

Lets open our Bibles this morning to the book of Hebrews, our text is Hebrews 8:1-6 (repeat). If you don't have a Bible this morning, there should be a black hardback edition in the pew near you and you can find our text on pg. _____, or you can follow along on the screens behind me.

As you're getting there, I would remind you of what we have seen in recent months. We've heard a lot of talk of priests, Aaron, Levi, Melchizedek and Jesus. We have traced the authors argument concerning the priesthood of the Lord Jesus. Jesus is not a Son of Aaron, nor of the tribe of Levi – which would seem to disqualify him from priesthood. Yet the author showed us that Jesus was in fact a priest from the lineage of Melchizedek a king-priest who came long before the Old Testament priestly law, what we know as Leviticus, given through Moses. So far from being disqualified as a priest he is in fact a priest superior to Aaron & Levi, and superior to the entire old covenant priesthood.

Yet, He is a descendant of Abraham, therefore he is qualified to be the promised Messiah of God's people, and He is a descendant of David so he is qualified to fulfill eternal kingdom promise to David from 2 Sam 7.

In making these matters clear from the Old Testament we see him answer objections against Jesus' credibility, against Jesus' lineage, against even the work Jesus accomplished on the cross. Now because it is easy to get "lost in the weeds" a bit, let me remind you of the importance of these detailed and nuanced statements. In a broad sense the author is answering basic but essential questions:

- Who is Jesus, and what does His priesthood mean?
- What does Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension have to do with me?
- How is Jesus connected to the Old Testament?
- Where is Jesus now?

These are questions many of us face at different times in our lives and it is to our great benefit to listen closely when God gives answers, so follow as I read Hebrews 8:1-6...

8 Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,² a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.³ For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.⁴ Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law.⁵ They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."⁶ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.¹

This is the Word of the Lord...Thanks be to God!

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 8:1-6.

Have you ever been around someone who has an air of superiority about them? Either their mannerisms, or their speech, or their facial expression give off the vibe that they are better than you are, and they know it... I was invited to meet up with some other pastors in the area a few months back by a mutual pastor friend. Basically, he was playing the part of matchmaker for pastoral friendships. He thought that because we were all his friends, we would probably like each other if given the opportunity to socialize, and we did. During our conversation, the topic of music came up, and though I didn't think I was being particularly dogmatic, one of the pastors jokingly remarked that I had good taste, but I had no room for what I didn't like – its either good because I like it or its horrible and no one should listen to it. We all laughed, myself included, because he was right. You can ask my wife and children; they will verify that I am this way. If you have ever mentioned music to me, I am very glad that my internal dialogue is internal.

What makes this ridiculous is the arrogance of my heart, I can't read music, I am not trained in the history of music, nor in the development of musical styles and compositions through history – for me to feel, act, think and speak as superior in musical appreciation from a place of zero credibility is foolish. I am limited in ability and scope, I have no basis to claim superiority.

Phony superiority is repulsive.
Genuine superiority brings humility.

When lightning strikes close to us and the thunderclap shakes our bones, we are in the presence of superiority. Here in our state when we hear the word hurricane we know what superiority can look like. It's not hard to know our place in those moments. But, in society there are times when we may be invited or directed to see our superior, one who has rightful authority over us. This isn't a statement about someone's value, or dignity, but of their power and authority. In a country founded upon rebellion, it is a challenge for many of us to even recognize another's superiority, much less humble ourselves before it. I led a mission trip for teenagers to England some years back, it was during the Queen's diamond jubilee, and a pastor said something that stuck with me, "as Americans you struggle with sovereignty, another who is a rightful ruler over you and is right to determine your actions and abilities, we don't have that struggle, in England we understand sovereignty." I wasn't offended by his comment because I knew from my own experience that he was right. It is very American of us to say, no one is superior to me, my ideas, my tastes, my freedoms, my destiny – I am superior.

The questions our author turns to address now, having already established that Jesus is an authentic priest, from the order of Melchizedek is the reality that Jesus is superior to any priest, even the old covenant priests that God had given through Moses. The temptation of these hearers to go back to the old covenant was to run to an inferior priesthood of an obsolete covenant.

