

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 7, Verses 23 - 28
Notes From Class on November 24, 2009
Last Revised on (November 26, 2009)

Good evening everyone!

Welcome to our continuing study of the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

Before we begin please make sure that you have everything you need.

Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

If you are using an English translation of the Bible other than the English Standard Version ("ESV") then you may like to have the handout we have prepared, which has the ESV text of Hebrews (in its entirety).

There is coffee and tea at the back.

Please get what you need and, then, let's get started.

Review

So far we have finished reading and discussing everything through Verse 22 of Chapter 7.

Before we continue reading I will give a quick **summary** of what we have studied so far.

Let's remember that...

Hebrews is a document written in Greek around the end of the **First Century A.D**

It is perhaps best thought of as the text of a **sermon**,

preached to a particular church which the preacher **knew**.

One of his main objectives was to encourage them to **hold fast** to their confession of faith.

It seems that most of them had confessed their faith in Christ **long before** this sermon was given

but that at least some of them were in danger of "**falling away**".

Please turn with me now to the beginning of Hebrews and follow along with me as I quickly **summarize**.

In **Chapters 1 and 2** we read of the **unqualified supremacy** of Christ.

He is the eternal Son of God.

greater than everything in all creation,

including even the angels.

However is not the angels he came to help, but the offspring of Abraham (2:16)

whom we understand to include all men and women who put their faith in Christ.

This is why the Son of God became a mortal man and lived among us for a while,

"so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." (2:17b)

At the start of Chapter 3 we are reminded that,

Just as he is superior to the angels,

Christ is superior to Moses.

We are therefore urged more strongly to hold fast to our confession of Christ

and not to behave as did the Exodus generation in Israel,

most of whom rejected God and his servant Moses

Contemplation of the Exodus generation dominates Chapters 3 and 4

This is held up as a picture of what it looks like when God's chosen people "fall away,"

and this picture is used to admonish all who hear this sermon to hold fast their confession of Christ.

The last paragraph of Chapter 4 reads:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (4:14-16)

The first 10 verses of Chapter 5, explore the metaphor of Jesus as our great high priest, by looking at the three ways in which he is like the Levitical high priests of the Old Testament.

Perhaps you remember:

 First, a priest must make offerings for sins --- Jesus **himself** is the perfect sacrifice.

 Second, a priest must **understand** the weaknesses of his people --- Jesus understands.

 We were created by, through, and for him; we **belong** to him.

 He himself, and only he, has experienced the struggle and suffering of **perfect** obedience to God.

 Third and finally, a priest can only be appointed by **God** --- Jesus was appointed by God,

 not as a Levitical priest, but as something infinitely better: a priest **forever** of the order of Melchizedek.

 The author has much more to say about **Jesus** as our priest and the Biblical figure **Melchizedek**,

 However he does not expect it to be **easy** to explain these things to his audience,

 because they have become **dull** of hearing.

 Thus he embarks on a long and difficult digression, and admonition, regarding the dangers of **apostasy**,

 which runs from **verse 11 of Chapter 5** all the way until the **end of Chapter 6**, where the preacher once again returns to the subject of Jesus as our priest.

 In the first **10** verses of Chapter 7, he **explains** the allusion to Melchizedek,

 a righteous and peaceful priest-king who appears **mysteriously** in Genesis, Chapter 14

 to bless **Abraham** and receive his offering.

 and who **foreshadows** Christ and his perfect eternal priesthood in several ways.

 Last week we started our reading at **Verse 11** of Chapter 7.

 Please be sure to find your place in the text now and follow along with me **closely**.

In Verse 11, the author reasons that God sent Jesus because perfection was not attainable through the Levitical priesthood and the law which people received under it.

 Q. Does this imply that it is God's **purpose** to attain perfection?

 A. Yes.

 Q. What **kind** of perfection?

A. Removal of **sin**.

So then we understand that God sent Jesus because the Levitical priesthood and law could **not** remove sin,

and because Jesus (and only Jesus) **can** remove sin.

In **Verse 12** we read that the change in the **priesthood** necessarily means that the **law** changed also.

For one thing, the new priest, Jesus, was descended from **Judah**

and the Law said **nothing** about priests coming from that tribe. (**We read that in Verses 13 and 14**)

Indeed Jesus' priesthood has **nothing** at all to do with human descent or the law,

because his power comes not from these but from his **indestructible life**. (**That is Verses 15-17**).

Q. **Who** has indestructible life?

A. **God!**

Jesus Christ is the eternal son of God and **God**.

That's why he, and only he, is a **perfect** priest.

In **Verses 18 and 19** we read that he offers us a better hope, through which we draw near to God,

whereas the Law, including the Levitical priesthood, made **nothing** perfect, and so has been set aside.

And in **Verses 20 and 21** we are assured that, unlike the Law and priesthood,

Jesus and the hope which he offers is **permanent**.

All of this makes Jesus the guarantor of a **better** covenant. (**Verse 22**)

Verse 22 is where the word **covenant** is first used in Hebrews.

