



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 17th February 2019

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Hebrews 7:20-28

Subject: Part 20, Chapter – The Greatest Priest, Jesus

No matter how many times you read the Book of Hebrews, you can't fail to see the greatness of our Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus, which is the point of the book. The Spirit of God makes it so clear, concerning the relevance of the Old Testament and the New. I believe Lloyd Jones was right to say that to separate these books of Scripture is a grave mistake.

Here in our text this morning we see the Holy Spirit once more exalting the Saviour as the Superior priest of all and in all times. He does so in three very distinct ways.

1. Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant.
2. He is the eternal Saviour.
3. He is Holy and sinless.

Sure, as we read and listen to the text, it gives us not only good reason to praise God but added information to know Whom it is we worship! Jesus in His high priestly prayer said the following in John 17 verse 3:

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”.

This is the kind of knowledge that leads to a deeper relationship and an enriched one as well. Facts and figures about the Scriptures, may impress people but it sure as anything does not save souls. You can know the Hebrew, the Greek and even the history of the Bible and still end up in hell. The Jews knew a great deal about a lot of things until it came from the pictures of the Old to the Person in the New, and for many it went pear-shape. It seems their biases and teachers, along with their traditions, got in the way for many; and still does so today. I am not necessarily speaking about the Jews either, for many religious people would lay claim to believe in Christ but it's not the Christ of Scripture they believe in. We have referred to Matthew 7:21-22 so many times in regard to this truth!

Tradition was monumental in Judaism as we see from Matthew 15:1 to 13. Jesus had to deal with it on a number of occasions especially in John 8 concerning Who he is. God's Covenant didn't cover the priest and yet it was a very important aspect to the maintenance of the covenant which we will be looking at in the next chapter. Verses 20,21 and 22, point to a very interesting and maybe not a very noticeable fact but one that the Jews would not wish to discuss, which is that the priesthood was not given under an oath from God, but it was given by God.

This is what these verses are expounding. Jesus' Priesthood is the greatest because God Himself has sealed with an oath. Let's just read those verses again.

Hebrews 7:20-22 -

And inasmuch as it was not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'Thou art a priest forever' "); so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

God did not swear to Aaron that his priesthood would be forever. In fact, God never suggested to Aaron or to anyone else, that that priesthood would be anything but temporary. However, many Israelites no doubt thought that it would be permanent, sure what else or who else could take their place? But their belief had no basis in Scripture in any shape or form. God never made an oath or any sort of promise, conditional or unconditional, that this priesthood would be eternal. On the contrary, He swore an eternal priesthood with Christ, just as David wrote in Psalm 110 verse 4, to which the writer here refers to for the fourth time

in this book (see 5:6; 6:20; 7:17). To make the point more emphatic, David added in that Psalm, that God will not change His mind, which is what we see here in these verses. God made an eternal decision about the new eternal priesthood.

No-one, neither David or the writer of Hebrews suggest that God's oath was any more reliable or valid than His bare word. When God makes eternal transactions, He has chosen to seal them with an oath, by His name sake and for His name sake. The oath does not represent greater truthfulness or greater faithfulness, but puts the emphasis on its permanency and encompasses the gravity of what is promised for our understanding.

As already emphasized several times, the Levitical priests' ministerial duties in the Temple were not ongoing. They took turns to minister and as the insight that Luke 1 verses 8 and 9 show us, they drew lots on what kind of duties they would undertake when it was their turn. The Priest's duties were temporary even though the duties had to be completed on a regular basis, regardless of which Priest or High Priest fulfilled the responsibilities. The Priests were sinful men, so they always had to offer sacrifices for themselves before they were qualified to offer them for the people. The sacrifices themselves only had a certain temporary effectiveness, and so, they had to be repeated and repeated. God intended for that priesthood to operate in that way because it was only a shadow of what was to come, it was pointing to the Messiah. He did not plan for it to be perfect or permanent, and so did not establish it with an oath.

When God made His covenantal promise to Abraham, however, He did so with an oath (Genesis 22:16-18 and in Hebrews 6:13). This promise was unconditional and eternal as we read in Hebrews 6 verse 17.

"God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the un-changeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath"

God wanted Abraham, and eventually all Israel as well as all the world, to know that this promise was permanent. It was through Abraham that the Messiah came, and therefore the blessings that every believer will experience throughout all of eternity is a perpetual fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant.

Not only is Jesus' priesthood based on an oath of God, thereby, it is eternal and unchangeable but Jesus is the guarantor of this oath.

