

Hebrews 7:20-28

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[0:00] I invite you to take your copy of God's Word. Turn to Hebrews chapter 7. Our text for today will be Hebrews chapter 7 verses 20 through 28.

! Before I read it, beloved, let me remind you that this is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath.

But this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to Him, The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind. You are a priest forever. This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

The former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office. But He holds His priesthood permanently because He continues forever.

[1:07] 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. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

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.

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 we have been working through the book of Hebrews for quite some time now, and have been for the last couple of weeks working through this idea of Jesus being a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

I hope that you haven't grown tired of the name, that you've begun to wrap your mind around the significance of this reality. And if you wonder what I'm doing, I'm trying to download my sermon notes onto my iPad right now, which I typically do in advance and I forgot this morning.

[2:22] So we're almost there. There we go. I've got notes. So, this letter was likely written to a small church made up of Greek-speaking Jews meeting on the outskirts of Rome, and its author is unknown.

But what we can be certain of concerning the author is that he has great pastoral affection for these people. This little church had suffered, and it would suffer.

Some of them were mocked and beaten for following Jesus. We read of this in chapter 10 and verse 33. Some of them were imprisoned for following Jesus.

Chapter 10 and verse 34. Also in verse 34 of chapter 10, some of them had had their property stolen for following Jesus. None of them had yet died.

They hadn't shed blood yet. But it seems the author of this letter believes that they will. Chapter 12 and verse 4. And because of the trial they were experiencing, some of them had apostatized or abandoned their faith in Christ.

[3:41] We see this in chapter 6, verses 4 through 6. So this letter is a pastoral encouragement to persevere to the end.

Hebrews chapter 6, verses 11 and 12 says, The author of this letter is taking great pains to show his hearers the excellency, the superiority of Jesus Christ.

He's working through their minds to their hearts to say, Don't give up on this way, because it is a more excellent way.

Recall that at the beginning of the letter, he skips any form of salutation and begins the letter in this way. Chapter 1, the first three verses. Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

[5:04] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

And then he quickly sets about the work of showing Christ's superiority, beginning with his superiority to angels. Verse 4, he writes, Having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

And he continues this theme in showing that Jesus is superior to Moses in chapter 3, that Jesus is superior to the high priest at the end of chapter 4 and into chapter 5, and that Jesus is superior to the whole Levitical system, which is where we find ourselves in the text this morning.

As the author continues to make the point that Jesus' priesthood was not at all like the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood, because he was not a priest of their order, but that his priesthood is superior to theirs because it is of the order of Melchizedek.

And beloved, we have to have this foundation if we have any hope in this life or in the life to come at all. We must understand Jesus as a Melchizedekian priest.

[6:36] And you don't have to walk around using that name, but you have to understand that he's a priest that was appointed by God with the promise, that he's a priest who is permanent, and he was the perfect priest because he was the perfect sacrifice.

We must understand this to have a foundation on which to build anything of value before God. Every person in the world, whether they are willing to admit it or not, builds upon some foundation. Often it's a foundation of our own making. In the case of the Hebrews, it was a foundation of Judaism, and they were very tempted to go back to that foundation rather than this new foundation of Christ as this forever priest.

So we're going to have foundations. If you've ever heard the term, it's turtles all the way down. It comes from a story of a teacher posing the question to a small class, young people, what holds the world up?

She thought she'd get no answer to this question, and she herself didn't have one. But a little boy shot up his hand, and he said, the world sits on the back of a turtle. And she said, well, very cleverly, what holds that turtle up?

[8:01] And he said, another turtle. And she said, well, and what holds that turtle up? And he goes, teacher, it's turtles all the way down. So when you hear me say that phrase, it's turtles all the way down, what I'm suggesting to you is we have to build upon something.

We have to make some assumptions at some point, but praise God, because of the holy writ, because of this inspired word, there's an actual foundation, a real foundation on which we can build. I had a very difficult week, and until the second, I wasn't planning on sharing this with you, but I think it's good and appropriate at this time. I don't know exactly. The diagnostics are still running about why this week was so hard for me.

I haven't had a vacation since last January. I think there's a tiredness that's just soaked into my bones. I think it's physical. More than that, I think it's emotional and spiritual.

I'm just tired. There are good reasons for this, and there are, I'm sure, poor reasons for this. I rolled into yesterday, anxious, that's the word to put on it.

[9:20] I'm just feeling an anxiety about what in particular I couldn't say. I think what probably was causing me the most anxiety is that I didn't feel ready to face today.

Here we are, we're talking about this Melchizedekian priest again. How do I say this in a meaningful way that's new and fresh and helpful? I don't know.

