



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 24th February 2019

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Hebrews 8

Subject: Part 21 – Service and Covenant of Christ, Our Great High Priest

Familiarity can bred contempt and in our rush, often, we forget the old in order to find new things. To some, these chapters may seem repetitious but they are far from that. The text begins with positive certainty, not in conclusion, but in continuances of the revelation concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, we see from verse one it states “Now the main point” which is emphasizing that this is a chapter which is focusing us on what has been taught. Here in this chapter the Holy Spirit is building block by block truths, ensuring that we understand the huge impact that these truths have on us as believers. Many great and marvellous things have been presented and explained but each and every one of them have been related either directly or indirectly to Christ’s High Priesthood which is superior and the New Covenant.

His Seat

Verse one also informs us that Jesus, our Great High priest has taken **His Seat** in Glory at the right hand of the Father’s throne. Of all the furnishings in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple, a seat was never part of it. God did not make provision for one and we know already

why. The priests job was never done because the sacrifices they offered were never permanently effective therefore there was never time for rest. The mercy seat in the Holy of Holies was not a seat for the High Priest. It was to represent the throne of God and it would have been utterly blasphemous for the high priest on that day of atonement to have taken a seat. It was for God alone and His special presence.

However, when Jesus Christ offered His sacrifice, He sat down (Hebrews 1:3). He was qualified to sit down because His atonement was done. His last words on the cross were, "*It is finished*", in other words, it is completed. He accomplished in one glorious act what all the priests of the Old Covenant had not been able to accomplish and could never accomplish, the forgiveness of men's sins and thereby their reconciliation to God. What a marvellous and wonderful High Priest we have in Jesus. He did it all in one sacrifice, the sacrifice of Himself but not for Himself. As far as our salvation is concerned, He has taken His seat. He has accomplished all that can be accomplished, all that needs to be done.

It is truly a work of the devil, to undermine the work Jesus accomplished on the cross on behalf of us, which is why we see so many people deceived into still trying to add to the simple and pure Grace of God, and to salvation by faith. It is illogical to think that the work of Christ needs anything added to it but that is the great deception. The bible is so clear that the saving effort of our Lord cannot have anything added to it, because it is absolutely perfect.

The right hand of a monarch symbolizes honour, exaltation, and power. To stand at his right hand was honour, but to sit beside him was a supreme honour. Christ sat down at the right hand of the throne of thrones, God's heavenly, eternal throne.

The idea of sitting at the right hand may have reminded some Jews of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council of seventy elders. This group had both civil and religious authority as they acted administratively as well as judicially. Even under Roman rule, the Sanhedrin were allowed considerable power, as evidenced by their role in Jesus' final arrest and crucifixion. It acted as a supreme court, and more. When the members sat in judgment, a scribe, or secretary, sat on either side of the presiding judges. The scribes on the left side were responsible for writing condemnations, while the ones on the right were responsible for writing acquittals.

So when we read here that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the father we can see that he is faithful to his word – remember John 3 verse 17 –

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

As High Priest, He now sits in the place not only of honour and power but also of mercy. He sits there making intercession (Hebrews 7:25) writing acquittals, as it were, for His own.

Jesus Christ has been given the place of honour. He has been ushered into the heavenly Holy of Holies. He is seated with God on His throne. Even more amazing is that, as believers, we will one day be invited to sit on that same throne.

"He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21)

WOW!!! WHAT A DAY THAT WILL BE!!

The book of Hebrews repeatedly reminds us that Christ is at the right hand of God. I think the purpose of these reminders was to assure those who were feeling deprived of the Temple services in Jerusalem that they did not need to fear losing out on what was going on in the symbolic, temporary Holy of Holies. Now they had the true, perfect, eternal Priest in the real, heavenly Holy of Holies, of which the earthly one was only a poor and soon-passing picture. In the real Holy of Holies, in Heaven itself, Jesus Christ is ministering and interceding for all believers. Accordingly, the crowning argument for the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ is His exaltation into heaven to sit at the Father's right hand in the place of honour, mercy, and intercession.

