

Christ Is Superior to the Levitical Priesthood

“Such an High Priest”

Hebrews 8:1-5

This is the final portion of this section on the superiority of Christ over the Levitical priesthood and the clause “this is the sum” point to that conclusion.

These verses not only serve as a conclusion to the last several chapters but also as an introduction to the next three. That is what is meant by the first phrase of the chapter: “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum.” The way this is given in the original Greek carries the past into the present, connecting the superiority of Christ from His position as our Great High Priest to the service and ministry that He is carrying out.

What is given here is the primary thrust of what has been said so far in the letter. “This is what we have been emphasizing from the beginning: the high priesthood of Jesus Christ,” the writer is saying. A great many things have been presented and explained, but they all relate, directly or indirectly, to Christ’s high priesthood. (MacArthur)

I. SITTING ON THE RIGHT HAND OF THE MAJESTY - VS. 1

- A. As we saw in our study of the last chapter, our Great High Priest is on the right hand of “the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,” which points back to Heb. 1:3 and reiterates the position of our Saviour now.**

There are three aspects of this truth that I want to consider in this message. There may be more but these three are unique and special for us today.

1. It's a position of authority - we saw this when we studied Heb. 1:3.

"The right hand of a monarch symbolized honor, exaltation, and power. To stand at his right hand was honor, but to sit there, supreme honor." (MacArthur)

2. It's a position of pardon

"The idea of sitting at the right hand may have reminded some Jews of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council of seventy elders. This group had both civil and religious authority and acted administratively as well as judicially. Even under Roman rule, the Sanhedrin was allowed considerable power, as evidenced by its role in Jesus' final arrest and crucifixion. It was a kind of supreme court, and more. When the members sat in judgment, a scribe, or secretary, sat on either side of the presiding judge. The scribe on the left side was responsible for writing condemnations, while the one on the right was responsible for writing acquittals. Jesus said that He came into the world not to condemn but to save (John 3:17). As High Priest, He now sits in the place not only of honor and power but of mercy. He sits there making intercession (Heb. 7:25) - writing acquittals, as it were - for His own." (MacArthur)

3. It's a position of mercy and grace - the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies shows this.

- a) The Mercy Seat as God's throne in the Old Testament

Exodus 25:22

²² And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.

Leviticus 16:2

² And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.

Numbers 7:89

⁸⁹ And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims: and he spake unto him.

1 Samuel 4:4

⁴ So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

Psalms 80:1

¹ Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.

Psalms 99:1

¹ The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved.

- b) The Mercy Seat served as a symbolic representation of God's heavenly throne.

"For, as the ark in the inward tabernacle was called the. mercy-seat, or throne of the Majesty on earth, because the glory of the Lord which appeared between the Cherubim rested on it to dispense to the Israelites the pardon of the offences which they committed against God as the king of their commonwealth, so the place where the glory of God is manifested in heaven, is called here the throne of the Majesty in the heavens ; and chap. 7:2, the throne of God." (MacKnight)

Hebrews 9:11-12

¹¹ But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; ¹² Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

Hebrews 9:24

²⁴ For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

Revelation 4:1-6

¹ After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. ² And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. ³ And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and

there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. ⁴ And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. ⁵ And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. ⁶ And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

II. SERVING IN THE SANCTUARY – VS. 2

A. “A minister of the sanctuary”

1. The word for “minister” here (λειτουργός) is not the one we would use for that of someone who serves others as a minister or pastor, or as found in the word for “deacon” (διακονέω).
 - a) The word used here is a compound word that comes from two words that would literally translate to “the work of (or for) the people,” and has to do with public service or worship.

In New Testament times, under the Roman Empire, it was “a person of property who performed a public duty or service to the state at his own expense.”

Romans 13:6

⁶ For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

Romans 15:16

¹⁶ That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.

- b) We get the English word “liturgy, or liturgical” from this, which is used now for a very formal way of worship.
- c) It was used of the service the Old Testament priests offered in their work in the Tabernacle and Temple.

Nehemiah 10:39

³⁹ For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

2. “The sanctuary”

- a) Sometimes referred to the entire tabernacle structure, including the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. This usage established the entire tabernacle as a sacred, holy place where God’s presence dwells.
- b) In a more specific sense, the sanctuary refers to the two inner sections of the tabernacle:
 - (1) The Holy Place (הַקֹּדֶשׁ) - Containing the golden lampstand (menorah), table of showbread, and altar of incense.
 - (2) The Holy of Holies (הַקֹּדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים) - Containing the Ark of the Covenant and the

Mercy Seat, where God's presence was most concentrated.

- c) In the text under review, it is referring to the heavenly sanctuary - the place where's God's throne is, where the eternal "Mercy-Seat" is.

This connects the earthly tabernacle with the heavenly.

B. "And of the true tabernacle"

Let me make a note here - there are some very competent scholars and theologians that consider this "true tabernacle" to be that of the body of Christ rather than the pattern for the earthly tabernacle that verse five references, but the context doesn't support that view. I understand it and can see an application to be made of that being the case, but we will look at this as just what it is: the tabernacle in heaven.

There is a text in the Gospel of John that would lend support to this view but the context there has a different purpose than this.

