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Sermon Notes

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Christ's Superior Priesthood

Hebrews 7:20-28

Memories of childhood disillusionment:

- Altar boy in the Roman Catholic church; gave me more access to our parish priests
- Before that, I tended to put these men on a pedestal... I was in awe of them and the incredible privilege they had to serve at the altar every Sunday
- But an old saying: familiarity breeds contempt... the better I got to know these men, the more sinful failings I saw in them
- I am not at all referring to criminal behavior on their part... the scandals of abuse by priests have rocked the Roman Catholic world
- No, I never saw anything like that at all... but rather it was the common human failings of a short temper, or an irreverent attitude toward the holy things of God; or a tendency toward laziness or a love of too much wine or overeating
- Perhaps the young boy Samuel had the same experience when serving with the High Priest Eli, and God gave him a message of dire judgment for Eli and his sons concerning their great wickedness
- Samuel had probably loved Eli and held him in great honor... but when God spoke to him in the middle of the night: "Samuel, Samuel..." it was Eli who told him to answer: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening..."

1 Samuel 3:11-14 And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. ¹² At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family-- from beginning to end. ¹³ For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

- UTTER DISILLUSIONMENT!!! Eli was a weak man, unwilling to restrain his sons... cherishing his sons more than he cherished God Himself
- Such disillusionment however goes with every human minister... even the best...

“There is no one righteous; not even one!”

- How then can we sinners draw into the presence of Almighty God? Is there no one who can represent us to such a holy God? Is there any way that a guilty, vile and helpless sinner like me be made perfect enough to come into the presence of Almighty God?
- Is there a PERFECT PRIEST who can offer a PERFECT SACRIFICE and carry on a PERFECT INTERCESSORY MINISTRY for a sinner like me to come into the presence of a God who is a consuming fire?
- THAT is the purpose of this passage today... to proclaim forever the perfection of the priesthood of Jesus

I. Superior by Oath (vs. 20-22)

Vs. 20-22 And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, ²¹ but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" ²² Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

A. The Oath of God... for the Third Time in Hebrews

1. First time: swearing that Israel would never enter His rest
2. Second time: swearing by Himself that God would bless Abraham and multiply him
3. The purpose of the oath: to confirm the absolute commitment of God toward a course of action

Hebrews 6:16-18 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. ¹⁷ So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

B. Levitical Priests: Established by Law... not by Oath

1. God told Moses one day to set apart the Levites to His service at the tabernacle
2. God told Moses one day to set apart Aaron to serve as High Priest
3. God told Moses to extend these indefinitely
4. This was all BY LAW... but not BY OATH
5. The Law can change; indeed, the whole point of Hebrews 7 is that the law HAS CHANGED!! But God's unshakeable oath to Jesus is eternal

C. The Oath Stated in Psalm 110:4

Hebrews 7:21 "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'"

1. The language is the language of eternity
2. God has used the most solemn language imaginable to establish the eternal foundation of Jesus' High Priestly ministry
3. Not just "The Lord has sworn" but more than that: "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind"
4. This oath points the way to an ETERNAL PRIESTHOOD... one that will never change, established by the oath of Almighty God

D. The Recipient of the Oath: YOU (Jesus)

1. This is again a statement made from the Father to His Son!!
2. This is an intertrinitarian conversation... an oath the Father is making to His only begotten Son, Jesus
3. Usually when an important official takes an office, that person does the swearing
 - a. A President stands on the steps of the United States Capitol building, puts his hand on the Bible as held by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
 - b. He raises his right hand and swears an oath, to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States of America
 - c. He is making an OATH, a solemn promise before Almighty God to this effect
4. But here, the Oath is taken not by the one receiving the high office, but the One bestowing it... God the Father is SWEARING AN OATH concerning God the Son... there is a sense of absolute finality to this ritual

“YOU are a priest forever!!”

E. Melchizedek Has Disappeared!

1. Notice very significantly that the rest of Psalm 110:4 has disappeared now...
According to the order of Melchizedek
2. All other human servants, types, patterns, apostles, prophets, kings and prototypes disappear before the ONE who fulfills them all: Jesus
3. In heaven, Melchizedek is not honored as co-priest with Jesus... Melchizedek is on his face before the glory of the true HIGH PRIEST, Jesus