I've got an outline. I think it's a pretty good outline for the text. I think it makes sense, but how is it going to be helpful? How is it even helpful to me? These are the kinds of things that are going through my head, and I'm fearing the need to fake my way through having anything useful to do and say today.

And this caused me what I can only describe, I don't know if this is what it was or not, but to have an anxiety attack. Again, if you've had an anxiety attack, what I felt may have been nothing like what you felt, but I had heart palpitations, my heart was beating extremely fast in my chest, inexplicably, and I just felt this overwhelming pressure.

And generally, for this morning, I don't know. And it took me most of yesterday and into this morning, my wife very kindly gave me some space yesterday evening to work through Philippians chapter 4, running my mind through beginning verse 4 all the way through verse 8.

[10:52] What is the remedy for this type of feeling that I'm having? And so if you will, turn with me to Philippians 4. I want to read it to you. I just, in a very unplanned way, but hopefully this will help us to consider today's text.

This is what Paul writes, Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

Right? So he's saying, like, why would you not rejoice? Be reasonable. Because God is near. God knows. God is with you. Do not be anxious about anything.

But in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And here comes the cycling of that.

I'm going, I'm not even sure what to pray. I don't even know exactly what's going on with me right now. How do I pray that God would help me in this feeling that I'm having?

[12:05] It's anxiety. I know. What am I even anxious about? And in the promise of verse 7, if we can make these requests known to God, is that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

Jesus. And I suddenly went, that Melchizedekian priest who does what for us? He always intercedes.

So Jesus takes my messy prayers yesterday and he brings them before the Father. He cleans them up, makes them understandable, and he pleads on my behalf before God.

Right? It's in him we have this greater hope by which we draw near to God. Verse 19 of Hebrews chapter 6. So, if we don't have that foundation, beloved, we have no hope.

We have no hope in this life. And we have no hope in the life to come. We need this superior Christ. And it's a reality.

[13:22] It's not just some philosophy. It's not an idea. It's a reality. There is this Jesus. And he is in fact superior. And on this we can build a life that's filled with hope and peace and is pleasing to God.

So, the outline for our study of this morning's text is as follows. Number one, Jesus is superior because of a promise. Jesus is superior because of a promise.

Number two, Jesus is superior because of his permanence. And number three, Jesus is superior because of his person. So, he's superior because of a promise, because of his permanence, and because of his person.

First, Jesus is superior because of a promise. So, just before our text today, right, we can read up a little bit, right, that there has been a priest given to us, a better hope through which we draw near to God.

It's through this, because the Deccan priest, Jesus Christ, that was a better hope, better than the Aaronic priesthood, that we can draw near to Christ.

[14:40] And then the author says, and it was not without an oath, a promise. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath.

But this one, Jesus Christ, was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him, the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind.

You are a priest forever. This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. The point of Jesus' superiority is first made by drawing our attention to the fact that Jesus became a Melchizedekian

priest through a divine oath that was recorded in Psalm 110 verse 4.

The author of Hebrews, right, through inspiration and quite brilliantly sees Psalm 110 and verse 4 as pointing to Christ.

A promise that was made that Jesus would be a forever priest. The Aaronic priests were not appointed with a promise.

[15:49] They took their positions because of their lineage through divine instruction but not through an oath. The only other time we know of God swearing an oath is when he ratified the covenant that he made with Abraham.

We noted this and talked about it at length when we studied chapter 6 verses 13 through 18. And God is not obligated to make oaths. He's God. Humans may need to make oaths to say, no really, right, we're flawed.

Even in our best efforts we often lie. So we would say to somebody, I mean this. I'm making this commitment, right, we make marriage vows.

These are oaths made to one another because we're weak. God is not. He is in no way obligated to make oaths but because of our weakness he does so.

His word is sure so when God serves our feeble minds by making oaths we should pay very careful attention to what it is he's promised to do.

[17:02] The author of Hebrews tells us why God does this in Hebrews chapter 6 verse 17. So when God desired to show more convincingly, right, this isn't because his word fails but because we fail to believe his word more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose he guaranteed it with an oath.

He makes this promise. He swears by himself he makes it sure that Jesus will be a forever priest. And the author is tying this together for us in verse 22 where he says this makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

Because he's the forever priest and he was made so by a divine oath this divine promise he's the guarantor the guarantee of a better covenant.

There's two very important things to note about verse 22. First in Greek the sentence ends with the word the name Jesus.

[18:15] It's at the very end of the sentence. Here in English the translation that we're using most of us this morning ESV says this makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. But in the Greek it would have been directly this makes the guarantor of a better covenant Jesus.

