

## Sermon Summary #21

### Once for All Hebrews 7:26-28

At our community group leaders gathering here on Friday night I spoke about what has been called the “*scandal of particularity*”. What many perceive to be the “scandal” of our evangelical faith is the idea we promote that there is ***only one particular pathway to God; only one particular and exclusive opportunity to be saved; only one particular person, namely, Jesus Christ, through whom we are reconciled to God.***

At the conclusion of my session on Friday night, in addressing this topic, I made this comment:

“The so-called ‘scandal’ of particularity is in fact an unimaginable expression of divine mercy. That God should provide ***even one way*** for the salvation of hell-deserving sinners is remarkable. That salvation is available ***at all*** through faith in Jesus Christ is not a ‘scandal’ but a breathtaking revelation of God’s amazing grace.”

Here in Hebrews 7:26-28 we see this “scandalous” revelation of divine mercy and amazing grace yet again. Our author will say to you and me as clearly as he possibly can that *there is only person*, Jesus Christ, who qualifies as the mediator between God and man. *There is only one sacrifice*, that of Jesus Christ, that can atone for our sin. *There is only one great high priest*, Jesus Christ, through faith in whom we find eternal life.

#### *How Fitting!*

The translation at the beginning of v. 26 isn’t the most helpful and I sense that it fails to communicate the force of what our author is saying. I would render it something along the lines of: “For it was ***appropriate*** for us to have a high priest” like Jesus, or it was “***suitable***” or it “***perfectly meets the needs*** of people like us” to have Jesus for a high priest.

This is nothing short of profound when you think through the implications. He’s telling us in no uncertain terms that ***this is what we need***. Jesus Christ in his capacity as our high priest is the perfect answer to whatever questions we might ask. Whatever is required for you to experience maximum satisfaction and joy in life now and hereafter, Jesus acting on your behalf as your high priest will supply it. ***Jesus as high priest, and Jesus only, will do for you what you most need but not necessarily what you most want.***

You and I were created for a purpose. We are not a random collection of molecules formed through endless ages of evolutionary development. We exist for a reason, with a goal lying before us, and Jesus as our high priest alone will make it possible for us to reach it and to fulfill it. Jesus alone is suited and is appropriate for the task of helping us enter into the deepest and most lasting enjoyment of the ultimate reason for which God created and redeemed us.

***Is this not the sales pitch for virtually every product on the market?*** Whether it’s a new car, a faster computer, more fashionable clothing, a more promising career, or a more attractive companion, this world wants you to believe that it can provide what is most “suitable” and “appropriate” and “fitting” for your soul. ***But there is in fact only one thing you absolutely must have: Jesus Christ as your faithful and merciful high priest!***

This being true, be assured that the world, the flesh, and the Devil will do everything possible to convince you otherwise. Don’t believe their lies! Ignore their promises! They provide at best temporary relief and only passing pleasure and will eventually destroy you.

There's only one thing you need to trust: Jesus Christ as your faithful and merciful high priest and the once-for-all sacrifice of himself on your behalf. Consider how the prophet Jeremiah warned the people of the 6<sup>th</sup> century b.c. about this very thing:

Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit" (Jer. 17:5-8).

So pause for a moment and think deeply and honestly on this question. God is saying to you and me in this passage that ***there is only one thing that is "fitting" and "suitable" and "appropriate" to the needs of our souls: Jesus Christ as our great high priest.*** Here is what that means.

Do you need cleansing of your conscience from the guilt and shame of a rebellious life that was devoted to sinful self-indulgence?

Do you need a sacrifice to be offered up on your behalf to bridge the gap between you and God?

Do you need a hope for the future that will never disappoint, the sort of hope that will energize you in the present moment and sustain you in the difficult days that lie ahead?

Do you need a friend who will never cease to pray for you, a friend who will never berate you or betray you or ridicule you or make fun of you or let you down?

Do you need to know you are genuinely and eternally loved and cherished even when everyone else abandons you?

Do you need to be useful in a cause or a ministry that will produce something of everlasting value?

No one can meet the genuine needs of your heart and mind and body and emotions except for Jesus Christ as your faithful and merciful high priest. A lot in this world can satisfy those numerous superficial needs you think are essential for your happiness. In fact, *our entire society depends for its very existence on convincing you that you need something more than and other than Jesus Christ and what he does for you as your merciful and faithful high priest.*

Believe it or not, there are a lot of people in Christian churches who actually look to some religious leader or spiritual celebrity or perhaps their Pastors and their Elders, to fulfill this role that only Jesus can. And then when that man or woman fails, they are shattered. We are being inundated today with moral failures and financial scandals. I pledge to you with all my heart that I will walk in sexual purity and financial integrity. By God's grace and with the help of the Holy Spirit I'm committed to fulfilling that promise to you until the day I die. But please don't put your trust in me. Jesus alone merits your trust.