Jesus is the superior High Priest, in a superior position, fulfilling His superior Ministry. We will consider the superiority of Christ in two ways from this text: First, Jesus' Superior Position (8:1-2) and then second: Jesus' Superior Ministry (8:3-6)

Jesus' Superior Position

The first statement in vs.1 clues us in on the significance of these verses, “**Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest**”² – He tells us the reason and the summary of what he has been explaining to this point and the basis for his continuing explanation as the letter moves forward. Jesus is the point of the letter of Hebrews because he is the main point of the Bible. Jesus is our high priest. We have covered this in previous sermons in our series so I won't linger here long except to remind you why it matters that Jesus is our great High priest. A priest is a mediator, one who goes between two parties –working to bring two parties that are separated or alienated together. The priesthood of the Old Testament existed to restore communion and fellowship between God and His people. God's people sinned; the priest would offer the appropriate sacrifice which God had commanded on behalf of the people for atonement, and God's wrath was satisfied, forgiveness was granted and Israel's relationship with God was restored.

The late J.I. Packer summarizes this beautifully, “*Every member of our fallen and rebellious race is by nature “hostile to God” and stands under God’s wrath. Reconciliation of the warring parties is needed, but this can occur only if God’s wrath is somehow absorbed and quenched and man’s anti-God heart, which motivates his anti-God life, is somehow changed. In mercy, God the angry judge sent his Son into the world to bring about the needed reconciliation. It was not that the kindly Son acted to placate his harsh Father; the initiative was the Father’s own...In all his mediatorial ministry the Son was doing the Father’s will...Jesus is “the mediator of a new covenant” – that is, the initiator of a new relationship of conscious peace with God, going beyond what the less effective Old Testament arrangements for dealing with the guilt of sin could ever secure.*”³

This is what the author of Hebrews is saying to us. That Jesus brings the restoration and renewal that we need, he has accomplished what we could not, and he has finished the work that the old covenant could not, because as David showed us last week Jesus is alive even now. He is in a superior position to the entire old testament priesthood because of what he has accomplished which no former priest could do.

This is the hope and the heart of the gospel. If you are here today and you aren't a Christian this is the message of hope that Christians believe. None of us really have to be convinced that we have done wrong, that we are guilty of sin. Maybe your view of Christianity is that we are hypocrites, liars and scoundrels, and you know what, you're right! We know that we are guilty, which is why we have trusted in Christ. The gospel is honest with everyone about our guilt before God. God is not ok with, nor will he excuse our wickedness. He is holy, perfect and righteous and he rightly judges sin. But the good news is that we do not have to bear the punishment and guilt for our sin because there is one who took our penalty in His death on the cross, Jesus our High Priest. He died in our place, receiving our condemnation in his death. This Jesus, the eternal Son was raised from death by the Father. He rose from the grave, and lives even now. True Christians are those who have repented of their sin, we agree

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 8:1.

³ J.I. Packer, Concise Theology, pp. 148.

with God's Word that we are guilty, we confess that guilt to God our judge, and we trust in Jesus who died and rose again as our only hope and our only savior. And God the righteous judge looks upon His son, at His right hand, our high priest who intercedes for us and says, welcome home. If you have questions about becoming a Christian, you can see me or any of the pastors or leaders down front after the service and we'd be glad to explain more clearly what it means to be a Christian.

But there's more to *Jesus' superior position* in the two following statements:

First, "*one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,*"⁴ – Jesus position we are told is a place of honor and authority. Leon Morris explains it this way, "*We have, then, a high priest who is so great that he took his seat at God's right hand. 'The Majesty in heaven' is a reverent way of referring to God, and to be at his right hand is to be in the place of highest honor. The posture of sitting points to a completed work.*"⁵ Jesus we see has taken a place which no earthly priest could ever go. The place of honor at God's right hand. Historically ancient kings would have high officials in their presence, as a display of power and authority they would grant an audience to people they deemed worthy to be around them. The highest seat and position of the kings court was his right hand.

In the presence of God the Father, the rightful king of the universe, the seat is occupied by His beloved Son our great high priest. This isn't new to our ears because this is how the author began his letter in chapter 1, speaking of Jesus he wrote, "*After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*"⁶ – Jesus is in a position superior to any one in the universe he is at the right hand of His heavenly father. There is no priest who could ever claim such an honored position, but more on that in a moment.

