

Heb 8:1-13 Jesus Is the High Priest of a Better Covenant (part 1)

When we take the Lord's Supper, we remember the 2nd part of Jesus' words: "**This cup is the new covenant in my blood. As often as you drink it, remember me**" (1 Cor. 11:25). Today's sermon will give us an opportunity to understand more deeply the meaning of these words. Chapter 8 is all about the new covenant we have in Christ. As we've seen, the old covenant, culminating with Mosaic Law, has come to an end. Look at v. 13: "**In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.**" And for weeks now, we have been comparing the new covenant with the old through the picture of Melchizedek, a priest of an entirely different order than that of the Aaron and the Levites. Look over at 7:18-19: "**For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a BETTER hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.**" No less than 14 times we see the words "better," "more excellent," or "superior" when referring to the new covenant we have in Christ. Look at 8:6: "**But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.**" With this in mind, we need this text today. We need to know what is better so we can understand the person and work of Christ, so we can know the blessings of this new covenant, so we can know the gospel more clearly, and so we can leave this place and live as new covenant Christians this week. I have 3 truths from cp. 8 as to WHY this covenant is BETTER than the old: 1) The New Covenant is established upon a better Place; 2) The New Covenant is established upon a better Person; and 3) The New Covenant is established upon better Promises. (We will only cover #1 and #2 today.)

1. Better Place. Look at vv. 1-2: "**Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent . . .**" The New Covenant is better because it is established at "*the throne of the Majesty in heaven*" in the "*holy places*" in the "*true tent*." This refers to a place, a very special place, a place unlike any other in existence. This place is none other than God's sanctuary, the place where God dwells. Though there are many in the Bible, we only get glimpses of this place. The most prominent is the Garden of Eden where God walked with Adam in the cool of the morning, unhindered by Adam's sin. But, when sin entered the world and Adam and his wife, Eve, fell, this special Garden of God's presence, this temple garden, was forbidden and they were exiled from this place of God's presence, never to return in the same way. I think of a game we played when the kids were young around the kitchen table as we would often ask one question. And I remember one of them (which I've mentioned before). We asked, "*What is the best place on earth,*" to which Josiah replied "*in mama and daddy's bed.*" To a young child there is often no greater place, no safer place, no more blessed place, than mama and daddy's bed. Why? It is the place where they are, the place of their presence . . . Well, the presence of God is the BEST place . . . ANYWHERE!

I think of Moses as he saw the burning bush that was not consumed. As he drew near God told him, "**Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground**" (Exod. 3:5). I think of Joshua who stood on the brink of war before

entering the promised land, outside Jericho. And the Angel of the Lord appeared before him with a sword in his hand. And Joshua said to him, “*Are you for us, or for our adversaries?*” And he said, “*NO; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord.*” This was no ordinary angel, but the Lord Himself. And Joshua fell on his face and worshiped him. And he said to Joshua, “**Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy**” (Josh. 5:13-15). I think of Isaiah who, in a vision, saw the Lord sitting on his throne. And the seraphim cried out: “**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.**” And Isaiah cried out, “**Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips**” (Is. 6:1-7). I think of Solomon, after building the great temple and the glory of the Lord appeared . . . IN THAT PLACE.

Brothers and sisters, because of sin, we have lost that privilege . . . Our sins have separated us from this holy God. And all these examples are mere pictures and shadows and types of that which is real, that which is true, the ACTUAL place where God dwells in his fullness? Can you imagine as a child never being able to go into the presence of your parent’s bedroom ever again, no matter how much you begged or how much you tried? This is the point of the author. The old covenant with the old priesthood is not complete. It does not, nor could it ever take you into the PLACE of God’s fullness.

Think about the Levitical high priests under Mosaic Law. Where did they minister? Where did they give their gifts? Where did they make their sacrifices according to the Law of Moses? Well, they served and ministered their gifts and offerings at the Tabernacle, and later at the Temple. And Yes, they were places! And Yes, God did (though seldom) appear gloriously, so that the priests could not continue in their work. But, all of these places were manmade places, places of the earth. They were, according to v. 5 a “copy and shadow of the heavenly things.” And this earthly “holy of holies” was as far as they could ever go. Under that system, under Mosaic Law and its instructions and requirements, that was as far as it would take them. They could never “take flight” (so to say) and ascend higher. That system of priests could not take them to heaven . . . to the BEST place. It could never restore, nor fulfill what they lost in Adam. (It could never take them back to mama and daddy’s bed.)

This is why the author of Hebrews was saying to those Hebrew Christians, “*Do not go back to that covenant.*” It was good for its time. But it was merely a copy, a shadow, of the heavenly things. It can only take the you into the earthly holy of holies! It can only offer lambs and goats. It is not sufficient. That system cannot take you all the way to the throne room of God! But, in Christ, we have a high priest who is seated where? Look at 1:3: “**After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . .**” And 1:8: “**But of the Son he says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever . . .**” And 2:9: “**But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor . . .**” And 4:14: “**Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens . . .**” And 6:19: “**We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.**” And 7:26: “**For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.**” Brothers and sisters, those priests of the OC

ministered in an earthly tabernacle or a temple. And they could only enter a room built by men. Look at v. 5: **“They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.”** The earthly holy of holies is merely a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things. But where does Jesus minister? He ministers in heaven itself, the “true tent” in the place that the “Lord set up, not man.” He ministers where the fullness of God dwells!