1. Jesus is the guarantor of this oath

You know when we buy appliances, they come with a guarantee and we are glad of them when the appliance breaks but they usually come with Ts & Cs. These are not such a big deal really, they are standard. But if you go to the bank for a loan, and someone become a guarantor for you, they are basically saying, if you don't make the payments, they will be responsible for them. This is a whole lot more serious, isn't it? This position comes with responsibility, and if you don't make the payment as you promise, then your relationship with the guarantor may be fragmented. Back in the old days, and I'm talking about really old days, like in the time of Jesus, according to historical evidence, people could become guarantors for people in prison, which meant, that a person in prison could get out for a few hours or days, whatever, and the guarantor would take their place until they came back. If they didn't come back, then the guarantor would have to serve their sentence. A great example of this is in Philemon verses 18 and 19 when Paul was willing to be surety for the runaway slave, Onesimus. Addressing the owner, Philemon, Paul writes of Onesimus, "*But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account; I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it.*"

So, imagine the Jews who read this for the first time, that Jesus is our guarantor? They knew exactly the weight that was on these words, but do we?

The covenant that God made through Jesus is better than the old one. Jesus took our place on the cross, he made the payment because we couldn't and he stands before God continual interceding for us, not making our relationship with God worse, but better. Colossians 2 verses 9 to 14 -

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. ¹¹ In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³ And you, being dead in your trespasses and

the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,¹⁴ having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

It is important to recognize that the Old Covenant was God given and He gave it for a time and it served its purpose for that time. It pointed towards the Messiah and helped prepare the way for Him. Until the coming of Jesus Christ, the Mosaic covenant was exactly the covenant that Israel was supposed to have. The New Covenant is better because it is complete and eternal. The Old was good; the New is better.

Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant and He guarantees it. He has become surety for it. All of God's promises in the New Covenant are guaranteed to us by Jesus Himself. He guarantees to pay all the debts that our sins have incurred, or ever will incur, against us.

Just give that one truth time pass from the brain to touch your heart and it will bless you. How can we continue in sin when such love is been demonstrated towards us?

2. Jesus is our Eternal Saviour - Hebrews 7:23-25

And the former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing, but He, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

While the Levitical Priests had a retirement age, the Aaronic priests had what might be called the ultimate disqualification for permanent ministry: death. No Priest could serve indefinitely. Each died and had to be succeeded in order for the High Priesthood to continue. Once again, the Jewish readers are reminded of the limitations of the Old Covenant.

In Numbers 20:23-29, Aaron, the first high priest and forerunner of all succeeding priests, was about to die. God commanded Moses to bring Aaron and his son and successor, Eleazar, to Mount Hor, in view of all the people. God reminded Moses that Aaron, like Moses himself, would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. The human giver of the law and the human forerunner of the priesthood would both die before Israel entered the Promised Land. This brief account is a typology of two things about the Old Covenant, firstly it was not permanent,

and secondly, neither the law (represented by Moses) nor the sacrifices (represented by Aaron) could deliver from the wilderness of sin and bring into the land of salvation.

Jesus Christ, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Jesus is the superior High Priest because He needs no successor. Jesus is able to grant eternal salvation to those who draw near to God through Him, and He makes intercession for us which is why we have such security regarding our salvation. We can no more keep ourselves saved than we can save ourselves in the first place. Just as Jesus has power to save us, He has power to keep us. Constantly, Jesus Christ intercedes for us before His Father. Through Jesus Christ, we are able to

"stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" (Jude 24).

Taking everything I have just said, it is now time to think about when it says *'those who draw near to God'*, what exactly is that saying, what is that implying, who is drawing near? Does it mean that if a person chooses to draw near to God then and only then, God is able to save? To really look and understand what this is stating, we need to understand two views in regards to this. I know what my standing is, but do you? So, I'm putting it to you for your consideration, and if you are not sure, then you really need to think about it as it has a big impact on your theology. The two views are opposing ones, and are called Synergism and Monergism.

Synergism believes that God and man work together, each contributing their part to accomplish regeneration in and for the individual. As John Hendryx, a Calvinist theologian, explained what synergism is

"...the doctrine that there are two efficient agents in regeneration, namely the human will and the divine Spirit, which, in the strict sense of the term, cooperate. This theory accordingly holds that the soul has not lost in the fall all inclination toward holiness, nor all power to seek for it under the influence of ordinary motives."

In other words, God has offered salvation, and man must receive it.

The opposite to Synergism is the Monergistic view. This view believes that the people of God are objects of God's election. They do not participate in it, and do not contribute to, the salvation or regenerative processes. Monergism is the view which holds that God works

through the Holy Spirit to bring about the salvation of an individual through spiritual regeneration, regardless of the individual's cooperation.

So why is it important to look at these opposing views? We need to have clarity about the work of salvation in our lives especially in the days in which we live. People can make all sorts of good arguments, but remember you only have to be 1 degree out in your sail path, to miss out your destination.

You need to back ideas and beliefs with Scripture, so now it's time to be Bereans and search out the scriptures for yourself. But when you get a chance to do it, and it's a whole bible study in and of itself, you need to ask the question – does it partially have to do with human choice and if so, who gets the Glory, is it me for my part and what I've done or is it completely God, for His Grace and what He has done?

