

Hebrews 8:1-6 "The Truth about Our High Priest" **

Main Idea: Hebrews 8:1-6 points out a bottom line, life-changing truth, namely, that we have a high priest. Specifically, we learn three important realities concerning our high priest.

I. Our high priest is seated (1).

- A. This reveals His authority.
- B. This reveals His accomplishment.
 - 1. Christ finished the work He came to do.
 - 2. Christ's work is sufficient to bring a sinner to heaven.

II. Our high priest is serving (2).

- A. There is a tabernacle in heaven.
- B. Our Savior ministers there in our behalf.
 - 1. We should submit to His service.
 - 2. We should follow His example.

III. Our high priest is superior (3-6).

- A. His offering is superior (3-4).
- B. His sanctuary is superior (5).
- C. His ministry is superior (6).
 - 1. He established a better covenant.
 - 2. He offers better promises.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself these questions...

- 1. Is Christ my high priest?
- 2. Is Christ supreme in my life?
- 3. Is Christ becoming more precious to me?

Do you like repetition? I remember when I took piano lessons years ago. Mrs. Kauffman knew that repetition was vital for a piano student, so she reviewed the basics again and again. "Hold your hands this way, sit in the chair this way, and play this scale this way." Even her homework assignments were filled with repetition.

It's the same in athletics. Listen to just about any basketball coach before a game and you'll hear

repetition. Rather than introducing new information, the coach tells the team the same things he's been telling them all week, even all season long.

Likewise, good parenting is filled with repetition. How many times did you tell your children how important it is to make their beds and be a clean-plater? Sometimes a parent feels like a broken record.

It ought not surprise us that when we read the book of Hebrews, guess what we find? Repetition! The writer keeps hammering away at certain themes and repeating certain words over and over again, and as we've seen his line of reasoning is pretty intense. Quite frankly, when you read Hebrews you find a ton of details about a system we don't have today, the tabernacle and the Levitical priesthood. And since that system is gone, we may have a hard time understanding the point of it all, a point that the first readers, *Jewish* readers, understood very well. Thankfully, every so often the writer stops to tell us the point, and that's the case in our text today.

Notice the beginning words of chapter 8, "The point of what we are saying is this." In the past four messages we've worked our way through Hebrews 7, and we've learned that Jesus is a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. We've pondered the mysterious identity of this priest-king named Melchizedek, considering just how great he was (verse 4). The writer told us that if perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood, there would have been no need for another priest, one in the order of Melchizedek (verse 11). We learned that other priests took their office because of their pedigree, but Jesus became a priest with an *oath* when God said to him, "You are a priest forever (verse 21)." We read that other priests died, but not priest Jesus. He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him because He "always lives to intercede for them (verse 25)."

Great truths, for sure, but you finish chapter 7 wondering, "Okay, I feel lost. How do all these truths fit together?" Thankfully, the writer pulls it all together as he begins chapter 8. "The point of what we are saying is this." Or, as the KJV puts it, "This is the sum." And what is the sum, the point of it all? Here it is in a sentence... Verse 1—*We do have such a high priest.*

Before we go any further, please don't miss what's happening here. Whenever you're ministering God's truth to others, always be asking yourself, "What questions is this raising for those listening to me?" Before we give *answers*, we need to know the *questions* people are asking. In this case, the question was simply, "Okay, why did you just tell us about Melchizedek?" To which the writer, knowing his audience, responds, "Here's why. Here's the point."

Thirty years ago when we told people, "Jesus died for sinners like you and me," we could assume some things. Most people understood what sin was, who Jesus was, at least in a basic sense, and why He died. But that's not the case today, and when sharing gospel truth these days, we can't afford to assume anything.

So what's the point of all this talk about Melchizedek and high priests? Hebrews 8:1-6 points out the bottom line, life-changing truth, namely, that *we have a high priest*. Specifically, we learn three important realities concerning our high priest. Our high priest is seated, serving, and superior. Let's examine each one by one.

I. Our high priest is seated (1).

Verse 1 "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."

What is true of our high priest Jesus? He is *seated*. Where? In heaven. And where in heaven? At the right hand of the throne of the Majesty. What does that tell us about Christ? Two things...

A. This reveals His authority. To be at the *right hand* of the throne of Majesty in heaven indicates He possesses the credentials, the right, the authority to rule all things in and under heaven.

The writer emphasized this truth as he began his letter in 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.*" Later he asked this question in Hebrews 1:13, "To which of the angels did God ever say, '*Sit at my right hand* until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?'" God never gave an angel permission to sit at His right hand. That place is reserved for His Son.

