

Text: Hebrews 8:1-6

Title: The Perfect High Priest

Date/Location: March 27, 2011 at FBC

Introduction

Up to this point in the book, the author of Hebrews has not majored on how we must respond to Christ so as to be saved. He has said some things about believing, for instance, which we know is *the* requirement for salvation (Heb. 3:6, 3:12, 3:14, 3:19, 4:2-3, 6:1, 6:12). But by far the most uses of the terms faith or confidence or believe or trust occur in chapters 10-11. The first part of Hebrews up to chapter 10 seems rather to be focused on identifying the one in Whom our trust must be placed; then the remainder from chapter 10 forward emphasizes the need to believe in this One. I understand from this that we first need to know the Person we are being asked to trust before we can reasonably put our full confidence in Him. This does not excuse unbelief for lack of knowledge! It only means that belief must be informed belief and not blind belief.

Hebrews has very carefully discussed the change in the priesthood from Levi to Melchizedek and the corresponding change in the Law that is required to accommodate a new priesthood. But another thing important for a Jewish person to know is where priestly ministry takes place and what the content of the offerings are. In these areas also, Jesus has a superior ministry when compared to what came before.

I. Preliminaries: Two Tabernacles

As we read this passage, it becomes clear that the author is concerned about the place where priestly service happens. There used to be one such place—the OT tabernacle or temple. In the OT, the earthly place of God’s dwelling was in the tabernacle/temple. But now there is another place to consider: heaven.

A. The heavenly tabernacle is what is called **the sanctuary and ... true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man**. This is the place where God dwells, about His throne. I understand this tabernacle to be heaven itself, not a special super-temple building in heaven like the one that was in Jerusalem.

Transition: In fact, to think that way is to think about it backwards.

B. A pattern derived from the heavenly dwelling place of God was shown to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 25:1-40). This is where Moses was told **“See**

that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” The pattern is derived from the heavenly sanctuary, like an architectural sketch.

- C. An earthly model was made from the above “drawing.” This model effectively symbolized the heavenly reality of God’s dwelling place but it could not replicate it exactly. Since it was designed to be built on earth by men, it can only be a **copy and shadow** of the real thing. It would be a fading shadow at the time of the writing of Hebrews and would be totally gone in a few short months or years when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD.

Note the distance between God and man built into the tabernacle model. There were the separating veils, the washings, the altar, the sacrifices, the incense, the limited number of times someone could access the most holy place, and the limited number of officials (Levitical high priests) that could do offerings. There is a refreshing nearness that God offers to every Christian that is much different than the old ritual.

II. The Perfect High Priest: His Place, v. 1-2

I am always glad for a clear statement of the main point of a book or part of a book. Here we have it: **We have such a High Priest...** I understand this to mean that Christ in His priesthood is the primary subject matter of the book of Hebrews.

However, the message of the book as a whole is not just about Christ as High Priest, but it includes “what do we do about it” once we figure out that Christ is the last and only high priest? Well, we are supposed to believe with an ongoing type of faith.

- A. His Place: The right hand of the Father, v. 1b

He is sitting there in heaven. This posture must be important because it is mentioned in 1:3, 1:13, and again in 10:11-12 and 12:2. It signifies what Jesus cried out on the cross in John 19:30: **It is finished!** That is, the work of satisfying God’s wrath against sin is done, with no more that needs to be done or that can be done.

- B. His Place: The sanctuary and true tabernacle, v. 2.

That is the tabernacle where God dwells all the time, not the OT pattern or building that was made from the pattern. God “built” this place, heaven, as His special dwelling.

- C. Focus a moment on **such** a high priest. The author has been trying to tell us all along that we have a certain kind of high priest—such a one. He is:
1. More glorious than Moses 3:3, besides being superior to angels and OT prophets and Levi and the Levitical priesthood and even Melchizedek.
 2. The Son of God 3:6
 3. Sympathetic to our weaknesses, 4:15
 4. Sinless, 4:15
 5. Called as priest after the order of Melchizedek, 5:6
 6. Perfect high priest, 5:9
 7. Author of eternal salvation, 5:9
 8. A refuge, an anchor, a forerunner, 6:18-20
 9. Guarantee of a better covenant, 7:22

III. The Perfect High Priest: His Ministry, v. 3-6

- A. Every high priest offers something, v. 3

Gifts and sacrifices have to do with sins, as 5:1 suggests with similar phrasing.

If Christ is a high priest, then he must also have something to offer.

What it is that He offers is not mentioned here. It was mentioned in 7:27 and will be again in 9:12 and 9:14. Namely, He offered HIMSELF!

- B. If Christ were on earth, He would not be offering anything.

The idea is that if Christ were on earth (but He is not), He would be unemployed. Why? Because there were presently priests making offerings in accordance with the OT Law. Jesus would not officiate there for several reasons, one being that He was not a Levite!

1. Note that the present tense verbs **are** and **who serve**. These priests were doing offerings at the time Hebrews was written. This indicates that it was written sometime before 70 AD when those offerings had to cease.
2. It is interesting to think about the overlap between the dispensations, that is, the Law and Grace. If my calculations are correct, about 38 years of overlap existed (from 32 AD at Christ's death to 70 AD at the destruction of Jerusalem). That sounds a lot like another period of history from Numbers and Deuteronomy, doesn't it? My point here is to say that it is incorrect to think that sacrifices of animals stopped the moment Christ died. They did not. True, they were not offered rightly and they did not have any effect to cleanse from sin, but they

were offered in an outward obedience to the Mosaic Law. God allowed the previous system to fade out even while the new one gained the ascendancy.

3. These offerings and so forth were made in the copy and shadow, not the true tabernacle. We can see how ineffectual they must be if they are offered at a shadow of the real thing. The light of the glorious gospel of Christ was going to make that shadow invisible.

C. Instead, He is in heaven and has a better ministry, v. 6.

The “such” a High Priest we were talking about in v. 1 is that way because:

1. He has a more excellent ministry. Would you rather have someone down here at a shadowy temple making repeated offerings for himself and for you, or someone in heaven at God’s right hand?
2. He mediates a better covenant. This is the “New Covenant.” We have not really dealt with the New Covenant at all in the book of Hebrews, but it is one more major piece of the Hebrews puzzle that we have to put into place. It was promised in the OT, but we have not yet seen how it fits into things.

For future reference, note that I believe there is only ONE New Covenant, as opposed to some who teach there are two.

3. The covenant was legally established upon better promises. These promises were oath-based unconditional promises. Conditional promises like the Mosaic covenant always fail because we humans fail to keep our end of the bargain. Such faltering covenants give way to unconditional promises such as we find in the Abrahamic and New Covenants, and even in the Davidic covenant.

Conclusions

There is no other high priest who has these credentials. Religions with priests are worthless to bring us to God.

Our focus needs to be on our High Priest: in heaven, where God is and where we will be as well (Col. 3:1, Matt. 6:20).

We ought to have great confidence in Christ. We should believe in Him since He is the only way to be cleansed from sin.

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