This brings to my mind the tragic but beautiful story from the book of Acts when Stephen was taken out of Jerusalem to be stoned to death for preaching the unsearchable riches of the gospel of Jesus Christ so powerfully before the Sanhedrin. Stephen had a vision just before he died and it says in Acts 7 verse 55 -

"he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55).

His Sanctuary

We come now to verses 2-5 and we read as follows,

A minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain."

The sanctuary in which Jesus ministers is infinitely superior to the one in which the Jewish priests ministered. As expected, the superior Priest ministers in a superior sanctuary. He does not minister in a temple of cedar and gold, or in a temple of white marble, beautiful and impressive as they were, much less in a tabernacle made of animal skins. But Jesus' sanctuary is in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man and which can never rot, crumble or be destroyed.

The word true is not used here as the opposite of false. The true Israelite tabernacle is not being contrasted with false tabernacles, or temples of her pagan neighbours. Nor is the idea that the Israelite tabernacle itself was in any sense false. It was temporary and inadequate, but it was not false. "True" is used here as a contrast to the shadow of things to come. The comparison is between the typology and real, between the temporary and the permanent.

The Old Covenant with all its rituals and ceremonies and altars and sacrifices and tabernacle and temples, were but shadows and types, pictures and reflections, of the realities of the New Covenant. These all were just heavenly patterns. Earthly worship, even the most sincere and godly, is only a remote reflection of what worship is like in heaven. The earthly priesthood is only an inadequate shadow of the real priesthood which we will look at next week in Chapter 9 God willing.

This leads us to verse 3 of chapter 8 -

His Service.

For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer.

This verse begins to take the argument from the general to the particular. Some would, and have questioned, "If Christ has finished His work and He is seated in heaven, does this mean He has nothing to do now? Is all of His priestly work finished?" As was just touched on a moment ago, the answer is, No. His sacrifice is finished; His atoning work is finished but all of His priestly ministry is not finished and we should be very thankful that it's not, because he is still interceding for us! He is truly a ministering priest.

Remember Hebrews 5, we looked briefly at the distinction between gifts and sacrifices. Gifts referred to meal offerings and sacrifices to blood offerings. The gift offerings were given to represent personal dedication, commitment, and thanksgiving to the Lord. The blood offerings, on the other hand, were for cleansing from sin. The priests were responsible for offering both. Not even the simplest meal offering could be made by a lay person. A person would bring an offering, but it could be presented to God only by a priest.

Jesus has offered the one final perfect blood sacrifice that is sufficient for all time and for all who believe. This work of His is completely finished, because there is no need, and there will forever be no need, for any additional sacrifice for the cleansing of sin. But, the need for His redeemed people to come to dedicate and commit and give thanks is not over.

And, under the new covenant, we can personally bring gifts of praise and thanksgiving before the throne of God, our prayers are like incense before God, for we under the new covenant are priests unto God. We can praise God, thank Him, commit and dedicate ourselves in worship, obedience, and service to Him, through Jesus Christ. Anything of any value or consequence we do as believers must be done through our Lord.

"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:17; Ephesians 5:20).

So, this bring us to look at **The Superior Covenant**.

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. (Hebrews 8:6&7)

Jesus' superior seat and His superior sanctuary are evidences of His superior ministry. His superior ministry is confirmation of the superior covenant, which He mediates and which has superior promises.

A Mediator is someone who stands between two people and brings them together, a go-between in a dispute, conflict or contract. He must represent both parties. In religion, a priest is seen as the mediator between God and men. Many false religions have priests who claim to do just that reconcile men with God, or with their gods. These, of course, are all pseudo-mediators because, though they may represent men to some degree, they cannot represent the true and living God at all. The Old Covenant with Israel had its mediators. In ceremonial matters those were the priests, and only the priests. Moses, however, also acted as a mediator of the Old Covenant (Galatians 3:19; Exodus 20:19; Deuteronomy 5:5). In a sense, the prophets were mediators only of God's Word to Israel.

The Israelite mediators, assuming they were legitimately doing God's work, were not false mediators, as are those of other religions. The Israelite mediators were true only in the sense of being proper, of being and doing what God wanted them to be and do. However, They could not, in and of themselves, bring men and God together for they, too, were but copies and shadows.