When did the Son take His seat? We find the answer in Hebrews 10:12, "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, *he sat down* at the right hand of God." He took His seat *after* He made His sacrifice for sins. Hebrews 12:2 elaborates, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and *sat down* at the right hand of the throne of God."

So the fact that our high priest is seated speaks of His authority. In addition...

B. This reveals His accomplishment. You wouldn't find any chair in the Old Testament tabernacle. That's because you didn't go there to sit. There was always work to do, for no sacrifice made there ever finished the sin problem. More sins would come, and more sacrifices would be necessary.

But we have a high priest who *sat down*. And why is that? It's because...

1. *Christ finished the work He came to do.* "By one sacrifice," says Hebrews 10:14, "He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." Christ finished His work. He came to earth as a man, lived a perfect life, and then offered His perfect life, dying as a sacrificial lamb, thereby providing the final payment for sin. Three days later, to prove His pleasure with His Son's redeeming work, the Almighty God raised His Son from the dead. The result?

2. *Christ's work is sufficient to bring a sinner to heaven.* He is "able to save completely those who come to God through Him," as 7:25 declares. *Completely.*

Remember why this was such a big deal. This letter was written to a Jewish audience comprised of people who had professed faith in Messiah Jesus. But due to persecution, some were having second thoughts. "Maybe we made a mistake. After all, we don't have a priest like we used to. Maybe we should go back."

"Go back?" says Hebrews. "We *do* have a high priest! And He is *seated* at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven!" What's true of our high priest? He is *seated*. Second...

II. Our high priest is serving (2).

Verse 2 continues, "And who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man."

That's interesting. If our priest is seated, how can He be serving? In reality, though Christ finished His work of redemption, He is not presently inactive. His redemptive work is complete, but His work as intercessor continues. To repeat the words of 7:25, "He always lives to intercede."^[1]

Alan Stibbs offers this helpful analogy: "Admittedly the act of offering was necessary to constitute Christ a priest in fact, and not only in name, just as the act of child-bearing is necessary to constitute a woman a mother. But that truth does not mean in the case of motherhood that henceforth, to those who resort to her as mother, such a woman is always giving them birth. Her act of child-bearing is for them not only an indispensable but also a finished work. What they now enjoy are other complimentary ministries of motherhood, which lie beyond the child-bearing. Similarly with Christ's priesthood His propitiatory offering is not only an indispensable but also a finished work."^[2]

The point is, even now our high priest is *servicing*. Seated, yet serving. Redemption complete,

intercession continuing.

And where is He serving? *In the sanctuary*, says our text (lit. “in the holy things” or “in the holy places”). That’s what a sanctuary is, of course, a holy place filled with holy things. And what particular sanctuary does the writer have in mind? The one that is *the true tabernacle*. The first tabernacle, of course, was the tent that God told Moses to have the Israelites build, a holy place where they would bring Him sacrifices and He would pardon their sins. But that’s not where Christ is serving. Hebrews says He is serving in the true tabernacle, the one *set up by the Lord, not by man*.

Just what is this “true tabernacle?” Bible scholars have proposed a variety of explanations over the years. John Chrysostom and John Owen said the tabernacle/tent refers to the body of Christ, referencing a later verse in 9:11 for support. Brown explains, “To these expositors the true tent is the human body of Christ in which he ministered on earth and in which, supremely by dying, he accomplished our redemption.”^[3] Others, such as Westcott, have suggested the tent is the church. Still others say the tent refers to the individual believer, as Brown again explains, “The sanctuary, or tent, which Jesus enters is the soul of the believing man or woman.”^[4] And still others have said that the virgin Mary is the true tent.

I think the context suggests a more basic understanding. In verse 1 the writer said that Christ is seated where? In *heaven*. I think he has heaven in mind in verse 2 as well. When he says that Christ is serving in the sanctuary, he is indicating that...

A. There is a tabernacle in heaven. In fact, the writer says so plainly in verse 5, as we’ll see in a moment. Raymond Brown explains, “The most natural reading of the text is that our writer here refers simply to the eternal or heavenly realm where he is seated at the right hand of God. It is here that Christ serves as our *minister*.”^[5]

We’ll talk more about this heavenly tabernacle when we get to verse 5, but for now let’s consider what’s happening there. Verse 2 reveals that...

B. Our Savior ministers there in our behalf. When the writer says that Christ “serves” in the sanctuary, he uses an important word. It’s from the Greek term *leitourgos*, from which we get the word “liturgy.” It refers to a person who serves another. In Romans 13:6 it’s used of civil authorities, there called “God’s servants.” In Romans 15:16 Paul used the term to refer to himself as a “minister of Christ.” In Hebrews 1:7 the writer uses the word to tell us what angels are, *servants*.

