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Sermon Notes

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Christ Our Heavenly Priest

Hebrews 8:1-6

Opening illustration: Silhouette pictures popular in colonial America; first invented by _____; they were a copy and shadow of the person's profile...

The Old Covenant Tabernacle and priesthood a copy and shadow of the true ministry of Christ

Context:

I. We Do Have Such a High Priest (vs. 1)

A. A Summary of Hebrews 7

1. The author is summing up what he has been saying
2. It is very necessary for a good teacher of the word to do this frequently... especially when the points have been complex and deep
3. The author has already told us (in Hebrews 5) that the perfection of Jesus as our High Priest in the order of Melchizedek is MEAT and not MILK
4. It cannot be accepted by LAZY LISTENERS, but takes a great deal of diligence and concentration on the part of his hearers to accept
5. If this is so, it makes perfect sense for the author to use some techniques to be sure that his hearers are understanding the argument
 - a. Repetition
 - b. Illustration
 - c. Summation
6. Here, we have a summation... literally "the head" of the whole business; the chief or principle thing he has been trying to communicate
7. And here it is:

Hebrews 8:1-2 The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

B. The Accusation Addressed: You Have NO PRIEST!!

1. The standard human religion is one of external show and sensual glory
2. The pagan religions were based on an idol crafted by human skill with an elaborate pattern of religion surrounding it
 - a. The Egyptian priests had their idols and their priestly rituals
 - b. The priests of Artemis of the Ephesians had their elaborate temple, their magnificent display centered around some image of Artemis supposedly having fallen from heaven
 - c. The Aztecs in Mexico had their impressive temples with their carefully calculated steps and their heinous human sacrifices... all very clearly visible and designed to impress the senses
3. It is ALWAYS the human tendency to go for elaborate appeals to the senses... sensual sights, sensual sounds, sensual smells, sensual tastes
4. Even the Old Covenant, established by God, had an outward, visible beauty, majesty, display
 - a. The Temple was a glorious and visible structure
 - b. The priests were decked out in glorious array
 - c. The senses were saturated with the IMPRESSIVENESS of the Old Covenant sacrificial system
5. BUT the New Covenant religion here established is one based WHOLLY on faith in Jesus who ministers invisibly in the heavenly realm
 - a. By FAITH we receive the priestly ministry of Jesus
 - b. By FAITH we rest in the once for all sacrifice of His body for our sins
 - c. By FAITH we rely on His continual intercession for us at the right hand of God
 - d. We walk by FAITH and not by sight
6. The clear accusation of the enemies of this NEW COVENANT religion: YOU HAVE NO PRIEST

- a. The Jews could say this to the Christians: you have forsaken the Laws of Moses for no ministry at all... you have no offerings made for your sins; no incense of intercession rises to cover you... you have NO HIGH PRIEST
- b. The pagans could say the same thing
 - i) In fact, the Greeks frequently called early Christians “the godless”... literally “atheists”
 - ii) They did this because the Christians did not accept their man-made gods... they said “man-made gods are no gods at all”
 - iii) Polycarp, when he was on trial for his life in the amphitheater of Smyrna, was offered his freedom if he would curse the Christians with the common curse: “Away with the godless!”
 - iv) He turned the whole thing on its head when he gestured at the citizens of Smyrna with his hand and said (of them) “Away with the godless!!!”
- c. BUT this is the very issue the author is dealing with here... both Jews and Greeks could say of the Christians, “They have NO HIGH PRIEST, no temple, no sacrifice for their sins, no intercessory prayer ministry”

C. We DO Have a High Priest!

- 1. The POINT of what we’ve been saying...
- 2. Every true believer in Christ is COMPLETELY COVERED in a SUPERIOR ministry by a perfect High Priest
- 3. You DO have a High Priest today!!