The New Covenant not only has a better Mediator but better promises and it is faultless. All covenants are based on promises. Sometimes promises are by only one party, sometimes by both. Promises can be conditional, sometimes they are not. As far as God's covenants are concerned, He makes them and keeps them, they are significant and steadfast, they are also in His timing, for His glory and our benefit. Men break their promises, God does not. What follows here in verse 8 is very important. If it stood by itself, it would make no sense, but these words come with great force and explanation. They are crossed reference from the familiar book of Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 31

For finding fault with them, He says, "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah". (Hebrews 8:8)

The Old Covenant which is being referred to here is the covenant made on Mount Sinai when the Law was given. It was not false, but it had faults not on account of God but on account of man's fallen nature. As Paul stated in Romans 7 verses 7 to 12

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." ⁸But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. ⁹I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. ¹⁰And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. ¹¹For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. ¹²Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

If that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. Its faults were seen in its limitations. It was limited to a people, to a nation and it only highlighted sin from the outside, but it did not do an inward work. This was pointed out by Jeremiah, one of the Jews' own prophets who prophesied of a new and better covenant - Jeremiah 31:31 to 34 -

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— ³²not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The writer is saying here in the book of Hebrews, "Look what your own Scriptures have to say about the advantages of the New Covenant. You should have been expecting a New Covenant to come, and you should already have known that it would be superior to the Old. One of your own greatest prophets told you this hundreds of years ago."

Yet millions of Jews even today are hanging on tenaciously to the Old Covenant, even though their own Scriptures, through their own beloved prophets, have told them. It's been in their Scriptures for well over 2,000 years that a new one was to come.

We can note at least eight factors that show that the New Covenant is superior to the Old.

The first one is that this new covenant is: **WRITTEN BY GOD**

A will is a type of covenant and illustrates beautifully God's covenants with His people. Though many people may be involved in its provisions, a will is written by one person, the one whose will it is. A beneficiary has no part in determining the benefits. He can only accept or reject, but he cannot change what the will provides for him. The New Covenant in Christ, the Messiah, is based solely on God's sovereign terms. *I will effect a new covenant*, the Lord told Jeremiah.

The second thing we see is that: It's completely **DIFFERENT FROM THE OLD**

The covenant in Christ is new and is better, different in every way. It is not just an enhancement or modification. It is not slightly different, but radically different, from the old one. God effected a new covenant, which was "*not like the covenant which I made with their fathers*" (v. 9).

Thirdly and very importantly, the covenant was made; **WITH ISRAEL**

The new covenant, unlike the old one, includes Gentiles. A problem that the prophet Jonah had as he witnessed God's saving mercy on the Gentiles from Nineveh. The Israelites believed that God made covenants with them and only them. Yet in the Books of the Prophets we find that God had a plan for the Gentiles, for the people of all nations also. There were many such prophecies, examples include - Micah 4:2 –

Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Daniel 7:14 –

Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.

and Isaiah 49:6 –

Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.' ”

For God to even enter into covenant with the Gentiles was unthinkable to the Jews. Talk about putting God in a box. But thankfully this is not the case with the new Covenant. It is for the who-so-ever that believes in the gospel truth.

Paul reasoned in Romans chapters 4 to 8 that even the people who were supposed to keep the covenant of God did not and could not on account of their fallen nature. This was proved in their history, periods when the nation (more Israel than Judah) had totally apostatised from Him. It was however the Lord that always made the first move in bringing them back. God keeps His word which is why God still has promises to keep to Israel, He is not finished with them yet! Praise God!

A Fourth factor is: **IT IS NOT LEGALISTIC**

“Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not care for them, says the LORD”. (8:9)

The blessings of the Old Covenant were conditioned on Israel’s obedience to the law that God gave with the covenant. When Israel did not continue, God judged them. Under the law, His care depended on their continuance. However, Israel’s disobedience did not annul the covenant, but it forfeited all the blessings of it. It was a covenant of law.

Not so the New Covenant.

