**January 10 – Hebrews 7-8**

Alrighty, strap in because today is the one and only day that we are going to examine two chapters in one day. Here we go. ☺

The book of Hebrews is the only book of the New Testament that expressly refers to Jesus as our High Priest. And the key chapters that focus in on that aspect of Christ’s ministry on our behalf are Hebrews 6-9. This makes these chapters of incredible significance for us to study. You cannot read the Old Testament without acknowledging that the priesthood was a big deal. And all that they did pointed to and found its fulfilment in the person and work of Jesus. However, the way that Hebrews explains this has sometimes proven difficult for people, especially when it comes to this mysterious figure, Melchizadek. So, for today’s shepherding notes, I will focus in on three main topics of these two chapters: Jesus is part of a better priesthood, Jesus is a better high priest, and Jesus provides us a better covenant.

1. Jesus is part of a better priesthood.

It may be a good idea for you to go back and read Genesis 14:17-24 in order to get a good sense of the historic events that Hebrews is referencing. The beginning of the chapter sets its attention on summarizing the unusual nature of Melchezedek. Here are the highlights.

1. He was a priest of the one true God four generations before Levi was born, and more than 500 years before the birth of Aaron. Apart from references like this and the book of Job, we would not know that there were any saved people in the world apart from Abraham, and especially not enough to require a priest.
2. His name and titles are royal – King of righteousness and king of Salem, meaning king of peace.
3. He has no record of father or mother or genealogy. This does not mean that he popped into existence without parents. Rather, this is to highlight that his parents were not recorded, nor were they part of a priesthood. Therefore, his position as priest was not inherited.
4. There is no record of his birth or death, and in that way he resembles the Son of God. His priesthood has no retirement date. (The Levitical priesthood had a required retirement date at one’s 50th birthday – Numbers 8:24-26.)

A Jewish person would struggle to consider Jesus as a priest because of how connected the priesthood was to the tribe of Levi. Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi, He was from the tribe of Judah. Therefore, many would scoff and say that it was impossible for Jesus to ever serve as priest. This is why Hebrews goes back more than five centuries before the priesthood was established in order to anchor the priesthood of Jesus to this figure, Melchizedek. And this should not have been a surprise to the people of Israel because Psalm 110 expressly predicts that the Messiah would be a priest **forever**, after the order of Melchizadek. Hold on to that thought about the eternal reign of this priest as we consider our second point.

The other major argument showing that the priesthood of Melchizadek is greater than the priesthood of Levi is found in verses 4-9 where Hebrews reminds us that it was the greater (Melchizadek) that was paid a tithe by the lesser (Levi through Abraham). And the blessing was given by the greater (Melchizadek) to the Lesser (Abraham and his offspring). Therefore, The priesthood to which Jesus belongs is not lesser, not just equal to, but notably superior to the priesthood of the Old Covenant.

1. **Jesus is a better High Priest.**

This permanence is a big part of Hebrew’s argument. Consider verses 23-24, “The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. “ This is just one of the many reasons Jesus is a better high preist, according to these verses. Consider just how much greater He is. Unlike other priests, Jesus is

1. A forever priest (7:23-24)
2. Able to save to the uttermost (7:25)
3. Always lives to make intercession for us (7:25)
4. Holy, innocent, unstained, and separated from sinners (7:26)
5. Exalted above the heavens (7:26)
6. Sacrificed HIMSELF for us (7:27)
7. Seated at the right hand of the Father (8:2)
8. A more excellent ministry enacted on better promises (8:6)
9. **Jesus provides a better covenant**

The author of Hebrews takes a large quote from Isaiah 31:31-34 in order to highlight the point that it was always God’s plan to make a new and better covenant. Jesus has given us the New Covenant that He spoke to with His disciples the night He was betrayed. There, he told the disciples that this New Covenant was “in His blood.” This means that it was ratified (or made legally binding) at the cross. Hebrews 8:13 tells us that this New Covenant makes the old obsolete.