Because the second statement of Jesus' superior position only intensifies this further, "*a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.*"⁷

Ok, so what on earth is he talking about, and I will restrain some of my Bible nerdery here, which is a challenge, but remember he is talking to people who would have a more thorough understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures than we have. The Tabernacle and the Temple were the physical locations where God's presence was located among his people. Within the Tabernacle and the Temple there were spheres of access, with most people not allowed to proceed very far. The priests were the only ones allowed to enter into the holy places in these structures, but even then, there was a smaller section called the holy of holies where the ark of the covenant was placed, and the only one who could enter that place in the Temple was the high priest and He could only enter once a year, on the day of atonement. The reason was the presence of God. No priest was allowed to simply remain in the

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 8:1.

⁵ Leon Morris, "[Hebrews](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 74.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 1:3.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 8:2.

presence of God, they entered, performed the necessary rituals and they were blessed if they walked out.

The Tabernacle and the Temple were an outpost of heaven on earth. They were physical structure that symbolized heavenly realities. Living outside DC afforded a lot of cool opportunities for our family, one day we were in the district and I wanted to go to a record shop, the kids were still small and could not appreciate such an amazing opportunity nor the mile walk to get there, so Carrie and the kids chose to enjoy a park instead, I know their loss, while I walked over to DuPont circle, but the walk took me down a portion of what is known as “embassy row”, which is exactly what it sounds like a street where foreign embassies are lined up one after another, and they are stunning, each country trying to one up the next in pomp and circumstance. But that makes sense as the embassies are essentially outposts of their nation on foreign soil, they are physical spaces representing their respective country. They are separated from their home country by distance, but politically and geographically each embassy represents a sovereign outpost of their nation. If you enter these embassies, you must be a citizen, or a guest and you would find as much connection to that nations home soil as one building can hold.

The Tabernacle and the Temple were embassies of heaven on earth. Yes God is sovereign and rules over all the earth, but in the Tabernacle and the Tent the structure was called his dwelling place. Which is why earthy sinful humans could only enter if the price of admission had been paid, namely their sins atoned for by sacrifice, lest they enter the heavenly presence of God and be killed by His holiness.

But Jesus, our great high priest, ascended to heaven, and is seated in the place no other priest could occupy. They could only serve in the outpost here on earth, which was truly a place of God’s presence, yet Jesus freely enters the heavenly courts of God and occupies the position of greatest honor in the universe as the eternal Son of the Father. Jesus has the superior position to any and every priest, which is why we need no other priest, no priest can ascend higher than Jesus. No earthly priest has the right, authority or credibility to enter where Jesus does, he alone sits at the right hand of the Father as a minister for us. He’s not just in a superior position, He’s in the superior position of the universe and He is seated there as our mediator, before God on our behalf, which is what we saw back in ch. 4 when the author wrote... *“¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*⁸

Jesus is in a superior position accomplishing a superior ministry, which is our second consideration:

Jesus’ Superior Ministry

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 4:14–16.

So if you notice there in vs.2 Jesus is referred to as “a minister in the holy places,” the word translated minister refers to service, Jesus is there serving, but who does he serve?

The author answers this with the explanation he gives in vs. 3-4. In vs. 3 the ministry of a priest is described as one of offering. The author says human priests bring an offering of gifts and sacrifices. Those are the terms of their service. They deliver the sacrifices, offerings and gifts of the people to God. This is priestly ministry.

Then in vs. 4 we get a master move by our author. I don't play chess, but I can appreciate the skill chess takes, because from what I can see the player who reacts to their opponent can lose rather quickly, but the one who anticipates their opponents moves can see the game more clearly and win rather quickly. This kind of brilliance is what we see here.

He acknowledges what the opponents of Jesus' ministry might bring up, and then destroys their argument. The opponents of Jesus might say something like, “we know what priests do, and we even know which people should do it – the only priests God allows to bring offerings, gifts and sacrifices are sons of Aaron from the tribe of Levi, and Jesus is neither. In fact, in all of Jesus' days on earth he was never recognized as a priest, what makes him a qualified priest now?” And the author of Hebrews acknowledges this in vs. 4 saying, “*Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law.*”⁹

But then he creates a checkmate when he flips the argument around, using the reality of the whole Old Testament when he states, “*5 They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.*”¹⁰ The Temple was only an outpost, an embassy of heaven, Jesus is the priest who can enter Heaven itself, He is the rightful citizen, the rightful king, He is the priest who can go where no son of anyone is permitted to go. Heaven is his home, earth was the place of the Levitical priesthood. Then he quotes Exodus 25:40 to drive home the point that Moses received the dimensions and instructions from heaven. The author makes it plain earth is meant to mirror heaven not the other way around, why else would Jesus have taught us to pray, “*10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*”¹¹

The author is showing that Jesus has a superior ministry because He serves in the holy place of heaven, not in the outpost of the Temple.