F. The Oath Makes Jesus the Guarantor of a Better Covenant

1. This is the first time the word “covenant” is mentioned in Hebrews... and we are told of a BETTER covenant
2. Hebrews 8-10 will use the word “covenant” another 18 times!! This is a MAJOR THEME in the book
3. A Superior Priest, offering s Superior sacrifice in a Superior sanctuary under the auspices of a Superior covenant, resulting in a Superior life... that is the unifying theme of Hebrews
4. Vs. 22: Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant
 - a. The New Covenant is BETTER than the Old... the message of Hebrews 8
 - b. Jesus is here called the “guarantor” of that better covenant
 - c. The word refers to the one who stands behind a covenant, guaranteeing that its stipulations will be met
 - d. It has the effect of a co-signor on a loan... he puts himself on the line financially to ensure the covenant is met; the “surety” or “guarantor” is the one who accepts legal obligations
 - e. The OATH is the ground of Jesus’ role as the surety, the guarantor... God has sworn to Jesus that He WILL BE A PRIEST forever... and that oath is the substance of Jesus’ role as surety... He will put His lifeblood on the line for us to guarantee the forgiveness of sins, transformation of heart, and adoption as sons that is the essence of the New Covenant

II. Superior by Permanence (vs. 23-25)

Vs. 23-25 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent

priesthood. ²⁵ *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

A. Nothing Unique about the Aaronic Priests

1. There were MANY of them
2. Josephus tells us that there were 83 high priests in all from Aaron through to the last one in AD 70 when the Romans finally ended it all by destroying the Temple in Jerusalem
3. A succession of them, necessitated by the DEATH of each High Priest
 - a. Aaron was stripped of his priestly robes in Numbers 20 on Mount Hor; his son Eleazar succeeded him as priest and Aaron died
 - b. Eleazar served as High Priest through the conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua; then his death in the Land of Canaan is recorded for us in Joshua 24, and he was succeeded by his son Phinehas
 - c. This dreary succession continued until the end

B. Death Prevented them from Continuing in Office

1. The wages of sin is death; the steady drone of the death of the High Priests, one after the other, was a testimony to their sinfulness... they were, all of them, mortal sinners
2. This mortality showed the LIMITATION of their office under the Law of Moses
3. The succession of High Priests, according to the Author of Hebrews, shows the inadequacy of their ministry for sinners

C. BUT Jesus is a PERMANENT High Priest

1. BUT Jesus lives forever... this is a STRONG CONTRAST that the author is drawing
2. He “always lives” (according to verse 25)
3. He is actually the death conqueror... a mighty High Priest whose resurrection makes Him the perfect High Priest
4. Death has NO POWER OVER HIM at all

Romans 6:9-10 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

The word “mastery” in Romans 6 = kingly rule, dominion, dominant authority

Jesus RULES over death, not the other way around!!

Revelation 1:18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

5. The death Jesus died he died to sin; Romans 6 says the life he lives he lives for God... BUT Hebrews 7 says the life he lives he lives FOR US, at the RIGHT HAND OF GOD to intercede for us as our High Priest

D. A Permanent Priesthood

1. There will be no succession of priests... the same priest will handle your case until you are done being saved
2. Under the Old Covenant: one priest may have been more godly, more effective, more zealous for the glory of God than another
 - a. For example: Phinehas was burning with zeal for the glory of God when Israel was at its worst... sinning with the Baal of Peor
 - b. Phinehas struck down a particularly bold sinner among the Israelites
 - c. God spoke of Phinehas’s zeal for God’s honor and glory and made a lasting covenant of peace with him as a priest
3. BUT THEN there was Annas... a wicked man who used the office of High Priest to fleece the people and take advantage of them financially, turning the Temple—God’s House—into a marketplace
4. NOW: Which of those two would you rather have interceding for you and offering sacrifices... Phinehas or Annas?
5. There was never a guarantee that the next High Priest would be as good as this one
6. BUT JESUS has a permanent priesthood, because He can never die again!!
7. The absolute superiority of the Priesthood of Jesus to that of the Levites!!!

E. End Result: A Complete Salvation for All His Elect

1. This is the glorious implication of Jesus as our permanent High Priest
2. He will manage our case until we are “saved completely”
3. More on this at the end... but Jesus is CONSTANTLY ALIVE to pray for us and to SAVE US COMPLETELY

III. Superior by Holiness (vs. 26-27)

Vs. 26-27 Such a high priest meets our need-- one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people.

A. This is the High Priest WE NEED... Jesus MEETS OUR NEED

1. Hebrew: literally "Now such a high priest was precisely appropriate for us"
2. This is what is fitting, what is appropriate, what the situation called for
3. Our need: purification from sin

B. Jesus Described as HOLY

1. Holiness = separation, being APART UNTO GOD
2. "Holy, blameless, pure": these define Jesus' separation from sin itself
 - a. Jesus never committed a single sin

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin.

