

Hebrews 7:20-28 "A Priest That Meets Our Need"**

Main Idea: In Hebrews 7:20-28 we learn three reasons why we, needy people as we are, ought to believe in, trust, cherish, follow, and tell others about priest Jesus, the one who indeed *meets our need*.

I. Consider the position of priest Jesus (20-22).

- A. Jesus received divine authorization (20-21).
- B. Jesus initiated a better covenant (22).

II. Consider the permanence of priest Jesus (23-25).

- A. All other priests died (23).
 - 1. We can try to ignore, postpone, or even deny death.
 - 2. We cannot avoid the reality of death.
- B. Jesus lives forever (24-25).
 - 1. He can save us completely.
 - 2. He can take us to God.
 - 3. He can intercede for us.

III. Consider the perfection of priest Jesus (26-28).

- A. He can meet our need because of who He is (26).
 - 1. He became what we are.
 - 2. He remains set apart from sin and sinners.
 - 3. He is exalted over the heavens.
- B. He can meet our need because of what He accomplished (27-28).
 - 1. He does not need to offer ongoing sacrifices.
 - 2. He made one, final sacrifice for sins.
 - 3. He has been made perfect forever.

Response: Since there is a high priest named Jesus...

- 1. You may come to God as you are.
- 2. You may come to God because of who Jesus is.
- 3. You may come to God because of what Jesus has done.
- 4. You may come to God because of what Jesus is doing.

5. You may come to God because of what Jesus will do.

Did you realize that when the railroads were first introduced in our country, some folks feared that they'd be the downfall of the nation? I chuckle when I read the following excerpt from a letter to then President Jackson dated January 31, 1829:

As you may know, Mr. President, 'railroad' carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by 'engines' which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed.

Martin Van Buren, Governor of New York

Change is never easy, and that's especially true when you're convinced that *God* is against the change. Governor Van Buren said that *the Almighty* didn't intend people to travel at the breakneck speed of 15 miles per hour. How the governor knew that, I don't know.

But just suppose he did. Suppose he could point to written instructions in God's Word that prohibited travel at speeds over 15 mph. That would make accepting the change quite difficult, wouldn't it? If you believed God's Word, it sure would.

Now listen to something God did say, in Leviticus 6:24-26, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Say to Aaron and his sons: 'These are the regulations for the sin offering: The sin offering is to be slaughtered before the LORD in the place the burnt offering is slaughtered; it is most holy. The priest who offers it shall eat it; it is to be eaten in a holy place, in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting.'"

Those weren't suggestions, but commands. God said to bring a sin offering to the Tabernacle. Give it to the priest who must be a descendant of Aaron. He will kill the animal, and your sins will be covered.

But we don't do that, do we? Obviously, some things have *changed*. We are not doing today some things that God commanded His people to do in the past. Why not?

It's wise to have solid reasons before changing traditions (Wiersbe says that before we start moving fences we'd better find out why they were put there in the first place). How much more so if the traditions are based on revelation from God Himself! For the Jews it wasn't just that "we've always done it this way." It's that God had said to do it this way! Aren't we disobeying God if we don't bring animal sacrifices and let the priests of Levi offer them, as God's people had done for centuries?

That's why the letter of Hebrews was written. Some folks were struggling with that very issue. They had professed faith in Jesus, but they were having second thoughts. The family pressure, the societal pressure, was getting to them. Maybe we miscalculated. Maybe it would be better to go back.

The message of Hebrews is simply, "Why go back when you have something *better*?" Sure, the Levitical system was good because it was given by God. But it has served its purpose. God gave the Law to prepare us for Christ who is the fulfillment of the Law!" The word "better" appears in eleven verses in Hebrews. In Christ we have a *better hope* (7:19), founded on *better promises* (8:6), and are living under a *better covenant* (7:22). We have *better and lasting possessions* (10:34), and are looking forward to a *better country* (11:16) and a *better resurrection* (11:35).

Last time we pondered this statement in Hebrews 7:11, "If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?" Yes, God gave the Israelites the priests of Levi, and yes, God gave the Israelites laws about bringing animal sacrifices to Him. But there's been a change, as verse 12 says, one that God Himself authorized, a change of priesthood and a change of the law. We do have a priest, a *better* priest, one in the order of Melchizedek, and His name is

Jesus.

There's so much to be said about Jesus! As we come today to Hebrews 7:20-28, we're going to learn three reasons why we, needy people as we are, ought to believe in, trust, cherish, follow, and tell others about priest Jesus.