Here’s what’s staggering. In our text we’re told this is what Christ is, “a minister of the sanctuary,” as the KJV puts it. Yes, Christ came to earth to serve—that’s what Philippians 2:7 declares. But Hebrews 8 takes it a step further. Our great high priest, the One who has returned to heaven and is now seated on His throne *is still serving*. He who is Lord and Master still serves His subjects.

Don’t misunderstand. Christ is not our Genie in a bottle. He does not exist for us, for all things exist for Him. And yet He serves us in the heavenly sanctuary. He ministers there in our behalf.

How ought we to respond to this? In two ways...

1. *We should submit to His service.* The reason our high priest is serving in the sanctuary is because He knows what we need, and He is committed to meeting that need, fully, entirely, and completely. To cite 7:25 again, “He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.”

Incredible as it sounds, it’s true. Yet the question is, are we submitting to His service?

My mother loved to serve her family, as my wife does hers. My mother had a simple rule for us kids. Perhaps you’ve heard it (or used it) in your own family. No snacking before meals. What was the purpose of that rule? I didn’t understand it as a child. If I wanted a hostess ho-ho, I didn’t understand why I couldn’t have one, even if it was fifteen minutes before lunch. What I eventually learned, however, was that my mother knew what I needed to be healthy and strong, and she served me by providing a well

balanced meal. But that meal would do me no good if I didn't eat it, and I wouldn't eat it if I filled my stomach with junk food and refused to submit to her service.

Christ is serving in the sanctuary. Are you submitting yourself to His ministry? Here's what He told us in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." To be saved, we must believe in Him. To bear fruit, we must remain in Him. We must submit to the ministry He alone can provide.

That's why spending time with Him on a daily basis is so critical. We need Him. We need the ministry of His Word in our lives. We need to be praying to Him. Without Him we can do nothing.

But the fact that our Savior ministers in our behalf should elicit a second response.

2. *We should follow His example.* Remember His words to us in John 13:13-15? "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

Our high priest is seated. Our high priest is serving. What's more...

III. Our high priest is superior (3-6).

What's superior about Christ? The writer identifies three things.

A. His offering is superior (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. If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law."

Did you realize that when on earth Jesus never went into the holy of holies in the temple? Since he was not a Levite, He couldn't go there and therefore stayed in the outer courts with the rest of the people. In fact, if Jesus was still on earth, says the writer, He couldn't be a priest for us, since He wasn't a Levite.

But our priest is superior to the Levitical priests. In what way? His offering is superior. What's more...

B. His sanctuary is superior (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.'"

That's interesting. When God told Moses on Mount Sinai to build a tabernacle, He didn't leave the specifics up to Moses. He told him exactly how to build it. In fact, He *showed* him what He wanted it to look like, explaining in Exodus 25:9, "Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you." (which He repeated in Exodus 25:40 & 26:3)^[6]

I must confess I never thought about this before. I knew that Moses *heard* God's voice on the mountain, but the truth is he *saw* something too. And the writer of Hebrews says that what Moses saw was a *copy* and a *shadow* of what is in heaven.

I have a model in my office of a tractor. It's an exact replica of a tractor that was in the barn of a friend of mine, and he made the model according to scale. The model isn't the tractor, but it represents it.

Israel's tabernacle was like that. It was fashioned to represent the heavenly tabernacle. Robert Gromacki explains, "Moses probably saw a visible reproduction of the invisible heavenly temple and recorded the construction details under divine inspiration. Each item or detail thus must have had divine significance even though believers have difficulty in ascertaining it."^[7]

And there were indeed plenty of details in the first tabernacle! The writer of Hebrews actually

describes it in chapter 9. Listen to this description, taken from the *New Living Translation* of Hebrews 9:2-5:

“There were two rooms in that Tabernacle. In the first room were a lampstand, a table, and sacred loaves of bread on the table. This room was called the Holy Place. Then there was a curtain, and behind the curtain was the second room called the Most Holy Place. In that room were a gold incense altar and a wooden chest called the Ark of the Covenant, which was covered with gold on all sides. Inside the Ark were a gold jar containing manna, Aaron’s staff that sprouted leaves, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the Ark were the cherubim of divine glory, whose wings stretched out over the Ark’s cover, the place of atonement. But we cannot explain these things in detail now.”