- b. His enemies could not prove Him guilty of a single sin
 - c. Jesus was PURE from all sin... His record was perfectly clean
3. "Set apart from sinners" = Jesus was infinitely high above all sinners, not included with them under the wrath and curse of God... intrinsically and ESSENTIALLY different from us as sinners... His heart was pure and devoted to His heavenly Father
 - a. This is speaking of Jesus in His essential nature
 - b. AND YET He chose to eat and drink with sinners in fellowship

Luke 5:30-32 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" ³¹ Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

- c. AND He was numbered among the transgressors in His substitutionary death

Isaiah 53:12 he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

4. "Exalted above the heavens": as we mentioned earlier in Hebrews 4, Jesus has "passed through the heavens" and is now "exalted above the heavens"
 - a. The heavens refer to the created realms where the spiritual beings like angels live
 - b. Jesus has been exalted high above all created beings
 - c. This is the INFINITE GAP of his perfect holiness... He is even separated from the HOLY ANGELS... high and lifted up above them
5. THIS IS THE HIGH PRIEST WE NEED... and this is the High Priest we have!!!

C. Direct Contrast with the Levitical High Priests

1. He is ***unlike the other high priests...*** separated from them, as infinitely high above them as the heavens are above the earth
2. John the Baptist said:

Mark 1:7 "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

3. The Levitical High Priests were all sinners; as such they were required by the Law of Moses to offer sins FIRST FOR THEMSELVES, then for the people

Leviticus 16:6 "Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household.

4. All of the High Priests were sinners
 - a. Aaron was a sinner: He even made a golden calf and led Israel in idolatrous worship; God was ready to strike Aaron dead, but Moses interceded for him

Deuteronomy 9:20 And the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time I prayed for Aaron too.

- b. Eleazar was a sinner, so was Phinehas, so were they all
5. The fact that they had to offer sacrifices for themselves AT ALL showed their own sinfulness... they deserved to die condemned for their sins

6. The fact that they had to offer sacrifices FIRST for themselves, THEN for the people, shows that God cannot accept the ministrations of a defiled High Priest

Isaiah 59:1-2 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

7. The fact that they had to offer sacrifices DAY AFTER DAY shows also that they were habitual sinners... not just sinning occasionally
8. It stands to reason then, the more holy a priest, the better his ministry; thus a PERFECTLY HOLY priest, blameless, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens is the BEST POSSIBLE High Priest we could have
 - a. Jesus did not have to offer sacrifices FOR HIMSELF
 - b. He was sinless and therefore was only offering sacrifice for US

IV. Superior by Sacrifice (vs. 27)

Vs. 27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

A. "Day After Day": The Sacrifices Themselves were INEFFECTIVE

1. This is the very point the author will make later in Hebrews
2. The animal sacrifices had NO POWER to atone for sin... the very fact that they were endlessly repeated shows their ineffectiveness

Hebrews 10:1-4 [The Law of Moses] can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴ because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

B. Once for All

1. Jesus offered the PERFECT SACRIFICE for sinners... Himself
 - a. This is the BODY that God had prepared
 - b. This is the ONLY ACCEPTABLE and perfect sacrifice there has ever been
2. "Once for all" shows the PERFECTION of the sacrifice

- a. Nothing more could have been offered
- b. Nothing more needs to be offered
- c. AND this sacrifice does not need to be repeated
- d. Indeed... it must NOT be repeated

Roman Catholic mass = a continual reoffering of the sacrifice of Jesus... the Council of Trent established that the mass is an unbloody sacrifice offering the same victim (Jesus) who once offered himself as a bloody sacrifice... so the mass is a propitiatory sacrifice: turning away the wrath of God; and the priests, in the line of the Apostles, now stand as those offering up Jesus to God this unbloody sacrifice

- 3. Jesus is a superior priest because HE ALONE offered the perfect sacrifice: Himself... His own blood... and he did it ONCE FOR ALL TIME, never again to be repeated

V. Superior by Perfection (vs. 28)

Vs. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

A. Jesus is Superior to those Priests PERSONALLY

- 1. They are weak, sinful men
- 2. Constantly assaulted by temptations to which they frequently yield
- 3. They are thus sinners... and even more guilty because they know more of God's Law than the common people
- 4. Thus the author calls them WEAK... literally "beset with weakness"

Hebrews 5:2-3 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. ³ This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

- 5. "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it... prone to leave the God I love"