Which bring us to the Fifth factor. **IT IS INTERNAL, NOT EXTERNAL**

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (8:10)

The law under the New Covenant is internal not just external. Everything under the old economy was primarily external. Under the Old Covenant, obedience was primarily out of fear of punishment but under the New covenant, obedience comes from an internal place of

adoring love and worshipping thanksgiving because the Spirit of God is at work within a believer's life. Formerly God's law was given on stone tablets and was to be written on wrists, foreheads and doorposts as reminders (Deuteronomy 6:8-9). When the old law was given, it was intended to be in His people's hearts (Deuteronomy 6:6) but the people could not write on their hearts like they could write on their doorposts. Now, the Holy Spirit writes God's law in the minds and hearts of those who belong to Him. In the New Covenant true worship is internal, not external, its real and not ritual (Ezekiel 11:19-20, 36:26-27; John 14:17).

The Sixth factor is – It is **PERSONAL**

And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. (8:11)

Being internal, the New Covenant has to be personal. It is personal not only in God's law (His Word) being within us, but in His very Spirit (who is a person) being within us. Every believer has a resident Counsellor, a resident Helper, a resident Teacher, a resident Friend.

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26).

God is a person, not a force. You can communicate to Him and He with you. Often people approach God with these new age ideas that if you formulate a behaviour and a pattern, that God should answer your prayers, but that is not how God works because He has His ways, His reasons, His will because He is a person. Which is why so many believers get so frustrated when God doesn't answer their prayer in the way they want, and in their timing. I've often heard, but I did this and I said that.... But not very often do I hear, I am waiting to hear what God wants, what is His will. Very different hearts.

Another amazing factor, the Seventh one – It **BRINGS TOTAL FORGIVENESS**

For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more. (8:12)

Here is the capstone of the New Covenant. Here is what men need more than anything else and what the Old Covenant pictured but could not give. The promise of the Old Testament is

finally fulfilled! Under the Old Covenant, sins could never really be forgotten, because they were never completely forgiven. They were only covered, foreshadowing and anticipating true forgiveness in Jesus Christ. But under the New Covenant, for those who belong to His dear Son, even those in the old Testament, and there were many who saw His day and believed, for those who believe, God forgets every sin, past, present and future for this is an incredible part of the New Covenant.

Lastly - **It's 'FOR NOW**

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (8:13)

In sharing the gospel with Jews, whether in New Testament times or today, it must be said, that one of the biggest stumbling blocks for them is the idea that the Old Covenant has passed away, and that it is no longer valid for them or for anyone else. God does not honour that covenant anymore and His promised new Covenant has been fulfilled. It is infinitely better than the old one, through His Son, Jesus Christ, the Jews' own Messiah. It is hard for a Jew to realize that the Old Covenant, with its laws and ceremonies, was only a symbol, a picture of God's plan for them and for the world.

The Old Covenant symbol is not bad, and was never bad. It had a beautiful, God-given purpose. It pointed to the Son, represented the Son, foreshadowed the Son before He came to earth. But now that the Son has come, the symbol has no more purpose, and God means for it to be discarded.

The old sacrificial system was completely over when the veil was split in two when Christ's sacrifice was completed (Matthew 27:50-51; Mark 15:37- 39; Luke 23:44-46). At that time, Christ's unique, never-to-be-repeated sacrifice was finished with the result that all believers in Christ had direct access to God (1 Timothy 2:5-6). When Titus destroyed Jerusalem after this book was written, he destroyed the Temple. Without the Temple, there was no altar and no Holy of Holies. There could therefore be no sacrifices and no ministering priesthood. Without a priesthood and its sacrifices, there could be no Old Covenant. It was finished. When verse 13 was written, the obsolete covenant was on the verge of disappearance. The destruction of the Temple completed the closing of the Old Covenant by removing the place

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of sacrifice that no longer served a purpose. The age of the Mosaic law and the Levitical priests was over. The New Priesthood was established forever under the new Covenant.

We not only have reason to praise God, but we have the pleasure to come into His presence and communicate with Him. Prayer is so under rated and least sought after, yet we know that it is our greatest strength. For God answers prayer. To stand before his presence as a forgiven sinner saved by grace, is surely the greatest and most blessed position for us to be in. Every minute, every hour, every day – 24/7/365 is not a date to remember but the code we are given to come before Him.

Amen.