What was the point of the construction of that tabernacle? Hebrews says that tabernacle was a copy, a mere shadow of the one in heaven. Philip Hughes explains, “It was designed to display, in a typical manner, deep truths concerning the need of man and the grace of God. There was, as Calvin says, a real meaning in everything; but at the same time, he [Calvin] adds, ‘there is no cause for us to be excessively curious and to seek some sublime mystery in every nail and in other similar details...as a good many ancient writers laboured to do.’”^[8]

We could spend a lot of time trying to conjecture the relationship between Moses’ sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary, but it boils down to this. The reality has come, so why go back into the shadows? Christ’s sanctuary is superior to the one on earth.^[9]

But there’s more. Not only is His offering and His sanctuary superior, so too...

C. His ministry is superior (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.”

What makes Jesus’ ministry superior? For starters...

1. *He established a better covenant.* When God met with Moses on Mount Sinai, He entered into a covenant relationship with the nation of Israel. It’s called the Mosaic covenant, and that covenant served for fourteen centuries, but in the end it failed. The problem wasn’t the covenant. The problem was the people.

When Jesus came, He didn’t patch up the old covenant. Rather, He did what the prophet Jeremiah predicted Messiah would do, in the text the writer of Hebrews quotes in the latter half of chapter 8, the text we’ll consider next time, the Lord willing. Rather than touch up the old, Jesus established a new and better covenant.

Remember the Savior’s words? “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you (Luke 22:20).” (see also Heb. 9:15)

There’s something else that makes Jesus’ ministry superior. Not only did He establish a better covenant, but...

2. *He offers better promises.* In fact, His covenant, says the writer of Hebrews, “is founded on better promises.” How so? Robert Gromacki offers this helpful explanation, “The old system depended upon the promise of man toward God.”^[10] Remember God’s challenge to Israel at Mount Sinai? Exodus 19:5 states, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.” And the people responded in Exodus 19:8, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” In order to receive God’s blessing, Israel had to obey.

What about the new covenant arrangement? Again, Gromacki says it well, “On the other hand, the new covenant stemmed from the unconditional promises of God toward His people. They would receive His blessing because He willed to confer it upon them apart from their merit and solely through His grace.”^[11]

It boils down to this. Man toward God, or God toward man, which will it be for you? Will you trust in

man's efforts to reach God—that could be your own efforts, or some religious organization, or humanitarian cause, OR, will you trust in what God has done to reach man in the person of His Son, Jesus the Christ? Where is your trust today?

Raymond Brown sums up rightly the implications: "Here is a clear word to any Christian in despondency or despair. We may feel crushed, dejected, bewildered, or broken, but our eternal salvation has never depended on our vacillating moods or our changing circumstances. Christ has entered the heavenly sanctuary; 'once for all' he offered his blood for us. There he has appeared for us and now he is praying for us. We are ever remembered at the throne and our names are enrolled in heaven. This is our confidence. Our faith is grounded not in what we are or what we have done, but ever and always in what he is, God's perfect Son, and what he has done through his perfect, eternal sacrifice."^[12]

I hope you're trusting in Christ today. His offering is superior. His sanctuary is superior. His ministry is superior. There is none greater! Yes, there is no high priest like Him, for He is seated, He is serving, and yes, He is superior.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself these questions...

1. *Is Christ my high priest?* It's not enough to affirm that there is a high priest in heaven. The question is, "Is He *your* high priest?" Are you admitted your need for Him because of your sin, have you repented of your sin, and put your trust in His finished work on the cross? Have you received Him, the risen Savior and high priest of heaven, as *your* high priest? If not, why not? He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him. So do so. Come to God *through Him*.

2. *Is Christ supreme in my life?* He is superior to all else. Is He superior in *your* life? Take inventory. We're so prone to give lip service to our great high priest. He deserves more. He who gave His all deserves our all.

3. *Is Christ becoming more precious to me?* He's not just a concept to analyze. He's a person to adore and treasure and cherish.

^{**}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] Raymond Brown puts it this way, "The ministry he now offers is as intercessor, not as sacrificer." p. 141.

^[2] Alan Stibbs, taken from Raymond Brown, pp. 144-5.

^[3] Raymond Brown, p. 143.

^[4] Ibid.

^[5] Ibid.

^[6] Stephen said that Moses made the tabernacle "according to the pattern he has seen" (Acts 7:44).

^[7] Robert Gromacki, p. 140.

^[8] Philip Hughes, p. 293.

^[9] For further reading, consider the use of "temple" in the book of Revelation, such as in Rev. 11:19.

^[10] Robert Gromacki, p. 140.

^[11] Gromacki, p. 141.

^[12] Raymond Brown, p. 146.