Q. What is a "**covenant**?"

A. A formal, solemn, and binding agreement. (Webster)

Q. **What** is the "better covenant" of which Jesus is the guarantor?

A. Gospel

Q. What is the Gospel better **than**?

A. **Law**

Q. Does anyone have any questions or comments before we go on?

Chapter 7, Verses 23-28

O.K. then, would someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 7, Verses 23-28, in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

Thank you. Now would someone please read those same verses in English (ESV)

23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,

24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

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.

27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

28 For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Thank you.

Now we understand that the Law of Moses and the Levitical Priesthood were **imperfect**,

and therefore **temporary**,

and that these have been replaced by the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is **perfect**

and therefore **permanent**.

Verse 23 reads as follows:

(Verse 23)

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,

If you are familiar with the Old Testament, you will know that the Levitical priesthood was **hereditary**,

passing from father to son, generation after generation, after generation....

So there were **many** priests over the years,

some good, some bad, and **none** perfect.

Verse 24 reads:

(Verse 24)

but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

An alternative translation here is that he holds a priesthood which is "**nontransferable**", because **he** continues forever.

Still another translation has the **priesthood** as being "unchanging" because the priest is always the same.

Q. Who is "**he**?" (in v. 24)

A. **Jesus**, the Son of God

The Levitical priests of whom there were many are **gone** forever

The priesthood of the **Son of God**, of whom there is only one, will **never** end.

We read in verse 25:

(Verse 25)

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

It is only through a **mediator** that sinful men may draw near to God.

The Levitical Priests were **mortal** men.

Like all mortal men, they **themselves** sinned and grew old and died.

So in this and many other ways, their **mediation** was imperfect and uncertain.

But with Jesus there is **no** uncertainty at all.

If we draw near to God through **Christ**,

then we know that he will **always** be there to intercede for us,

and that his **intercession** will always be perfect,

because he **himself** is perfect.

Indeed **only** Jesus is able to save eternally, because only he lives eternally to make intercession.

Verse 26 reads:

(Verse 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.

It is indeed **fitting** that Jesus is our high priest!

Who else possibly **could** mediate between man and God?

Angels? Moses? Abraham? David? Aaron?

All of these have been examined in Hebrews, found worthy in many ways, yet vastly **inferior** to Christ.

It seems necessary that our mediator actually **be** a man, otherwise how could **we** reach **him**?

At the same time, it seems necessary that our **mediator** be able to reach **God**,

which no **sinful** man can ever do (that's why we need a mediator in the first place!)

and perhaps not even the highest angel can reach **above** the heavens!

Only the Son of God has actually been able to go there, because that is where he is from!

Which means that there has **always** been only one **effective** mediator between man and God.

And that is **Jesus Christ**, the eternal Son of God.

None of the sacraments and ceremonies of the law were **at all** effective,

except insofar as they foreshadowed Christ,

and God graciously made these shadows of Christ **effective**

until such time as Christ **Himself** was revealed.

This is why Paul was so hard on Jews who had once confessed their faith in Christ and then began to turn **back** to the elements of the law and the old priesthood

That is to turn **away** from the only effective mediator between God and Man and back to the shadows that were always empty and ineffective except insofar as they were pointing toward Christ.

It is worth remembering that no religious ceremony --- past, present, or future --- has any **beneficial** effect whatsoever if it is "Christ-less." (Calvin)

Apart from Christ, there is **no** hope at all!

Verse 27 reads:

(Verse 27)

He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

Because they could not **actually** mediate between Man and God, as Christ does,

the priests under the Levitical priests had to do all kinds of **symbolic** stuff,

constantly, to atone for their own sins and the sins of the people.

They wore special **clothing**, and maintained special **altars**, and had special **ceremonies**, etc., etc.

The profuse **elaborateness** shows that it was all symbolic of a higher spiritual reality.

It was symbolic of (what?) the priesthood of **Christ**.

The priesthood of Christ is **very** different.

Because it is **completely** real.

The **most** real thing.

Only the eternal Son of God has lived a perfect human **life**.

He then sacrificed himself --- **once for all** --- as an atonement for sins.

He then rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God, having become a priest **forever**.

So Chapter 7 ends in Verse 28 as follows:

(Verse 28)

For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

So then, **knowing** that we have such a "high priest," we are without excuse,

we had better look **up** to heaven, where he sits at the right hand of God,

and **forward** to the coming of his kingdom.

And we had better **not** look down to Earth and back to the law,

This does **not** mean that we are supposed to throw our Old Testament away and behave badly.

Hebrews itself is great example of how the Gospel can be **preached** from the Old Testament,

and of how we can learn **from** the Old Testament, that the law never perfected anything!

Not because the **law** was bad,

but because **we** are.

We are **so** corrupt that not **even** the law can save us.

Only Jesus the Son of God can!

Questions?

Comments?

n.b. This is where we ran out of time. There was considerable discussion near the end of class and following class about the relationship between the Law and the Gospel. Some were anxious to defend the Law and its continuing usefulness to believers in Christ. Others were anxious to emphasize the freedom of believers in Christ from condemnation under the Law. Etc. We will continue to pursue this next time. -- GGR