Listen closely: ***I'm not your high priest!*** I and the other Pastors and Elders at Bridgeway are just like the priests of the Old Covenant: we are weak (7:28) and mortal (7:8, 23) and in need of a sacrifice for our own sins (7:27).

Some of you are actually tempted to live your spiritual life vicariously through me. Some of you think: "If Sam studies the Bible, I don't need to. The only thing that's important is that I can tell people I attend a church where the Bible is studied and understood and taught. That will suffice for my spiritual needs." No it won't. Or you think: "I don't need to share the gospel with my non-Christian friends and co-workers. Andy Edwards is our pastor for missions and evangelism and he does enough of that to suffice for my spiritual welfare and to fulfill my obligations." No, he doesn't. The fact that your Pastor or an Elder or your community group leader prays and presses into the heart of God and pursues the gifts of the Holy Spirit is not a substitute for you doing so yourself. There is only one high priest and his name isn't Sam. It's Jesus.

So, the point of these opening words in v. 26 is that *there is only one who suits the needs of your soul; there is only one who meets perfectly every need and every cry of your heart; there is only one who is appropriate to your predicament, and his name is Jesus.*

*But how do we know Jesus is up to the task?* What gives us such confidence? What makes him so special? How is he any different from Buddha or Mohammed or a really gifted counselor or close friend or Bible teacher? The answer is found in the seven-fold description of him that follows. So let's begin by taking them one at a time.

#### *What makes Jesus so Special?*

R. T. France perhaps put it best when he said that the following words in vv. 26-28 point to the "total goodness and godliness" of Jesus (102). Let's look at them closely.

(1) Jesus our high priest is *holy*. This isn't the normal word for "holy" in the NT. This term (*hosios*) means *morally pure*. It is the utter opposite of impious. It points to the fact that Jesus alone was devout, pious, and always pleasing to God (see Heb. 5:7-8 and 10:5-10).

Sadly the word "holy" has lost its punch in our day. Just consider how we employ it in such flippant ways: there's "Holy Toledo!" "Holy cow!" "Holy mackerel!" "Holy smoke!" "Holy roller." And the list could go on without end. And the problem worsens when you apply the word to a person. It conjures up the image of someone who rarely smiles, looks like they've been sucking on a lemon all day, is quite unpleasant to be around, and lives in constant fear that someone somewhere is actually having fun in life.

But that's not what it means when it is applied to Jesus. It means that notwithstanding the barrage of temptations he faced, together with the appeal and seductive allure of his own world to abandon faith in God and fornicate and lie and steal and ambitiously promote his own cause, he remained perfectly committed to God and his will.

(2) He is also said to have been *innocent*. This means that he was without guile or guilt. He wasn't immune from being accused of sin and evil. The Pharisees certainly attempted to do that on several occasions. It simply means they had no grounds for doing so. Whether it was the law of God or the law of the land, he is without blame. This applies not only to his outward actions and words but also to his inner motives and feelings. He was marked by integrity and untouched by evil.

(3) He was also *unstained*. This word has in view the ceremonial purity that was required of high priests during the time of the Old Testament. Here are some of the so-called blemishes that would disqualify a man from serving in the tabernacle:

- Making contact with a dead body
- If he had a bald patch on his head
- If he shaved off the edges of his beard
- If he had any self-inflicted cuts on his body
- If he was blind or lame or had an arm or leg that was longer than the other
- If he had an injured foot or hand
- If he was a hunchback or a dwarf

Just to mention a few . . . (see Leviticus 21:1-23 for the full list).

These requirements, of course, in no way suggest that if you have such an affliction today that you are unqualified or unholy and thus excluded from God's love or his presence. Rather, God used these physical limitations or blemishes to teach a spiritual lesson, namely, that access to the presence of God requires utter and absolute perfection.

In the case of Jesus, he was morally and spiritually unstained. He had no moral blemish on his record. There was never an instant that he fantasized wicked or perverted thoughts or spoke an unkind word or chose to violate a divine law. He was holy, innocent, and unstained.