And in Greek emphasis was placed towards the end of the sentence. Greek sentences drive to the point. They drive to the end.

They drive to the weight of that sentence. And so in the original language this is one of the beautiful things about knowing it's not the case for me but at least knowing how to look up these types of things that the author of Hebrews is placing the full weight of verses 20 through 22 on Christ on Jesus.

Right? This makes the guarantor of a better covenant Jesus. Secondly about verse 22 the author using the name Jesus instead of in other forms which he does throughout the letter Jesus Christ the Christ is emphasizing his humanity and his work.

Jesus right? This God man emphasizing his incarnation that he came and lived as a man that he had an earthly ministry.

[19:48] And the author of Hebrews let me remind you has made this point. We lose this sometimes in our verse by verse study which is a good and valuable thing to do but he means for ideas to be carrying as this is a letter opened and read at one time.

So Hebrews chapter 4 verse 15 he says 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.

So beloved as you build a foundation on Christ we can have this confidence that this guarantor of a better covenant lived also as a man took on bodily form experienced the things that we experience experience them to the full because he never sinned all of the temptation that came everything that

was driving at me across this past week that I would suggest caused me to sin he didn't give in to and he doesn't just empathize with me in my weakness he sympathizes with me he's walked in my shoes what a foundation to build upon what a forever priest speaks also of this name Jesus to his propitiation that he stood in our place that he took the punishment of God that was due us in himself again in the book of

Hebrews chapter 5 verses 7 through 10 in the days of his flesh Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his reverence although he was a son he learned obedience through what he suffered and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him being designated by God a high priest and this is where it's originally introduced to us after the order of Melchizedek Jesus died in our stead lived a perfect life that we might have his perfection so it speaks of his incarnation it speaks of his propitiation and it speaks now and where we are in our text today of his intercession Jesus God man put to death for our sin was raised again ascended and seated at the right hand of the father and in his session his current rule he intercedes or prays on our behalf

Hebrews chapter 7 and verse 25 where we're headed 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 and this is all true because of this promise Jesus is superior because of the promise secondly Jesus is superior because of his permanence we can see this in verses 23 through 25 which I just read the former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office but he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever and then 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 Aaron then

[23:43] Eleazar then Phineas and so on and so on and so on there was a high priest who died and then another high priest took his place and he died and another high priest took his place and he died inevitably all of the biblical record of these men ends with and he died human men just as we lose our earthly bodies one day these men could no longer continue in the office of high priest it was insufficient it was inferior in that way the historian Josephus records that 83 priests served from Aaron to the destruction of the second temple in AD 70 83 right and then he died came another and then he died and then came another in some other historical records there are as many as 300 plus that served in this role so there's even some contradiction in there but the point being and simply the point that the author of

Hebrews is making here is that they couldn't continue forever and they didn't in contrast Jesus' priesthood is permanent that is it is non-transferable it is his priesthood and he will be the priest forever Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek perpetually right in perpetuity if you like to watch Shark Tank and the benefits of this reality are massive they're massive firstly by faith in Jesus' eternal perpetual priesthood we are saved totally the author of Hebrews says that he is able to save to the uttermost priesthood it's not a word that's common in our vernacular today and I commend the use of it in this case because the idea of completeness is bound up in the original Greek word but that's not it the idea of eternity is also bound up in this Greek word and so to use either one some translations say for all time but that falls short and so what I'm guessing is that the translators used a word that would make us all scratch our heads a little bit and do a little work to understand that the original word combines these ideas of completeness with eternity that really to translate it well we'd have to insert a phrase for that single word which would be something like able to save completely for all time that he does a work that he saves us it's not a working of our own right we do good work now because he's saved us but our good working adds nothing to our salvation it glorifies the one who saved us so he saves us completely and he saves us securely for all time so we can add nothing to it

Paul writes of this in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8 and 9 for by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing unless we be unclear about what grace is it's not your own doing it's the gift of God not a result of works so that no one may boast God has saved us and this has present implication for us in this life as we are even now saved completely yet growing up in holiness this thing we call sanctification Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 18 for the

word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God this doesn't mean that we are being saved in a degree we are saved but we are continually being saved we are continually being turned from sin and to

God in Christ Christ is able to save to the uttermost completely for all time those who place their faith in him secondly by faith in Jesus eternal perpetual priesthood we are interceded for totally totally he does it all he catches every heavenward prayer and he intercedes for us because he always lives to make intercession for them do you ever grow weary in your praying I do I grow weary in my praying my prayers can be so weak just often don't even know what to pray but praise God Christ never does he is self-existing and self-sustaining and he sits at the right hand of the father forever he never falls asleep on the job he never takes a bathroom break he never ceases to intercede for us that's a reality that you can build upon if you are in