Jesus teaches this truth, in part to Nicodemus in John 3:12-13. He says, **“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the son of Man.”** And Paul says to the Ephesians: **“He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.”**

Brothers and sisters, today, Jesus is the high priest of a better covenant, the NEW Covenant. Why? Because ONLY HE can take us to God. Only HE can restore us to the presence of God. And as Christians, the first result of this work is to give us the Holy Spirit. **“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold the new has come”** (2 Cor. 5:17). By the Spirit, we are united to Christ . . . NOW. And where does he sit? At the right hand of the majesty on high! This is why Paul can say **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places . . .”** (Eph. 1:3) And, He **“raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus . . .”** (Eph. 2:6) Already the Spirit is the **“firstfruits”** given to us (Rom. 8:23).

This is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the high priest of a better covenant because he takes us to a better place. And let me say it isn’t so much the place itself, but WHO is at the place that is important.

2. Better Person. The New Covenant is established upon a better person. Look at v. 3: **“For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.”** And then look at the 2nd part of v. 4: **“since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law.”** Under the Old Covenant, the most important, the most crucial, the most significant person was the high priest. The entire Mosaic System was dependent upon the high priest to function and do what God required, what God commanded, on behalf of the people. And in this service as high priests, they offered gifts and sacrifices. We’ve seen this already back in 5:1: **“For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”**

Here I need to ask a question: *“What kind of gifts and what kind of sacrifices did those priests offer?”* Well, these gifts were in the form of burnt offerings (Lev 1:1-17), grain offerings (2:1-16), fellowship offerings (3:1-7), and offerings of thanksgiving (Lev. 7:12-13, 15; 2 Chr. 29:31; Ps. 50:14). And then there were different kinds of sacrifices. This included the burnt offerings (Lev. 5:1-19), sin offerings (Lev. 4:1-35), and restitution offerings (Lev. 5:1-19). And finally, there was the Day of Atonement when sins committed during the entire year were forgiven (Lev. 16:1-34). I have another question: *“What did all these gifts and offerings have in common?”* . . . these foods and incense and different kinds of birds and goats and lambs and bulls. ALL of these gifts and sacrifices were OF THE EARTH. They were of the order of the Levitical Priesthood,

which was coming to an end. And why must they come to an end? They must give way to that which all of those gifts and sacrifices pointed, to the ONE who is the fulfillment of all those shadows and copies.

One of the best stories in the NT is John the Baptist as he preaches, saying, “**Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.**” In all his preaching he speaks of ANOTHER soon to come of whom He “**is not worthy to bend down and untie his sandal straps**” (Mark 1:7). And there on the Banks of the Jordan River as he was baptizing, he looked up and he saw Jesus. Do you remember what he said: “**Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world**” (John 1:29). Look back at vv. 1-2: “**Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven . . .**” And then in v. 2: “**a minister in the holy places . . .**” Where, in the “**true tent that the Lord set up, not man.**” We’ve seen already that this “tent” is a place. But, this “tent” or “tabernacle” is also a PERSON. Do you remember John’s words who said of him: “*The Word became flesh and . . . (tabernacled) among us?*” HE “dwelt” among us. This tabernacle is none other than the incarnation, the body of Christ. Look over at 9:11-12: “**But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.**”(Heb. 9:11–12). Here, the author distinguishes between the holy of holies in the temple and the body of Jesus Christ.

And this is so important. What did the OT priests offer? . . . the blood of bulls and goats. But, what did Jesus offer? He offered HIMSELF! And what kind of offering was He? Look at 7:26 “**holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners . . .**” This is why Jesus can say, “**Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true Bread from heaven**” (John 6:32). Brothers and sisters, Jesus offered himself. He laid down his life as a sacrifice. And consider the most glorious truth that “**in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell**” (Col. 1:19). I think of the virgin birth and his conception by the Holy Spirit. Look over at 10:5: “**Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a BODY have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do you will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”**

If Jesus would have been of the same order of priests as Aaron and the Levites, he also would have offered up earthly animals. But, he is of a different order to which Melchizedek points. Now, come back to 8:6: “**But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better . . .**” As a Church when we take the Lord’s Supper and say, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood*” we remember these great truths. This covenant does more than merely take us into an earthly holy of holies. It takes us to heaven. And this covenant does not rely on the gifts and sacrifices of a sinful man. It is established on a better PERSON, who is the Lord of heaven and earth!

So, as we come to an end of this sermon this morning, what do these truths mean for us. I’ll mention just a couple.

Application: Only God can do what it takes to save us. None of our efforts can ever take us to God. In the person of the Son, God is the ONE who makes the way. The PRIEST IS the OFFERING. Rom. 5:8.

Application: If we will come to God, we must do everything God's way. Look at v. 5 **"See to it that you follow God's pattern."** The world want to goes it's "own" way. But, this is not God's way. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life . . ." (John 14:6). This is also true of how we do church, and how we order ourselves as a body. This is also true in the way we worship.

Application: We should often dwell upon the beauty of Christ.

Application: Really our goal in this life is to worship this ONE we preach!

At the end of the day, this is what Christianity is! In the New Covenant We have a better place, a better person, and better promises (next week).