And why is this so important for us today? Well, *consider what it would mean if Jesus were unholy, guilty, and stained by sin*. It would mean that he, like you and me, would be given to impatience. He would often react to us with irritation and annoyance. He would be inconsistent in his love and would tend to make decisions selfishly, based on what best serves him rather than what is in our interests. He would be driven by prideful ambition, greed, lust, and self-protection. Is that the sort of Savior and Lord you want? Is that the sort of great high priest you desire to intercede on your behalf at the right hand of God? Is that the sort of friend on whom you can rely and to whose loving care you can entrust your life? I don't think so.

***But how did he remain sinless?*** My guess is that your instinctive and immediate reaction is to say: "He never sinned because he was God." Well, of course, in one sense you are correct. Jesus was and is and will forever be God in human flesh, God incarnate. And God by definition cannot sin. But I think the answer lies elsewhere. ***I believe Jesus remained holy, innocent, and unstained because he consistently relied upon the indwelling and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit.***

Make no mistake about the reality and force of the temptations he faced. He felt the full impact of Satan's seductive appeals. He wasn't immune to the appeal of gaining money by illegal means. He knew what it was like to gaze upon a woman and be tempted to lust and fantasize. But he never yielded to such enticements. Why? Because he never ceased to draw upon the power of the Spirit to continually redirect his thoughts to his heavenly Father and to the beauty of holiness and the surpassing pleasure of obedience. Consider John 3:34-35 as illustrative.

"For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand" (John 3:34-35).

Here John is describing *the unprecedented presence of the Spirit in the life of Jesus*. But who is it that "gives" the Spirit and who is it that receives?

Some insist it is Jesus, the Son, who gives the Spirit to those who receive his testimony (v. 32). But more likely God the Father is "he" who gives the Spirit without measure to Jesus, the one "whom God has sent," the one who "speaks the words of God." Three reasons:

- (a) This view alone makes sense of the first half of v. 34; i.e., the words of Jesus are to be identified with the words of God *because* Jesus receives the Spirit without measure. It is the Holy Spirit who inspires/enables Jesus to speak the very words of the Father.
- (b) This view connects v. 34 with v. 35; i.e., preeminent among the "things" given by the Father to the Son is the Holy Spirit.
- (c) This view sets up a contrast between Jesus and all who preceded him: however much of the Spirit the OT prophets and kings and priests may have had, Jesus has him all! Jesus, unlike those who came before, has received of the Spirit "without measure" (superabundantly, bountifully, completely, in unlimited fullness).

If Jesus spoke the words of God because he was God, if he acted and served and ministered solely by virtue of his own native/inherent deity, why would he be given the presence of the Holy Spirit (least of all "without measure")?

The primary thing I want you to see today that connects this text with ours in Hebrews 7 is that ***the reason or cause for the consistent faithfulness of Jesus in always speaking the words of God perfectly is the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life***. And the practical relevance this has for us is that ***the same Spirit who indwelt and empowered Jesus has been given to us that we might likewise be indwelt and empowered for holy living***.

(4) The fourth thing said about Jesus as high priest is that he is *separated from sinners*. This may simply be a way of summing up the three previous points. He is "separated" not in the sense of refusing to fellowship with us, not in the sense that he regards us as beneath his dignity, not in the sense that he won't draw near to us and love us and always be present with us. Rather, he is "separated" in that he never has and never will commit the sins we commit.

However, others argue that he is separated from sinners “by being exalted to the heavenly realm. The separation that occurs is produced by Christ’s exaltation” (O’Brien, 280). He no longer lives in the physical presence of sinners and is no longer exposed to their temptations or failings.

If that is the case, and I believe it is, we should connect this description of him as separate from sinners with the next phrase where he is said to be *exalted above the heavens*. This phrase points to his transcendent glory and would encompass his resurrection, ascension, exaltation, glorification, and seating at the Father’s right hand. He has departed from this earthly sphere in which sin reigns and has entered the heavenly realm in his Father’s presence where no sin is allowed.

(5) On the basis of all this it should then be obvious that unlike the OC priests, he had no need to offer a sacrifice for himself and then for the people. Rather he dealt with sin when he *once for all offered up himself*.

As reassuring and helpful as was the Old Covenant sacrificial system, it had inherent flaws and shortcomings. One was the fact that the man making atonement for sin had to include himself in the offering. In the instruction for how the Day of Atonement was to unfold, we read this:

“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).

