**JESUS IS HIGH PRIEST FOREVER**

February 21, 2016

Hebrews 7:1-28

Key Verse 7:25 “Therefore he is able to savecompletely those who come to Godthrough him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”

First, let’s be clear about what we need to be saved from. When the Bible talks about “salvation” or “being saved,” they may not carry the same meaning as what people think. The major problem in the world and in our lives is not our family problems or our wayward children or our financial problems or our failing health or terrorist threat. The main problem in the world—everybody’s problem—is how to be reconciled to God so that we escape his terrifying wrath at the judgment. That is the main problem. We need to be saved from the wrath of God that burns against all ungodliness and unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). Until we get this firmly and clearly fixed in our minds, hardly anything in the book of Hebrews will make sense. Christ can save us forever from the wrath of God because he intercedes forever with God. He continually puts himself between the Father and us as a fire-proof shield against his white-hot anger against sin. Don’t misunderstand here. It is not as though Jesus the Priest loves us and God the Father doesn’t. God the Father ordains the priesthood for our salvation. It is his idea. He sends the priest. It is his own Son whom he sends. And he loves him infinitely. All this is the love of God rescuing us from the wrath of God, in such a way that the justice of God is vindicated and the glory of God is exalted.

The reason there are priests in the Old Testament is that priests are needed to intercede for us with God. They enter the holy place where we are not allowed to go. And they take sacrifices for us so that our sins will be forgiven. All of that Old Testament priestly system was meant to teach us about our sin and the holiness and wrath of God and the inescapable judgment that is coming on us. And the point of it all was this: God has made a way to get right with God. He provided priests in the Old Testament, but it was imperfect and temporary. God provided his Son, the final High Priest. The reason for all this talk about Christ’s relation to Melchizedek is because the eternal, superior priesthood of Jesus is our only hope of eternal salvation. God’s wrath never changes. There is only one hope for sinners like us. We must have a faithful high priest, who will intercede for us forever. We need a king of righteousness (verse 2). We need a king of peace (verse 2). We need someone without beginning and ending (verse 3). Someone who has an indestructible life (verse 16). All the Old Testament priesthood could do was point toward the One superior priest (after the order of Melchizedek, Psalm 110:4), whose sacrifice of himself and whose eternal intercession would guarantee eternal salvation for all God’s people.

Look at verses 1-2. “This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.” There had been a war between 5 Kings in the area (including the King of Sodom) and 4 other Kings led by Kedorlaomer. The 4 Kings won and carried off all the plunder and a bunch of people that belonged to Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham usually stayed neutral in the Regional Wars, but this time he got involved for one reason: when they carried off the goods of Sodom, the 4 Kings also took Abraham’s nephew, Lot, and his family. In the course of rescuing Lot, he ended up defeating the most powerful king, Kedorlaomer. Abraham was returning home after this victory when he encountered Melchizedek. Genesis 14:18-20 says, “Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” After the Priest gave this blessing, Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything. It seems that Abraham gave his tithe voluntarily and gladly. Furthermore, Melchizedek willingly received the tithe from Abraham. The author of Hebrews says that Jesus is a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. We need to understand that the Hebrew Christians would have seen Jesus as ineligible to be a priest because he was not from the tribe of Levi. Of course, this fact doesn’t matter much to us. But it mattered greatly to the Jews--- and it mattered to God who made the laws about the Levitical Priesthood. And according to the Law, Jesus could not be a priest because he was descended from Judah. God took the trouble to prove that Jesus Christ is a legitimate high priest in every way. He is better and superior.

**First,** he is the guarantor of a better covenant. There was no such guarantor in the old covenant. When you sin, you had to pay every one of it. Our covenant with God cannot ever be broken, because as soon as a debt exists, Christ pays it. In the book of Philemon, Paul volunteers to be the guarantor for Onesimus. Philemon 18-19 says, “If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me…I will pay it back.” Paul is saying, “I will guarantee everything on behalf of Onesimus.” Likewise, Jesus Christ Himself, engaged as the guarantor in the service of the Father, says to the Father, “Charge to my account whatever my people do, and I will fully pay their debts. Whatever they owe, I’ll pay it.” He is the guarantee, so that our covenant with God can never be violated. Every time we bring a debt to bear, Jesus pays it. And therefore the covenant is maintained.