**For further study:**

This is an article from Ligonier about the order of Melchizedek that you may find helpful.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/priest-order-melchizedek>

**January 11 – Hebrews 9**

Yesterday our primary focus was on Jesus as High Priest. Today we are going to primarily focus on Jesus as the sacrifice. So, right up front, I want you to try to get this image in your mind’s eye. Imagine a priest, decked out in all his official garb, carrying a spotless, gentle lamb to the altar to be killed. Now, realize that every time that happened, it was always intended by God to be a picture of Jesus the priest offering the Lamb, which was Himself to be sacrificed.

“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.”

This chapter is paralleling the priestly work of Christ to the priestly work on the day of Atonement in the Old Testament. The most important imagery to grasp in order to understand this passage is the setup of the temple. In particular, it is vital to understand that the inner chamber of the temple was called the ‘Holy of Holies.’ It was the place where the presence of God dwelt. The beginning of this chapter reminds us that the Ark of the Covenant was in that room. (Or if you prefer to use the Latin term, Sanctum Sanctorum.)

The only the High Priest was permitted to enter, and only once a year. And when he did go in, he had to take a sacrifice of blood for himself, and for the nation. He would then take part of that sacrifice back out and sprinkle it on the people to indicate that the penalty of their sin was taken care of by the what had occurred. (As we will see tomorrow, those sacrifices never took away sin. There was only one sacrifice that was able to do that, and that was the sacrifice of Christ. However, when people sacrificed in faith, they were effectively looking forward to the self-sacrifice of Christ who truly did wipe away their sin.)

Christ, our better High Priest, entered into the true Holy of Holies in heaven to offer Himself as an effective sacrifice. Unlike the other sacrifices that had to be given year after year, Jesus’ sacrifice was effectual, and therefore occurred only once “to bear the sins of many.”

Here are three quick things to notice about this sacrifice:

1. **Death was required to inaugurate the covenant.** Verse 17 – **“**For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.”
2. **Death is required to forgive sins.** Verse 22 - “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”
3. **His death is able to purify our conscience from dead works.** Verse 14 – “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

**For further thought:**

1. Why is a blood sacrifice required to cover sin?
2. Why did God institute the practice of animal sacrifice if it didn’t actually save people?
3. Why did Jesus’ suffering only occur once rather than “suffering repeatedly?”

**January 12 – Hebrews 10**

**The Only Acceptable Sacrifice**

Hebrews 10 begins with an air tight argument as to why the Hebrew people should never, for even a single moment, consider returning to Judaism. Simply put, those sacrifices can’t take away your sin. That is why they were always repeated (verses 2-3). And, it is IMPOSSIBLE for animal blood to actually absolve anyone’s sin (verse 4). Jesus’ singular sacrifice is the only one that can perfect anyone (verse 14).

With most of the epistles (letters) in the New Testament, there is a discernable transition from orthodoxy (right beliefs) to orthopraxy (right living). In Hebrews, that division is not as sharp as it tends to be in the letters written by Paul. However, we have now arrived at that point in Hebrews when the author is primarily speaking to orthopraxy (right living). Consider the kind encouragement toward action.

Verse 22 – let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith

Verse 23 – Let us hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering

Verse 24 – Let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works.

**Encouragement to Gather**

Notice that one of the key expressions of unwavering hope and faith is the commitment to gather. We are told not to neglect meeting together. (Verse 25) Remember the context of this book. The author is speaking to suffering Jews who were being tempted to leave the faith and return to the defunct system of Old Covenant Judaism. And the first thing that he highlights as a practical point of action is to continue to gather in person with one another.

Due to the obvious complications of the previous two years, this has been a difficult thing for many people to know how to apply. But one thing that is unquestionably true as we study the Word, avoiding fellowship with the saints is detrimental to the soul and sanctification of the believer. We are called to prioritize gathering. This author is writing to people that were being highly mistreated, and some would even eventually be killed for their faith. Yet, he calls them to faithfully and regularly gather. If you are in a situation where your health risks have caused you to limitations in gathering, then please pursue as much fellowship as possible through other avenues until you are able to return. Facetime, phone calls, text messages, home visits, and social media connections are helpful temporary substitutes.

