation of His will. As we have seen, everything Moses did in constructing the Old Covenant tabernacle, together with its rituals and sacrifices, was only “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.” If there is any lingering doubt about God’s temporary design in the Old Covenant, it should be forever put to rest from what we shall read at the end of this chapter, “*By calling this covenant new, he has made the first one obsolete*” (8;13).

Fifth and finally, there are no commands, demands, or exhortations to be found anywhere in these verses (indeed, anywhere in this entire chapter!). Why? Because sometimes there is nothing more practical, life-giving, hope-stirring and heart-warming than to look to Jesus Christ. He is now exalted as high as anyone can be. So, perhaps all we may need to do today is to lift our sights and turn our eyes upon Jesus, and “look full in His wonderful face . . . .” And perhaps, just perhaps, “The things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.”