You know, there are some Christians who think they have to maintain the covenant by themselves. They say, “Well, I’ve got to work and make sure I don’t get disconnected from God.” They run around here and there, stirring up all kinds of works. It is all unnecessary. They are wasting their time. Jesus is the guarantor of the covenant. He takes care of all the debts. So stop trying to satisfy God by your own good deeds. God is satisfied with Jesus. That is all you need. He is our guarantor, securing the covenant, securing that it is a better covenant providing access. We think of Jesus often as a mediator, and it is nice to have a mediator, but it is better to have a guarantor. It is great to have a mediator who carries on the functions of the covenant. It is better to have a guarantor who guarantees the eternal character of the covenant. So all of God’s promises in the new covenant, then, are guaranteed to us by Jesus, who is the guarantor, who pays our debts immediately upon their being owed.

**Second**, he is a better high priest because he lives forever (23-25). The priests of ancient Israel served both man and God but at some point they all died. Verse 23-24 says, “Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.” According to Josephus, from Aaron to the fall of the temple in A.D. 70, there have been 83 high priests. Some were better than others, but they were all limited because of death. Like the priests of ancient Israel, 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 Jesus lives 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.

Look at verse 25. “Therefore he is able to save completely.” 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, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Look at verse 25b. “…those who come to God through him…” A comedian 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. He 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 his Son we have immediate access to the Father.

**Third**, he is a better high priest because of his prayers! (v. 25b) The last part of verse 25 says, “… He always lives to intercede for them.” Apostle Paul described his ministry of intercession in Romans 8:33-34, “Who shall bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” Whenever we fail or make a mistake or commit sin, the devil uses this to accuse us before God night and day (Rev 12:10), saying: “You are no good. How can you be a child of God? How can you call yourself shepherd or missionary? What you are doing is worthless.” When we hear these accusations, we lose spirit and fall into self-condemnation. We are helpless. But Jesus understands and bears all our weaknesses and defends us before the throne of God. He earnestly intercedes for us and our Father listens to him, not the devil. Because Jesus is mighty to defend us, all of the devil’s accusations fall to the ground; they are completely nullified. Jesus takes our imperfect offerings, with flaws by sin, and purifies them and present them to the Father as acceptable and pleasing offerings. God accepts us as his children just as we are and comforts us and strengthens us through Jesus’ intercession.

**Fourth**, he is a better high priest because of his completed work. When Jesus had completed the redemption of man, he was escorted by the angels to the throne of Almighty God, and he sat down at the right hand of God. One historian wrote, “We know a great deal about the temple (in Jerusalem) and it 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, 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.” But Jesus once for all time paid the penalty for sin! How this concept must have gripped the heart of the author of Hebrews because he will exclaim for the third time in 10:11-12, “Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he 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.

It was time for the Hebrew believers to let go of the old system and hold on to Christ alone. They did not need to go to the Jerusalem temple and offer animal sacrifices. They did not need an earthly high priest to mediate for them. They only needed Jesus to draw near to God. Only Jesus? To the Hebrew believers this was like a revolution. For about 1,500 years they had been observing the Levitical law and had offered millions of sacrifices. It had become part of their identity. When they heard, “the former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless,” they were shocked and said, “Are you crazy? It is unthinkable. You are blaspheming!” Though they believed in Jesus, they lacked confidence that Jesus was the only way to God. So they habitually wanted to depend on the old system. They thought that Jesus was good, but Judaism was also necessary. What is more, they would not be persecuted if they followed Jewish customs. We can understand them. Even though we believe in Jesus, it is hard to let go of old habits, customs and life patterns that are deeply ingrained. So we depend on Jesus plus something else. When difficulty comes, we can easily shrink back and drift away from Jesus. The main reason is a lack of confidence that Jesus is the only way to God who fully satisfies our souls. We know this conceptually. But practically, when a problem arises, we may depend on something else, not Jesus fully. So instead of coming to God, we may follow our old religious habits or fall into emotional dependency on others, or indulge in entertainment and games, ungodly music, alcohol, drugs. We try to solve the problems with our own strength in vain. May God help us to come to God through Jesus Christ, our eternal high priest because he can save us completely.