**Warning to Persevere**

Verses 26-39 present a frightening warning for those who profess faith, but continue living in unrepentant sin. For such as person, there is only a “fearful expectation of judgment.” The point is, talk is cheap. Anyone can say that they love Jesus. But if that is true, then the trajectory of that person’s life will be to leave sin behind and pursue godliness. For us to run that race, we need endurance (verse 36). Tomorrow we will read of Old Testament saints who endured. But to close out this chapter, the author provides an encouragement for those who truly believe. “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”

**For further thought:** This article helps us think about how to be intentional about stirring one another up to love and good works. <https://www.9marks.org/article/wanted-plotting-and-provoking-church-members/>

**January 13 – Hebrews 11**

We have now arrived at one of the most famous chapters in the entire Bible, and certainly the most well-known from the book of Hebrews. As usual, I won’t recap the entire chapter, but will only cherry pick three main concepts to focus in on. However, this summary of the Old Testament proves to be an incredibly helpful tool that you can use when you do study the first 39 books of the Bible. When you are reading about Noah or Abraham or Moses or the others mentioned, jump forward to see what Hebrews 11 has to say about their faith.

**Faith**

This chapter is not revisionist history seeking to whitewash the sins of the men and women listed. These were real people who sinned, sometimes in spectacularly devastating ways. The Bible never hides the flaws of its heroes. Noah got drunk, Moses killed a man, and Abraham lied about his wife. All of these men and women failed. Every one of the Hebrew people who read this chapter would have known about those failures. But, the point being made in this chapter is not that they earned their way into God’s favor. Rather, the point is that they were able to endure and not shrink back in the face of internal sin or external pressure. Why not? Because faith enables weak and sinful people to be used by God.

**The Object of Faith**

Faith is defined by the author in verse 1. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” However, this verse does not explain the OBJECT of faith. The rest of the chapter describes how each of these saints of old were able to succeed; namely by looking forward to Jesus. Everyone has faith in something. For example, when speaking of Abraham verse 10 says, “For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” And of Moses it says in verse 26, “He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.”

These men and women lived centuries, in some cases millennia before Christ, yet they believed in the promises that God made in such a way that it directed and shaped their entire lives. Yes, they certainly stumbled at times. But, the trajectory of their lives were marked by a dedication to do whatever God commanded, because they believed in the promises that God made to them. How much more should we, on this side of the cross, look to the promises of the Savior and stand in faith. This looks like living in obedience and persevering to the end because His promises are steadfast and true.

**God can do the Impossible**

So many of the things on this list were more than just difficult; they were impossible. Verse 12 refers to Abraham’s body as being “as good as dead.” Yet, God gave him a child. Noah was saved from the flood, Enoch was taken without tasting death, “women received back their dead.” Simple put, there is nothing outside of God’s power. The only thing that is impossible in this chapter is found in verse 6. “And without faith it is impossible to please him.”

**For further encouragement** – By faith… <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXB8ihepUpE>

**January 14 – Hebrews 12**

**Looking unto Jesus**

Yesterday we saw the great faith of men and women from the Old Testament. Chapter 12 begins by informing us how we, likewise, are able to endure every trial imaginable. The simple answer is that we look to Jesus. He is the one who initiates true faith (1 John 4:19). He also promises to complete our faith (Phil. 1:6).

Jesus endured. He endured the wrath of God. He endured the physical abuse of man. He endured the shame of sin. Why? Because there was joy set before Him. He had joy in obeying the Father’s will. He had joy in bringing many sons to glory. And we will share in His joy forever, if we also endure. Your endurance in the Christian life will hold out precisely as long as you are able to set the eyes of your heart on the Savior. Just like Peter sank in the waves when His eyes wandered from Christ, so we will struggle in faith when we lose our focus on Christ. So daily turn your heart to Him.