I. Consider the position of priest Jesus (20-22).

Verse 20 begins, "And it was not without an oath!" That first word ('and') indicates we've jumped right into the middle of a teaching session. The subject is the priesthood of Jesus. The question, again, is why don't we still follow the Levitical system? And behind that question is a more fundamental question. Why was the Levitical system established in the first place? To answer that, we must go back to the beginning.

Adam and Eve sinned and because of their sin were cast from the perfect garden, and the entire human race cut off from God. In time God in His mercy initiated His eternal plan to reconcile sinners to Himself, choosing a man named Abraham, blessing that man with a family and turning that family into a nation, so that through that nation He might eventually bring salvation to the world.

Around 1400 BC, as promised to Abraham, God gave that chosen nation of Israel the promised land. He also gave them something else. He met with them at Mount Sinai and gave them the Torah, His Law, a set of guidelines that revealed His character and His will for how they should live. Included in these guidelines were instructions concerning the sacrificial system and the priesthood that sustained it.

And so, for fourteen centuries, in obedience to divine command, God's people went to the tabernacle and later to the temple and brought offerings to God. But they didn't bring them directly to God, for as sinners they couldn't. They gave them to the Levitical priests, as God instructed, and the priests, serving as a go-between, killed the sacrificial lambs and calves, placed their blood on the altar, and provided a temporary covering for the sins of the people. It was temporary, for it would be repeated over and over throughout the lives of the people, but it was as God commanded.

And then, in the year AD 30, after more than 1,400 years of "doing it this way," a group of people in Israel stopped doing it. They did so because the One foreshadowed in the Levitical system, the Messiah Himself, Jesus the Son of God, had come to earth. They believed that through Jesus' perfect life and death as their sin-bearer ("the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world," as John the Baptist called him in John 1:29), and on the basis of His resurrection from the dead, Jesus had fulfilled the Law, including the Levitical priesthood, and made it obsolete. And so they stopped bringing their sacrificial lambs and calves to Jerusalem.

As you can imagine, that created quite a stir. It split families right down the middle. Some became violent, attacking and killing the Christian renegades who had the nerve to turn from their Jewish heritage and traditions, *God-given* heritage and traditions, to be precise. That's what made it so controversial. These weren't merely man-made rules folks were breaking. They were guidelines God Himself established through Moses at Sinai.

Why did they stop going to the Levitical priests and put their full trust in priest Jesus? Here's the first reason our text offers. It's because of the unique *position* of priest Jesus. How did Jesus become a priest in the first place? Here's the answer...

A. Jesus received divine authorization (20-21). "And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, 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.'"

The word "oath" appears eight times in Hebrews, three times in the verses I just read. An oath is a sworn statement intended to guarantee something. When my brother became a major in the Air Force, he raised his hand and took an oath, thereby pledging himself to protect his country, to death if necessary.

When a Levite became a priest, he didn't take an oath. He simply inherited the position. But when Jesus became a priest, says the writer of Hebrews, an oath was taken. By whom? "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind," a quotation of Psalm 110:4. Did you catch that? The Lord God Himself took the oath. The Lord has sworn.

But God doesn't need to take an oath, does He? For starters, this is His universe. What He says, goes. What's more, He can't lie. The reason we use oaths is because humans don't always tell the truth, and an oath helps verify the validity of the one speaking.

God didn't take an oath to verify the truthfulness of His speech, for He defines truth and falsehood has no place in Him. Why then the oath? For our sake. So that we will know His unchanging commitment concerning a critical subject. What subject? The priesthood of His Son. *You are a priest forever.*

He never said that about the Levitical priesthood. Yes, He authorized them for a time and a purpose, but concerning His Son alone He said, "You are a priest forever."

How did Jesus obtain the position of priest? It's His by divine authorization. Does that make a difference? Yes, says Hebrews, in verse 22, "Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant."

B. Jesus initiated a better covenant (22). The writer says Jesus is the "guarantee" (Greek *egguous* of a better covenant. The KJV calls Him a 'surety.' Think of a bondsman. If a person in jail wants to leave, he calls a bondsman who posts bail and guarantees that the accused person will show up in court to face his charges. He makes *surety*. He is the *guarantee*.

Because of God's oath declaring His Son to be priest forever, Jesus has become the guarantee. He guarantees, not just that the old covenant arrangement is no longer necessary, but that a *better* covenant now exists.