D. We Have SUCH a High Priest

- 1. The word “such” goes immediately back to the details of Hebrews 7
- 2. A High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek
 - a. One whose priestly ministry has nothing to do with his genealogy
 - b. One who has no beginning of days or end of life
 - c. One whose ministry is based on the power of an indestructible life
 - d. One who EVER LIVES to make intercession for us
 - e. One who is holy, blameless, undefiled, exalted above the heavens... because He is the ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF THE LIVING GOD

3. We have SUCH a High Priest

E. All of Our Needs Are Completely Met

1. So the author is seeking both to summarize what he's already said

2. AND to advance the argument as well

3. The overall theme of Hebrews: the Superiority of Jesus

II. Our High Priest is Seated at the Right Hand of God (vs. 1)

A. The Superiority of Our High Priest: His Position

1. Five times in Hebrews the author tells us that Jesus is at the RIGHT HAND of God

2. He tends to vary the expressions to give us a sense of the greatness of this privilege of Jesus'

a. First, Hebrews 1:3: "Majesty on high"... mentions the majesty, but not the throne

Hebrews 1:3 After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high

b. Second, Hebrews 12:2 "throne of God"... mentions the throne, but not the majesty

Hebrews 12:2 seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

c. HERE... Hebrews 8:1 mentions BOTH the throne AND the majesty

Hebrews 8:1 we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven

3. The sense is of the greatness of Jesus in the ACCESS to OMNIPOTENCE... Jesus is in immediate proximity to Almighty God, the one who rules over heaven and earth... all authority is His, all power is His, all dominion is His... in heaven, all the holy angels encircle God's throne and are ready to do His bidding, whatever it may be

4. WE cannot possibly imagine the kind of glory and majesty, power and radiance that flows from the throne of God:

Daniel 7:9-10 "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. ¹⁰ A

river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.

5. Jesus is at the place of ultimate access to infinite Majesty and power

B. The Superiority of Our High Priest: His Posture

1. Jesus is also depicted as SEATED at the right hand of God

2. The image is one of peace, of the cessation of His labors

3. Jesus' work is in ONE SENSE perfected, completed, FINISHED forever:

John 19:30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

4. This is clearly contrasted to the CONTINUAL WORK of the Levitical priests

Hebrews 10:11-14 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³ Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, ¹⁴ because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Jesus, having won the victory over all His foes at the cross is commanded by God

SIT ANT MY RIGHT HAND UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET...

This is the proper glory for Jesus, having been so viciously rejected, having been so scandalously treated, humiliated, beaten, mocked, spat upon, crucified, ripped open and subject to public censure and SHAME... NOW it is completely appropriate for Him to be EXALTED to the HIGHEST PLACE:

Philippians 2:6-11 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

NOTE: the once for all cessation of Jesus' activities as High Priest ONLY PERTAINS to the SACRIFICIAL aspect... not to the INTERCESSORY aspect...

The sacrifice has been made once for all, but the intercession of our High Priest goes on CONTINUALLY

III. Our High Priest Serves in a Superior Tabernacle (vs. 2, 5)

Hebrews 8:2 who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

A. Our High Priest is a MINISTER

1. Here Jesus is portrayed as continually active... serving, doing the work of the ministry God entrusted to Him
2. The Greek word: *leiturgos*... from which we get the word “liturgy” having to do with a religious service of worship
3. The verb form of this word means to MINISTER as a priest in service to God... discharging the duties of a priest in active service
4. So we have a combination image: one of Jesus as seated, having accomplished purification ONCE FOR ALL; one as a continually active high priest who EVER LIVES TO MAKE INTERCESSION for His people
5. But WHERE does He minister? What is the LOCATION?

B. A Sanctuary, a Tabernacle

1. The word “sanctuary” comes from the Latin, *sanctus* meaning “holy”
2. The Greek word here refers to the true “Holy Place” where the ministry of the High Priest occurred
3. This was the place in the earthly Tabernacle, and later the Temple, where only the Son of Aaron could go with the blood of the atonement

C. The “True” Tabernacle

1. The adjective “true” is used to denote a contrast
 - a. The Sons of Aaron entered a holy place in a Tabernacle, yes... the very one that God ordained in the Laws of Moses to be set up
 - b. But the TRUE Tabernacle is the one in which Jesus serves continually as our High Priest
 - c. The word “true” does not mean at all that the Old Covenant Tabernacle was FALSE in the sense of false gods, or a false religion, based on false premises and false intentions in human hearts... like it was some gross and evil deception
 - d. RATHER the word TRUE is understood here to refer to that Tabernacle that is substantial, lasting, eternal, the original vs. that which was

temporary, a shadow and picture and type of the original... the Tabernacle build under the Law of Moses was done in obedience to God's command, but it was not the TRUE Tabernacle

e. Similar expression:

John 6:32-33 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Same concept: it is not that the manna Moses gave the Jews in the wilderness was FALSE food... no, it did in fact feed them and nourish them, and it was a gift of God; but the TRUE bread which came down from heaven was Jesus Himself

2. What IS the True Tabernacle?

- a. The Greek word used is usually translated "tent"
- b. In the Old Covenant, it referred to the movable tent God had commanded to be made, where He would meet with the people and live in their midst
- c. The Author to the Hebrews says Jesus serves in a superior Tabernacle

Hebrews 8:2 and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

D. The Mosaic Tabernacle Merely a Copy and a Shadow... Made According to a Pattern

- 1. Verse 2: the Mosaic Tabernacle set up by men, not the Lord...
 - a. Exodus clearly described the instructions given to Moses

Exodus 26:1 "Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked into them by a skilled craftsman.

- b. It described loops, clasps, acacia wood poles, silver bases, cords/ropes, etc.
 - c. It was made by human artisans, and it was set up in every place that they travelled by the Levites who were assigned to that task; if anyone else got near the Tabernacle or tried to set it up, they were to be put to death
 - d. Specifically it was the Gershonites (a division of the Levites) who set up the Tabernacle and took it down again whenever they would move
2. Verse 5: the contrast is extended

Hebrews 8:5 They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

- a. The words "copy and shadow" are added... a copy and shadow on earth of what is in heaven
- b. The warning given to Moses is plain: a pattern was shown him on the mountain, and Moses was to imitate it on earth
- c. The idea of "copy and shadow" shows the superiority of the TRUE tabernacle to the earthly one the Levites used; these words can perhaps be combined such as a SHADOWY COPY
- d. The "pattern" shown Moses for the Tabernacle shows that God had clearly laid out how the earthly Tabernacle was to be... there was nothing wrong with it; it was just as temporary copy of what was in heaven
- e. By the way, the exact same thing happened with the Temple that David wanted to build for the Lord; God showed David a heavenly pattern by which the Temple was to be built:

1 Chronicles 28:19 "All this," David said, "I have in writing from the hand of the LORD upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan."

E. The True Tabernacle is the Body of Christ

1. So what is the TRUE Tabernacle? Some options:
 - a. The whole universe, the fabric of heaven and earth
 - b. Some think it refers to the universal true Church of Christ
 - c. Others think it is an aspect of the heavenly realms... some heavenly structure where Christ ministers as our High Priest which then had its earthly counterpart in the Mosaic Covenant
2. The TRUE TABERNACLE is the HUMAN NATURE of Jesus Christ Himself... specifically His glorified BODY... in which He serves as our High Priest
 - a. The Old Covenant Tabernacle was a type of the body of Christ, the TRUE tabernacle was the actual body of Christ... the Tabernacle was the FOCAL POINT of God's DWELLING in the midst of His people

Exodus 25:8-9 Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. ⁹ Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

That Old Tent, with all of its curious instructions, was meant to be a habitation for God by which He would dwell in the midst of the people, pitching His tent among us

- b. When Jesus came into world and took on a human body, we are told that He “Tabernacled” or literally “pitched His tent” among men

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

- c. Jesus also called His own body a Temple, drawing a clear connection between His body and the Temple in Jerusalem

John 2:19-21 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰ The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

- d. It is said to be made NOT BY MEN but by God; so it was with Jesus’ human body, crafted inside Mary’s womb by the power of the Most High God

Luke 1:34-35 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"[literally “Know no man”] ³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

- e. In Hebrews 10, the “new and living way” is Jesus’ body
- f. John 20: When Jesus is raised from the dead, the angels are at the head and foot of where His body lay
- g. In Revelation, in the New Jerusalem, we are told:

Revelation 21:22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

SO... the TRUE Tabernacle, in which Jesus serves as our Great High Priest, is not some heavenly structure, some heavenly room where He works on our behalf... it is nothing less than His resurrected body by which we draw near to God

IV. Our High Priest Offers a Superior Sacrifice (vs. 3-4)

Hebrews 8:3-4 Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. ⁴ If he were on

earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law.