**Disciplined in Love**

Good parents discipline their children. A good God disciplines His children. In other words, the author of Hebrews is arguing that if you are able to go on sinning and you encounter no consequences (emotional or circumstantial), then “you are illegitimate children and not sons.” God uses suffering to grab our attention and correct our actions. This does not mean that all suffering is the result of sin. It does however mean that God can and does sometimes use suffering in order to redirect our hearts to him. This kind of discipline is able to  yield “the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Verse 11)

**Fearless Faith**

Verses 18-29 contrast two mountains. The first is Mount Sinai which represents approaching God by way of the Law. The second is Mount Zion, which represents approaching God through the gospel. The first produces only fear and judgement. The second provides joy and freedom from sin. (Here is a great sermon that explains this incredibly well - <https://www.ns-bc.org/sermons/sermon/2022-01-09/mount-ever-rest-hebrews-1218-24>)

Because we have come to Christ through the gospel, we have a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Charles Spurgeon explains it like this. - “Material forces are not available in our warfare, for we do not wrestle with flesh and blood. The tyrant may burn our martyrs and cast our confessors into prison, but the pure truth of Jesus is neither consumed by fire nor bound with chains; it has within itself essential immortality and liberty. The doctrine that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners is no more to be wounded by the sword of persecution than is the ocean to be scarred by the keels of navies. When winds may be manacled, when waves be fettered, and when clouds may be shut up in dungeons, then—no not even then—may the Word of God be bound.” – Charles Spurgeon

**For your encouragement:** In light of these truths, consider verse one of this excellent hymn. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw89qxcfDV8>

**January 15 – Hebrews 13**

Today we finish out this wonderful book. The final chapter is a collection of various final encouragements and commands. Let’s highlight four.

**Money and Sex**

The two issues that are most likely to destroy a church are the same that that often destroy marriages and families: sexual sin or money issues. It is difficult to overestimate just how detrimental to your soul these sins prove to be. They both also leave those around you devastated, hurt, and broken. The author of Hebrews does not make extensive arguments about these things as he has with the theological matters of earlier chapters. Instead, he simply states that “God will judge the sexually immoral.” And He commands that we be content with what we have. Why? Because of the promise that God will never leave us or forsake us. That is a very interesting line to draw. It means that God’s promised presence is of greater value than a bank account that is overflowing. He then quotes a couple of Psalms highlighting that we don’t need to fear financial difficulties if we have the Lord. Why? Because “what can man do to me?”

**Reproach**

Our culture treats Christians like idiots. In the rare instances that Christians are portrayed in movies and television, they are depicted as unintelligent, pugnacious, and hypocritical. This is not new. Christians have been ostracized since the inception of the church in Acts 2. That negative reaction of repulsion in the heart of the unsaved is referred to here as ‘reproach.’ But, if we experience reproach, we are in good company. Jesus was crucified outside of the city. This was a picture of being set outside the camp. In the Old Testament, that was done to those who were considered ‘unclean.’ The picture being presented is that Jesus, the only pure one in all of history, was considered defiled on our behalf. Therefore, let us join Jesus and “bear the reproach that He endured.”

**Leaders**

Much of the middle of this chapter is about how the church is supposed to submit to and honor those who have been set apart to lead them. It is a reminder to me that I will give an account for the ways in which I shepherd you. And you will give an account for how you have been led. The reason that I write these shepherding notes is simple. I want you to be strong in the faith and daily renewed in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am thankful that you have made this responsibility joyful and not filled with groaning.

**Benediction**

You may notice that when we close our services, we generally have a verse that begins with the phrase “Now to Him” or “Now may He” or something of that nature. These verses are blessings being spoken over the people. (That is what the word benediction means.) Hebrews closes out with a blessing over the people that they might be equipped in every good work. This means that all that has been commanded in this book can only occur in our lives if God equips us to carry it out and works in us what is pleasing to God. And, it says that this is all for the purpose of Giving Jesus Christ all of the glory. In other words, all of the promises and commands and warnings of this book are accomplished in us by Jesus and for Jesus. To Him be the glory forever and ever, Amen.

For your joy: Congratulations! You have finished one of the 29 books of the New Testament. This book is all about perseverance. And you, good friend, are already persevering in the study of God’s Word. Keep striving toward the goal. ☺