This is the first use of "covenant" (*diatheke*) in Hebrews, and it certainly isn't the last. The writer refers to "covenant" some seventeen times (to put that in perspective, no other New Testament book uses it more than three times). A covenant is a legal term, an arrangement under contract, a last will and testament.

Leon Morris comments, "There is something absolute about a will. One cannot dicker with the testator. And in like manner man cannot bargain with God. God lays down the terms."^[1] And specifically, God in the person of His Son, Jesus the Christ, laid down the terms. Jesus initiated and is the guarantee of a better covenant.

How did He do it? Hear His own words in Luke 22:20, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." By means of shedding His own blood Jesus established a new covenant, a new arrangement under contract, by which sinners can be right with God.

Beloved, our Savior is the guarantee of a better covenant. Leon Morris explains that Christ serves as a guarantee in two directions. "He guarantees to men that God will fulfill his covenant of forgiveness, and he guarantees to God that those who are in him are acceptable."^[2]

The writer of Hebrews will have much more to say about this later. For instance, he explains in 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." (see also 9:15; 10:29; 13:20)

Why put your trust in priest Jesus? Why follow Him to the end? First, because of His position. His priesthood was given to Him by divine authorization, and He has used that position to establish a new covenant, as His Father intended.

II. Consider the permanence of priest Jesus (23-25).

Jesus' priesthood is permanent. To put that in perspective, please realize that...

A. All other priests died (23). "Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office." *Those priests*, again, is referring to the Levitical priests in Israel. There were *many* of those priests. Josephus says there were eighty-three high priests from Aaron to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.^[3]

And why were there so many? Because from 1400 BC all the way to AD 70, all those priests kept dying. *Death prevented them from continuing.*

By the way, it's no different for us, is it?

1. *We can try to ignore, postpone, or even deny death.* And that's exactly what many of us do. I see it at the Life Center where I work out in the mornings. Do you know the two things that grab your attention at just about any fitness center? Televisions and mirrors. Televisions so we can work out watching beautiful, healthy, successful people on the screens. And mirrors, so we see ourselves and our developing muscles in operation. I'm all for fitness, for God's Word teaches us to be good stewards of God's temple (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Yet we're so prone to live like we're not going to die.

What's more, we put our trust in people as if *they* weren't going to die. According to my count, since its beginning in 1878 Wheelersburg Baptist Church has had thirty-one pastors. Some of that number are still living, but most are in heaven now. When I read through that list of names, as I did again this week—J. H. Roberts, A. K. Murphy, John VanGorder, H. E. Ketchem, John Adkins, and many others—I'm reminded that I will not be your pastor forever. That's not being morbid. That's reality. Listen to the Scriptures. *Death prevented them from continuing in office.* The fact is...

2. *We cannot avoid the reality of death.* And that's true, not just for Levitical priests and present day pastors, but for all of us. Later Hebrews will remind us, "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment (9:27)."

But here's the good news! In stark contrast with all other priests who died...

B. Jesus lives forever (24-25). Notice the beginning of verse 24, "But because Jesus lives forever." Or as we saw last week in verse 16, Jesus is a priest "on the basis of the power of an indestructible life."

Human priests die, and their ministry ends. Priest Jesus died, but He conquered death and His ministry continues. Now notice the implications of His unending life in verses 24-25, "But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

Because priest Jesus lives forever, He can accomplish three things that we desperately need.

1. *He can save us completely.* As the KJV puts it, Jesus is "able to save them to the uttermost." This is your greatest need, beloved, as it is mine. It's not money, or education, or friendship, or security, or a home, or contentment, or a host of other *needs*. We need someone who can *save us*, and not merely save us from hard circumstances, but save us *from ourselves*.

That's our biggest problem, and therefore our biggest need. We are sinners who have violated God's law and therefore deserve His condemnation and judgment. And that's the very reason Jesus came, to *save us from our sin problem*. And because He lived a perfect life, then died in the place of sinners, and rose again, He is able to save the sinner completely, to the uttermost, forever. And the present tense verb^[4] carries the idea of continual activity. He doesn't simply *save*. He *saves* and *keeps saving* the sinner (see what He Himself said about this in John 10:27-29).

But that's not. Priest Jesus meets another need we have. Hebrews says...