A. The Superiority of Christ as High Priest is also Established in the Gift/Sacrifice He Offers

B. Gifts and Sacrifices Absolutely Essential to Approaching God

1. First, even if we were sinless, we would not want to approach God empty-handed

Exodus 23:15-17 "No one is to appear before me empty-handed. ¹⁶ "Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. "Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field. ¹⁷ "Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD.

- a. God deserves thanks and praise for all the lavish things He's given us by His creative power
- b. The Jews inherited a magnificent Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey
- c. They were told very plainly to offer to God the firstfruits of their harvests

Deuteronomy 16:16-17 No man should appear before the LORD empty-handed: ¹⁷ Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.

2. BUT since we ARE sinful, we must also have an atoning sacrifice offered for us
3. Without it, the holiness of God would lash out against us and we would be destroyed

C. The Levites Offers the Blood of Bulls and Goats... Clearly Inferior

Hebrews 10:1-4 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-- not the realities themselves. For this reason it 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.

D. Christ Offered Himself Once for All Time

1. A sense of OBLIGATION... it was NECESSARY for our High Priest to have SOMETHING to offer
2. For the sake of His glory, it was also NECESSARY that He should offer something infinitely superior to what the Levites offered

Hebrews 7:27 He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

***Hebrews 10:11-12 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.
¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.***

3. It was also NECESSARY that He NOT MAKE the offering on earth
 - a. First, the Law of Moses already prescribed that the Levites would be the only ones to offer animals on earth
 - b. Jesus, descended from Judah, was FORBIDDEN by the Law of Moses to make that kind of offering

Hebrews 8:4 If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law.

- c. Also, for the typology to be perfect, Jesus had to make the sacrifice in ONE PLACE, and then present it in ANOTHER PLACE
- d. The priests made the annual sacrifice of atonement out in the courtyard at the altar, then carried the blood behind the veil into the Holy of Holies to offer it there on the ark of the covenant
- e. So also Jesus shed His own blood outside the city gates of Jerusalem, and offered it in the heavenly realms in the very presence of God's throne

V. Our High Priest Mediates a Superior Covenant (vs. 6)

Hebrews 8:6 But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.

- A. This is a Summation: The Supremacy of Jesus' Ministry is Clearly Stated
 1. The word used here can be translated "MORE EXCELLENT"
 2. The nature of that excellence is tied to the perfection of Christ Himself
 - a. A more excellent man... a more excellent achievement
 - b. Superior in every way

3. Jesus has RECEIVED this ministry AND this Covenant from His Father
 - a. Everything Jesus did, He did at the command of His heavenly Father
 - b. It was only by the command of God that Jesus took on a body and served us on earth

B. Also the Author Gives a PROPORTIONATE MEASUREMENT

1. The ministry Jesus has received is AS SUPERIOR to theirs AS
2. The Covenant of which He is the mediator is SUPERIOR to the Old one

C. The Ministry and the Covenant Go Together

1. The Levitical priesthood is intrinsic to the Old Covenant... on the basis of that priesthood, the Law of Moses was given
2. So also the Priesthood of Jesus is intrinsic to the New Covenant... a superior covenant

D. Jesus the Mediator of a New Covenant

1. Mediator is a go-between, someone who enables two parties to establish their agreement
2. We should not imagine that Jesus is aiding God and man to hammer out some agreement between themselves as though they are two equal parties negotiating... not at all!! We have NO STANDING before such a Holy God to negotiate a covenant

E. That New Covenant is Founded on Better Promises

1. We will see next time what those superior promises are
2. I will give you a foretaste right now
 - a. A transformed nature: writing the laws of God in our minds and on our hearts
 - b. An intimate and perfected relationship with God: "They will all know me from the least of them to the greatest"
 - c. A perfect and final forgiveness of sins: "I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more."

VI. Applications

A. Come to Christ

1. Only by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ
- B.
 - C.
 - D.