And remember what the recipients of this letter didn't yet know...at the time of this letter the Temple was still standing, there were still Levitical priests bringing offerings and sacrifices, they did not know in a few short years Rome would enter the Temple defile it and destroy the Temple in Jerusalem. That outpost of heaven would be brought to the ground... but as we see in the final verses of our text...that Temple was obsolete, and the sacrifices being offered in Jerusalem were meaningless, because the Old covenant passed away when Jesus ushered in the New covenant – and we know that the Temple was

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 8:4.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 8:5.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 6:10.

no longer the place where the presence of God dwells on earth. No the author of Hebrews knew what Paul knew when he wrote, “¹⁹ *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,* ²⁰ *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,* ²¹ *in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.* ²² *In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*”¹² The Temple is no physical structure anymore, no the Temple where God dwells is the church. As we gather together week after week we assemble as outposts of heaven, declaring the finished work of Christ offering hope to each other in our darkest times and proclaiming the gospel to all who would hear.

Jesus builds his church, not in a tent made by hands, but in hearts transformed by His grace, this is what the author says in vs.6 “⁶ *But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.*”¹³

Do you see how he piles up superlatives in that sentence? Jesus doesn't just have an excellent ministry he has a much more excellent ministry. The covenant that he institutes through is death and resurrection isn't just “new” its “better” because the promises the New Covenant are better than the promises of the covenant of Moses. Every thing about Jesus is better, because He is superior...

The better promises the author is speaking of is what David will show us next week, but its appropriate for us to ask what makes Jesus ministry much more excellent, what better promises makes the new covenant better?

Let me take those in turn:

Jesus ministry is much more excellent than the old covenant priesthood because he finished the work that a sinful priest could never do. No earthly priest was sinless, thus they always had to bring a sacrifice for themselves and the people, they could not be a sacrifice for the people, therefore all the blood of animals would never be enough to atone for God's people that is, until Jesus as we will read in Hebrews ch.9 – “¹¹ *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)* ¹² *he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.*”¹⁴ The redemptive work of the levites was temporary, Christ's is much more excellent because his work has eternal power. Thus our Lord Jesus uttered with triumph “It is finished!”

So Jesus more excellent ministry institutes a better covenant because there is no wrath left for any of God's people. The permanence of Jesus ministry is proof that it is much more excellent than the Levitical priesthood. And we know that his ministry continues in us, through the Holy Spirit, not in

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 2:19–22.

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 8:6.

¹⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 9:11–12.

offering sacrifices, but as ambassadors of our king who though seated in heaven now, will come again and make all things new. This is our sure hope, why? Because he has built His new covenant on better promises

The promises we read in the very next verses of chapter 8 that include the law of God written on our hearts by the Spirit. The new covenant is better not because God got smarter as Israel went along, no, the New covenant was built upon the promise from Genesis 3:15 that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the seed of the serpent, and Ezekiel 36 where the Lord promised to remove our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh, and Joel Ch. 2 where God promised to pour out His Holy Spirit, and Jeremiah 34,³¹ “*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”¹⁵ Yes, and Amen, these are our better promises that we have in Christ.*

The promises of the old covenant were not bad, in fact they were good. Without the Old Covenant Israel would have been lost, and we would have no promised Messiah...but beloved the promises we have received through the Messiah, the eternal hope we have in Jesus, those promises are better.

Christ is superior, he is greater, there is none like him none beside him and church wonder of wonders Christ is our High Priest, he is yours he is mine. We have Christ here and now and through His ministry we look to a day where we no longer reside as an outpost of heaven, but we will be in heaven and see our savior face to face rejoicing for all eternity.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine, oh what a foretaste of glory divine! We sing that not as wishful thinking but because it is true because we have such a high priest...Lets pray.

¹⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Je 31:31–34.