[29:29] Christ he is interceding for you the author of Hebrews chapter 9 verse 24 says Christ has entered into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf Paul Paul writes in Romans chapter 8 and verse 34 who is to condemn not even myself Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who is at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us he clothes us in his righteousness he gives us the ability to draw near to God and he cleans us up and he cleans up our prayers so that we would be accepted by God he ushers us into his presence this is astounding Christ is dumb a 4th century preacher gives a helpful analogy of this idea of Jesus interceding for us and I quote from

Kent Hughes commentary on Hebrews a young boy whose father was away on a trip wanted to present his father with something that would please him his mother sent him into the garden to gather a bouquet of flowers moms I don't know if that's really what dads want when they come home but this young boy's mom did this the little boy gathered a sorry bouquet of weeds as well as flowers I think moms have all gotten one of those but when the father returned home he was presented with a beautifully arranged bouquet for the mother had intervened removing all the weeds Jesus cleans up our prayers and he most certainly cleans up us so that we can draw near to God in him so Jesus is superior because of a promise and he is superior because of his permanence and lastly he is superior because of his person verse 26 and through the end of the text for it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest holy innocent unstained separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens 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 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 now of interest these three verses it was argued by the ancient

Italian commentator Teodorico something like that are an old hymn he called it in his commentary a hymn to the high priest I hope this was true it's very possible that the author of Hebrews is quoting he's citing a hymn to this little Hebrew church they would have been familiar with these words in similar fashion from time to time when we're preaching will remind us of something we sing together and we're showing its veracity from the scripture it may be that he's intending to sum up this idea of Christ's priesthood before he moves into him being a priest of a better covenant with a song I like that idea whether or not it's the case the author of Hebrews does seem to encapsulate all that he has been saying in these final three verses he begins this idea of it being fitting that we should have such a high priest and this is better rendered it's clunky in English but would be better rendered such a high priest exactly befits us us you see the emphasis here being put on what we needed in a high priest because of our fallen condition because we are incapable of pleasing

God because no man could go to God on our behalf because that man is in that same fallen condition makes that point in verse 28 the law points men in their weakness and that those high priests verse 27 had to offer sacrifices daily first for their sins as humans we all find ourselves in this place and so no man can intercede for another man because of our fallen condition such a high priest exactly befits us because of the insufficiency of the law to give us unfettered access to God there's no measure of our working no amount of sacrifice that could fully draw us near to God the way we can in Christ because of this condition we need a superior priest and Jesus is that priest he is holy and innocent and unstained the text tells us he is perfect and this is either the author of Hebrews just building upon that idea right he is without sin never committed it he is holy like God is

holy he is unstained not only on the outside as the Levitical priesthood had to be purified on the outside but he is also unstained on the inside his very person is without stain so he may be just compounding an idea or possibly in relation to God he is holy like God is holy in relation to man he is innocent have never committed any crime against man and yet tried and condemned and in relation to himself unstained without any sin either way idea being given to us is that he is perfect right he goes on to say separated from sinners most likely due to the context of this letter the author is referring to his distinction from the Levitical priesthood some suggest that because he is in his heavenly session he is separated from sinners but the author of [36:48] Hebrews has been telling us that we have this very near priest right one who can sympathize with us in our weaknesses this does not seem like a far standing off separated priest but a close priest so most likely he is talking about this distinction from the Levitical priesthood because 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 so see how distinct he is as a McCull's a priest massively different not only is he the great high priest but he himself is the sacrifice that he offered the weightiness of our sin the eternal weight of it against a most holy eternally holy

God could only be met with an eternal sacrifice and this was Christ himself and because of this he is exalted above the heavens speaks to the triumph of his resurrection of his ascension and of his session for the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests but the word of the oath the promise which came later than the law appoints a son who has been made perfect forever brings us back to this idea of the perfection of Christ in perpetuity forever and ever and ever and the author of Hebrews intends to root his original hearers and us today in this foundation Jesus is superior because of a promise because of his permanence and because of his person Jesus is superior because God promised his priesthood because his priesthood is permanent and because his person is perfect the outcome for God's people is inevitable and it is eternal so beloved hold fast persevere to the end for we have a superior high priest it does not matter if you are in Christ what troubles may come your way whether it be physical or emotional what onslaughts assail you we have a steady a sure anchor of the soul and so in application this is what the author's working to accomplish in us this morning chapter 6 verse 11 and 12 and we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end so that you may not be sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises I hope you'll look to the promises with me this morning let's pray together let's pray