So who is this passage written to, and this is the reason for me mentioning these view-points? Is it to the who-so-evers who read it? Or is it to the believers? Well I believe that it is to the elect. The Scriptures are very clear that God has chosen His own from the foundations of the earth and that He will draw those who are His to Himself. Remember it is not just what we are saved from, but what we are saved unto which is why it says here that He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Jesus. The believer is welcomed always in scripture to come boldly before God's throne, we are always called to draw near, for it is God's Grace and Jesus' redemptive work that gives us eternal Salvation, and bring us into eternal relationship with God.

The power of salvation is Christ's ability for we know that He is able. Hallelujah! He can do it, He has done! As Terry said last week, Only He has the power to open up the seals, which we looked at in Revelation 5. Evangelicals are often criticized for claiming that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. The reason we make this claim is that this is what the Bible teaches. Jesus Himself said

“No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

Jesus not only is able to save, but He is the only One able to save. He is the only One who has the power of salvation (Acts 4:12).

One of the purposes of salvation is to bring men near to God. Deliverance from sin qualifies believers to come to God. Deliverance from sin has all three of the major tenses—past, present, and future. In the past tense, we were freed from sin’s guilt. In the present tense, we are freed from sin’s power. In the future tense, we shall be freed from sin’s presence. So we can say, "I have been saved," "I am saved" or "I am being saved", and "I shall be saved." All these statements are true; all are scriptural. Together, they represent the full, completeness of our salvation. In His Son, Jesus, we are now blameless in the Father’s sight. When we are glorified, we will be blameless in His presence.

As we come to the last two verses of our text this morning, we see that **Jesus is Holy and Sinless** – Hebrews 7:26-28

For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

Unlike any earthly Priest, Our High Priest, Jesus, is holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens which is why He is the Greatness. It was fitting, necessary, that He be such a person. Otherwise He, too, would have had to offer sacrifices for Himself first, and He, too, would have had to repeat the sacrifices over and over and over. Jesus offered only one sacrifice, and that one not for Himself but for us. He did it once. A perfect sacrifice by a perfect Priest and it was done, for all time and it was accepted by God. He could only be the eternal and perfect High Priest if He were completely righteous and sinless. And He is.

As believers, we are all holy in the sense that we are set apart in Christ for righteousness. We are counted righteous in Him. But Christ’s righteousness is in Himself. He was holy from the very beginning, eternally holy. He was born into this world holy. He was not capable of sin. He said of Himself,

“The ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me” (John 14:30).

There was no sin in Jesus to which Satan could appeal. Jesus is **innocent**, or harmless. Holiness points towards God, harmless towards men. Jesus injured no man. He lived for

others. He went about always doing good to others, including those who had done, or who He knew would do, Him harm. He healed but He never harmed.

Jesus was **undefiled**, free from any moral or spiritual blemish. Think about it. For 33 years Jesus Christ was in the world, mingling continually with sinners and being tempted continually by Satan. Yet, He never sin. Just as the rays of the sun can shine into the foulest stagnant pond and not lose their radiance and purity, so Jesus lived his life in the sinful, defiled world without losing the least of His beauty and purity. He moved through the world and remained untouched by any of its blemishes. He came into the most direct and personal contact with Satan, yet left as spotless as before they met. There never was a priest who was undefiled until Jesus. What evidence of His Deity, for God cannot sin, therefore Jesus was **separated** from sinners! He was of an utterly different class. It is because of this, He is **exalted** above the heavens. Because He is holy, innocent, undefiled, and separated from sinners, He is therefore exalted.

Is Jesus' Priesthood, sacrifice, intercession, salvation, his guarantee and his new covenant really sufficient? Here in this Book, it is saying absolutely, without any doubt yes!! He is sufficient in every way for He is the only way for *The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind.*

So why is it that we see so many Christian churches today starting to look back into Judaism? Are you aware of this? Are you aware of strong Kabbala influences creeping into the church? Or even the circulation of replacement theology that is coming in? Are you aware of teachings that put you into a position of power where God becomes your servant and not the other way around? This is replacing the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ of the bible, with another because many are not Bereans enough. Read Galatians 1 and you will see that what is happening today isn't a new movement. They are replacing Jesus with another Christ, read Matthew 24 verse 4 and verse 24. They are even introducing another bible, read Revelation 22 verses 18 to 20 and Deuteronomy 12 verse 32.

The fact, the simple true fact that there is only one Lord and Saviour that we can cling to. That we can see from our text this morning, Jesus is not just Sufficient but He is Superior, above all. As I close, I just leave you with the words of a song which I hope you will be blessed -

There is only one Lord that we cling to;
There is only one truth that we claim;
There is only one way that we walk in;
There is only power in one name.

And in the strong name of Jesus,
By the blood of the Lamb,
We are able to triumph;
We are able to stand,
In the power of His Spirit,
By the strength of His hand,
In the strong name of Jesus,
By the precious blood of the Lamb.

Though apart from Him, we can do nothing;
By His Spirit, we can all things
Covered by His blood, we are made righteous;
Lifting up the name Christ the King;

Amen.