2. *He can take us to God.* "He is able to save completely *those who come to God through Him.*" That's the purpose of a priest, remember, to provide a link, a bridge, between sinners and God. That's what Jesus does for us, as we saw last time in verse 19, "A better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God."

Just think of it. We have a priest who can take us to God. Through faith in Jesus we enter the family of God, and through Jesus we will spend eternity with God. What's more...

3. *He can intercede for us.* "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because *he always lives to intercede for them.*"

What does it mean to say that Christ *intercedes* for us? What exactly is He doing?

Let's first address what it does *not* mean, and there are several faulty notions you may hear from time to time.

Warren Wiersbe offers this caution, "We must not imagine that God the Father is angry with us so that God the Son must constantly appeal to Him not to judge us! The Father and the Son are in total agreement in the plan of salvation (Heb. 13:20-21). Neither should we imagine our Lord Jesus uttering prayers on our behalf in heaven, or repeatedly 'offering His blood' as a sacrifice. That work was completed on the cross once for all."^[5]

Another commentator put it this way, "We must be careful not to infer from this verse...that the author thought of our Lord as having to maintain a kind of continuous liturgical action in heaven for our benefit..."^[6] Christ is not in heaven finishing His redemptive work. He is *seated* in heaven, says Colossians 3:1, indicating His redemptive work is completed. Remember His words from the cross? "It is finished" (John 19:30).

So what does it mean to say that Christ lives to *intercede* for us? Wiersbe gives this helpful explanation, "Intercession involves our Lord's representation of His people at the throne of God...It has well been said that Christ's life in heaven is His prayer for us. It is what He *is* that determines what He *does.*"^[7]

That says it well. Christ's *life* is His prayer for us. When we blow it, His perfect life pleads for us. His death pleads for us. His resurrection pleads for us. I love the following hymn which captures this thought so well...

When Satan tempts us to despair

And tells us of the guilt within

Upward I look and see Him there

Who made an end to all my sin.

Because the Sinless Savior died

My sinful soul is counted free,

For God the Just is satisfied

To look on Him and pardon me.

That's our priest, brothers and sisters. Fix your eyes on Him. *He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for us.*

You say, "But you don't know what I've done! I've blown it in my life. I've sinned in ways that offend God and grieve my soul terribly. Is there yet hope for me?" My friend, hear what God says! *He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for us.*

If you need yet more proof, consider what the Spirit says to us through the apostle John in 1 John 2:1-2, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

That's what our Savior is now doing, speaking to the Father in our defense. He lives to intercede for us. We've considered His position and His permanence. Now let's...

III. Consider the perfection of priest Jesus (26-28).

Verse 26 begins, "Such a high priest meets our need."^[8] What is it about priest Jesus that assures that He can meet our need and that we can (and must) trust Him fully? Our text answers that question for us in two ways...

A. He can meet our need because of who He is (26). "Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens."

Who is Jesus? For starters...

1. *He became what we are.* The beginning of verse 26 is difficult to translate. The NIV says, "Such a high priest meets our need." Here's the KJV rendering, "For such a high priest became us." Philip Hughes suggests this would be better translated, "'Such a high priest exactly befitted us,' that is to say, answered exactly to the requirements of the predicament in which we, as fallen creatures, were placed."^[9]

And, of course, that's what happened. *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1:14). *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity* (Heb. 2:14). *He had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest* (Heb. 2:17). What's true of our priest? He became what we are. However, not all that we are, for...

2. *He remains set apart from sin and sinners.* Notice the words used to describe Him. "Such a high priest meets our need—one who is **holy** [meaning 'righteous, devout, pious']." A week before the Day of Atonement, the high priest in Israel had to leave his home, separate himself, and live those seven days so as to make sure he avoided ritual defilement.^[10] But Jesus didn't go through some ritual to accomplish holiness. He *is* holy.^[11]

He is also **blameless** [that is, 'innocent, guileless'] and **pure** ['undefiled,' the same word used in 13:4 which says, "The marriage bed kept *pure*"].

And He is **set apart from sinners**. Yes, Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, but He never condoned their sin nor, obviously, participated in it. As Gromacki puts it, "He was separated from them, but never isolated from them."^[12]

But that's not all. The writer wants us to know this about priest Jesus...

3. *He is exalted over the heavens.* He's not just *in* heaven, for heaven cannot contain the infinite, omnipresent Creator. He has, to borrow from *Young's Literal Translation*, "become higher than the heavens." That's why He can meet our need, because there is none higher and greater than Him.