B. The Oath Came After the Law

- 1. The author intends to prove that this means it SUPERCEDES it...
- 2. The Oath of God REPLACES the Law of Moses

C. The Oath Appoints the Son

- 1. Those are mere MEN

2. This is the Son of God
3. Jesus is intrinsically superior because He is the Son of God

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Matthew 17:5 a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

4. The Son is INFINITELY SUPERIOR as a priest to all the Sons of Aaron

D. Made Perfect Forever

1. He is and always has been perfect in and of Himself... with no flaws, no sins, no darkness at all
2. He is also “made perfect” by His incarnation, sinless life under the Law, suffering under the cross, death and resurrection...
3. “Made perfect” = completely qualified to be our Great High Priest
4. FOREVER: He will be as perfect in a thousand years as He is right now

VI. Superior in Effectiveness: Our Complete Salvation

A. The Goal: To Make Us Sinners Perfect As Well!!

Hebrews 7:18-19 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

1. The law was “weak” and “useless”... it was INEFFECTIVE in making us actually holy
2. The key statement: verse 18, “the law made nothing perfect”
 - a. This is the goal of the priestly ministry... to make sinners perfect to come into the presence of God
 - b. Notice verse 19: “by which we draw near to God”
 - c. This is the very thing FORBIDDEN in the Law of Moses... sinners were EXCLUDED all the time
 - i) No one could go up on Mt. Sinai, lest they be executed

- ii) Only Levite males could enter the Tent of Meeting to minister to the Lord... all Gentiles were excluded; all other Jews were excluded
- iii) Only the High Priest could approach the true presence of God, in the Holy of Holies... and He was unwelcome throughout the year... only on the Day of Atonement could he enter in... and he had to come with the symbolic blood of an ineffective animal
- iv) THUS FAR YOU MAY COME AND NO FARTHER!!! That is the message of the Law of Moses and its Levitical priesthood

d. If we would draw near to God, we must be MADE PERFECT:

Habakkuk 1:13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.

Deuteronomy 4:24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

Isaiah 33:14 The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?"

- e. The Levitical priesthood LACKED ALL POWER to make us sinners perfect
- f. Thus is the Law of Moses and its ineffective priesthood SET ASIDE forever

B. Perfect = Qualified to Come Into God's Holy Presence

1. We must have a priest who can make US perfect... or it does us NO GOOD AT ALL
2. Jesus is the Great High Priest who can make us sinners perfect
3. Hebrews 7:20-28 describes a perfect ministry by which we are made perfect
4. Jesus Himself is superior in every way
5. AND the offering of His own blood is a perfect and final sacrifice
6. AND He ever lives to intercede for us

C. A Perfect Salvation

Hebrews 7:24-25 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

1. So powerful this one concept: HE IS ABLE TO SAVE YOU COMPLETELY

2. Your purpose in salvation: “to come to God through Him”
3. Jesus is CONSTANTLY ALIVE as your High Priest, interceding for you to bring you to God
4. “save completely” = to finish the work of salvation He began in you
 - a. Justification is past
 - b. Sanctification is present and future
 - c. Glorification at your death/ second coming of Christ
5. The work of salvation is GOING ON NOW... you are besieged on every side
 - a. The world, the flesh and the devil are assaulting you
 - b. You have not yet entered your Sabbath rest in heaven
 - c. You are running with endurance the race marked out in front of you
 - d. You may think “How can I possibly finish this race for perfection? I am so weak! The flesh is so strong! The world’s pull seems irresistible! Satan’s evil kingdom is vastly more powerful, more experienced, and more intelligent than I am! How can I possibly continue to run this race of faith with endurance?!!”
6. This text says that Jesus is your constantly living Great High Priest... He is at the right hand of God and is interceding FOR YOU... He is praying for you right now
7. Next week, I will discuss in detail the priestly ministry of Jesus, interceding for you based on the blood He shed on the cross

VII. Application

A. Come to Christ!

1. There is no other Savior... no other High Priest who is perfect in Himself, in a perfect standing with God; who offers a perfect sacrifice for sins; and who constantly pleads with God for sinners like you
2. COME TO CHRIST NOW!!! Trust in Him... look to Him and Him alone

B. The Law Makes Nothing Perfect

C. Rely on Christ’s Priestly Ministry

D. Meditate Much on the Need for Christ to Pray for You

E. Worship Christ for His Perfection

F. Thank Christ for His Perfect Priestly Ministry for YOU

G. Delight in the Fact that Death and Sin Have No Mastery Over Him

H. Consider His Lofty Position: High Above the Heavens at the Right Hand of God