[John 1:14](#)

¹⁴ And the Word was made flesh, and **dwelt** [tabernacled] among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

1. This is the first mention of the "tabernacle" in the book of Hebrews, but the word is used eight (8) more times in the book, seven (7) of those in the next two chapters - so it is an important part of this portion of the book.
2. The phrase "true tabernacle" is meant as a

comparison to the Tabernacle of the Old Testament which was temporary in function and a type of what was to come in the "true." It is not a comparison to something that is false, or that the Old Testament Tabernacle was not "true."

With that in mind, I want to spend a little time on a very brief explanation of the Old Testament tabernacle used by the Israelites in the wilderness wandering.

The Old Testament tabernacle was a portable sanctuary designed by God as a dwelling place among the Israelites (Exodus 25:8-9). It was a symbol of God's presence and foreshadowed Christ's work as High Priest (Hebrews 9:11).

a) The Outer Court (2 on map)

The outer court was a rectangular enclosure (about 150 x 75 feet, Exodus 27:18) surrounded by a linen fence supported by bronze pillars.

(1) Bronze Altar (Altar of Burnt Offering - 3,4 on map) - Located near the entrance, used for animal sacrifices (Exodus 27:1-8).

(2) Bronze Laver (5 on map) - A large basin for priestly washing before entering the Holy Place (Exodus 30:18-21).

b) The Tabernacle Structure (The Sanctuary) - 6 on the map

The tabernacle itself was a rectangular tent (45 x 15 feet) divided into two sections:

(1) The Holy Place - 7 on the map

Only priests could enter this section, which contained:

- (a) Golden Lampstand (8 on the map) - Provided light in the sanctuary (Exodus 25:31-40).
- (b) Table of Showbread (9 on the map) - Held twelve loaves representing Israel's twelve tribes (Exodus 25:23-30).
- (c) Altar of Incense (10 on the map) - Used for burning incense as an offering to God (Exodus 30:1-10).

(2) The Holy of Holies - 12 on the map

The innermost and most sacred part, separated by a veil (Exodus 26:31-33). It contained:

- (a) Ark of the Covenant (13 on the map) - A gold-covered chest holding the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod, and manna (Exodus 25:10-22).
- (b) The Mercy Seat (14 on the map) - The golden lid of the Ark, where God's presence appeared between the cherubim.

First John 2:2 refers to our Saviour as "the propitiation for our sins" - a word translated as "mercyseat" in Hebrews 9:5.

c) The coverings for the Tabernacle

The tabernacle was covered with four layers of materials (Exodus 26:1-14):

- (1) Fine Linen (only shows on the expanded view) - represents Christ in all the glory of His perfect righteousness and redemptive work.
- (2) Goat Hair (6.a on the map) - A black covering, representing sacrifice.
- (3) Ram Skins Dyed Red (6.b on the map) - Symbolizing the substitutionary atonement made by the blood of Christ.
- (4) Badger Skins (6.c on the map) - this pictures the humanity of Christ, bearing the punishment for sinners.

C. "Which the Lord pitched, and not man" - the earthly tabernacle was a work of man's hands while the "true tabernacle" is entirely of God's own making.

III. SUBMITTING OUR GIFTS TO THE FATHER - VS. 3-5

A. "Gifts and sacrifices" - we saw this phrase in Heb. 5:1 but I didn't give much on it at that point.

1. In simplistic terms, "gifts" refer to non-blood offerings such as the meal offerings and the drink offerings and "sacrifices" refer to the blood offerings. There are exceptions to this rule of interpretation, but this is the rule applied in Hebrews.
2. The gift offerings were given by the Israelites to represent their personal dedication, thanksgiving, and devotion to the Lord (Lev. 2:1-10 give the statute for this). The blood offerings were for cleansing from sin (Lev.

17:11).

3. With that in mind, the clause in verse three (3) relating to our Great High Priest that states, "it is of necessity that this man have somewhat to offer" is not referring to the sacrifice for sin because that has been offered "once for all." It is referring to the "gifts" that were offered. (The Catholic church uses this verse to justify the observance of the Mass, but they manipulate it to mean something it doesn't.)

"Jesus has already ministered the one final blood sacrifice that is sufficient for all people for all time. This work of His is completely finished, because there is no need, and there will forever be no need for any additional sacrifice for the cleansing of sin. But the need for His redeemed people to come to dedication and commitment and thanksgiving is not over. These gifts of praise and thanksgiving Jesus continues to minister for us before His Father." (MacArthur)

- B. Verse four (4) points back to the previous chapter and the text on the tribe of Levi and the fact that Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. This is what is meant by "if he were on earth, he should not be a priest" - He wouldn't have qualified.**

Because He is in heaven, however, a "priest after the order of Melchisedec," He is qualified to perform those duties of ministering in the sanctuary for us as our mediator, advocate, and intercessor.

- C. Verse five (5) sums this point up showing that the Old Testament tabernacle and priesthood was**

just a “shadow of heavenly things” - a type of the true ministry in heaven.

Moses was physically shown a pattern of the Tabernacle to follow as he gave instructions to build the structure and all that it contained. This is referenced throughout the Bible. Imagine the wonder he must have experienced as he talked with God while receiving these instructions!!

Conclusion: We've spent thirteen weeks on this section of Christ being Superior to the Levitical Priesthood because of the significance it holds in showing that He was the perfect and complete sacrifice and fulfillment of all of the Levitical Law and nothing more needs done. Because of the completeness of the work, He ascended back to heaven and is there performing those eternal priestly functions for us, seated on the right hand of the Majesty, continuing to satisfy and fulfill what we need from Him as our Great High Priest - mediator, advocate, and intercessor.