But it's not just because of who He is. Secondly...

B. He can meet our need because of what He accomplished (27-28). "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. 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."

The writer points out three realities concerning priest Jesus. The first...

1. *He does not need to offer ongoing sacrifices.* He's not like every previous high priest. William Barclay explains what happened on the Day of Atonement, "The very first item on the ritual of that day was a sacrifice for the sins of the High Priest himself. He washed his hands and feet; he put off his gorgeous robes; he clothed himself in spotless white linen. There was brought to him a bullock which he had purchased with his own money. He laid both hands on the bullock's head to transfer his sin to it; and thus he made his confession: 'Ah, Lord God, I have committed iniquity; I have transgressed; I have sinned, I and my house. O Lord, I beseech thee, cover over the sins and transgressions which I have committed, transgressed and sinned before thee, I and my house.'" [\[13\]](#) Jesus never did that. He didn't need to do it. Instead...

2. *He made one, final sacrifice for sins.* Some people treat that sacrifice as though it were *not* final. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, performs a weekly mass. The purpose? Here's what *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* says (in paragraph #1367): "The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*... In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner. . . this sacrifice is truly propitiatory." [\[14\]](#)

Is that what the Scriptures teach, that Christ's sacrifice continues "in an unbloody manner"? No. Hebrews says, "He sacrificed for their sins *once*."

But it's not just Catholic theology that treats Christ's past sacrifice as insufficient. What about those in Baptist churches who sit on the sidelines, convinced that God cannot use them because of what they've done, who live as though they must "pay for their sins," and refuse to rest in the finished work of Christ? He paid the price! It's done!

But there's something else the writer wants us to know about Jesus...

3. *He has been made perfect forever.* I mentioned in our last message that the word "perfect" is all over the place in Hebrews, and that's because since God is holy, perfection is a big deal. And the writer of Hebrews wants us to know that we have a *perfect* priest.

Hebrews 2:10 says, "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."

Hebrews 5:9 adds, "And, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

And here we see it again in 7:28, "Who [speaking of the Son] has been made perfect forever."

My friend, in Christ we have a complete, a *perfect* Savior, and what He accomplished He did for you, if you believe in Him. John Calvin put it this way, "Christ has nothing that is not to be put to our benefit, because He was given to us by the Father on this condition, that everything that was His should be ours." [\[15\]](#)

We've considered the position, the permanence, and the perfection of priest Jesus. Now it's time to respond...

Response: Since there is a high priest named Jesus...five things are true.

1. *You may come to God as you are.* Don't try to clean your life up first. That's what the priest is for. He takes the sinner by the hand and leads him to God!

2. *You may come to God because of who Jesus is.* He is able to save completely those who come to

God through Him. That's because He is holy, blameless, and pure.

3. *You may come to God because of what Jesus has done.* He sacrificed for their sins once for all when He offered Himself. The door into the Holy of Holies is open, dear friend, for priest Jesus opened it.

4. *You may come to God because of what Jesus is doing.* He always lives to intercede for them. That means *you*, if you've put your trust in Him.

5. *You may come to God because of what Jesus will do.* He is in heaven now, but the day is coming, perhaps today, when priest Jesus will come again to earth. For our priest is also our King, and He will rule forever. Oh, come to Him today, come! He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him!

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] Leon Morris, p. 70.

[2] Leon Morris, p. 70.

[3] Observation by Leon Morris, p. 71.

[4] The word *sozein* is a present active infinitive.

[5] Warren Wiersbe, p. 302.

[6] Snell, quoted in Leon Morris, p. 71. He elaborates, "The meaning is that our Lord's presence in heaven, *seated* at God's right hand, and awaiting the full manifestation of his already achieved victory, itself constitutes his effective intercession for us."

[7] Wiersbe, p. 302.

[8] The NKJV renders this, "For such a high priest was fitting for us."

[9] Philip Hughes, p. 271.

[10] Observation in Leon Morris, p. 72.

[11] Revelation 15:4 "Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? **For you alone are holy.** All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

[12] Robert Gromacki, p. 133.

[13] William Barclay, pp. 84-5.

[14] Online *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/para/1367.htm>. Here's another quotation from the Catholic Catechism (paragraph #1405): "Every time this mystery is celebrated, "the work of our redemption is carried on" and we "break the one bread that provides the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death, and the food that makes us live for ever in Jesus Christ.""

[15] John Calvin, p. 101.