Try to get this picture in your mind. People bring incense to burn at the altar hoping that the fragrance will appease God and avert his wrath. Others bring a financial gift hoping it will pay off their spiritual debt. In the OT they would bring a lamb or a goat hoping that the sacrifice will cleanse their conscience. In our day people envision themselves bringing some good work or a long list of promises and good intentions and pledges and a description of past accomplishments hoping that when God sees it he’ll say, “Well, that’s quite impressive. I forgive you.” Or they bring a drink offering and pour it out as a libation to atone for their failures. Or they bring the first fruits of the harvest. Some today even cut their own flesh on the deluded belief that the shedding of their own blood will make things right and soothe their uneasy conscience.

***But Jesus approaches God and offers only himself!*** The sacrifice was of his own life, but also of his intimacy and fellowship with the Father. He gave it up and endured separation under divine judgment so that we might never have to endure such horror.

He did not make an offering *for* himself but *of* himself *for* others.

And he did this “*once for all*” (v. 27). Once for all doesn’t mean once for all people but once for all time. It points to the finality of his death. There is no need for another. No second or third or one-thousandth sacrifice for sin is needed. We don’t have to atone with a sacrifice for every sin we commit. It’s been done once and for all time by Jesus.

So this one word translated “once for all” points to a single historical event that is *unrepeatable* precisely because it is *altogether sufficient, enough, and perfect*. May we now and forevermore put an end to our needless and blasphemous efforts to atone for our own sin, as if by some act or promise or gift or personal sacrifice we could satisfy God’s wrath. Christ has done it: once for all!

Before I leave this point I want to say one more thing. This statement at the close of v. 27 to the effect that Jesus “*offered up himself*” finally and forever puts an end to the obscene idea that on the cross God the Father was cruel and abusive and compelled his Son to suffer judgment in our place. ***The offering of Christ on the cross was Christ’s idea***. He did it joyfully, lovingly, freely, voluntarily. Jesus wasn’t the victim of coercion. He didn’t knuckle under to his Father’s iron will. The authority to offer up his life was his alone. Yes, it was the joint will of the Father, Son, and Spirit that this occur. They all together joyfully concurred in the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. So put an end to all blasphemous talk that somehow the cross was an occasion of “cosmic child abuse”! Never!

(6) The high priesthood of Israel was as exalted and honorable an office as anyone could possibly attain. But those who were appointed were still sinful men. They failed and forgot and were late for appointments and lusted and

were covetous and prideful and yelled at their wives and didn't always treat their kids with kindness and justice. They were as beset with sin as you and I are. That is why he refers here to their "**weakness**" (v. 28).

However, the point of importance is that all such high priests were appointed to their office by the "law" of Moses. But not Jesus! Long after the Law of Moses regarding the high priesthood had been given, God appointed his Son to be high priest and sealed it by an **oath**. The oath he's referring to is found in Psalm 110:4, "The LORD has *sworn* and will not change his mind, You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." This oath came several hundred years after the law.

(7) The seventh and final characteristic of Jesus as our high priest that makes him special and incomparably superior to all other priests is that his priestly office and ministry lasts **forever**. Now that Jesus has been raised and exalted to the right hand of the Father he will *never* die; he will *never* be replaced by another; there are *no* term limits to his office. His ministry on your behalf doesn't last for a year or a century or a millennium. It is everlasting and eternal!

The perfection in v. 28 does not mean that Jesus was sinful and morally imperfect and only later rid himself of such flaws. It points yet again to the way in which he demonstrated that he was entirely qualified to serve as our high priest. He endured a lifetime of testing and hardship and temptation, and in every instance proved faithful. Whenever obedience was called for, he obeyed. Whenever the right word was needed, he spoke it. Whenever the righteous deed was appropriate, he performed it. As he progressed through life on earth he moved from untested obedience to tested and proven obedience and thus showed us that he was qualified and capable of filling the role of our great high priest.

### *Conclusion*

*Why then will you not come to Christ?* What do you fear? Are you afraid he won't receive you? But v. 27 promises that he is "able to save to the uttermost" anyone who draws near to God "through him." Are you afraid if you do come he won't be adequate to meet your needs? Are you afraid he'll mistreat you like others have done so in the past?

Oh, but this is the glory of knowing that he was, is, and always will be holy, innocent, and unstained. Put positively it means that he never acts out of selfish motives or overlooks those in need or fails to provide grace and power to those who ask. He never fails to comfort the hurting or to encourage the despairing or to forgive the repenting or to receive the outcast. He never fails to show mercy to the oppressed or to love the unlovely or to save those who believe. Why then will you not come to Christ? There is no other way. So Come.