

The High Priest Who Counts

The Book of Hebrews

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Tonight then we move on in our consideration in this wonderful epistle called Hebrews, written to believers of a Jewish background perhaps living in Jerusalem maybe, and who were themselves perhaps beginning to cave-in, buckle and bend under the pressure of persecution, the thought of it arising, and who were themselves beginning to think that there was good policy in turning back towards the Jewish ways. We think of their methods and the Jewish faith which was at that time still prevalent, the temple was still standing in Jerusalem, and there was a temptation to begin to pivot back towards that form of worship, what was happening in the temple, the high priest of the Aaronic, the old covenant priesthood.

So our title tonight is this, "The High Priest Who Counts." The high priest who counts. The writer has concluded his consideration of angels and he's brought that to an end, although he does mention angels once more in chapter 13, verse 1. He's given some warnings about the danger of neglecting so great salvation, that if we look for somebody other than Jesus Christ to save us from our sins, then we will not find ourselves helped. We will not find anybody that can help us. And he's now going to develop the reasons why that is so and begin to show us that all that the old covenant represented, Moses sort of was the name that stands out for that, that we speak of Moses and we speak of more than just the figure of Moses but what Moses brought in, that that is now something which belonged in an era that has now passed. Not all of it is gone for we see the moral law that still continues, but other aspects to it are now past and do not have the power and the validity, the authority, the legitimacy that once they did. And so to try to go back to those things would be folly, that they were not intended to last, they were not intended to be the final word. They were a preparation for better things to come and all those better things to come are in Jesus Christ.

So the writer now begins to open up this big theme which really is going to fill the bulk of the letter which is to show the insufficiency, the inferiority of what belonged to Moses in the old covenant compared to the Lord Jesus Christ and the new covenant. "Covenant," of course, is a word that means "a promise," what promises God makes to us basically, and how we respond to those, and the differences that have emerged as a result of the Lord Jesus Christ shedding his blood. And so hence our title, "The High Priest Who

Counts," and that high priest, of course, finally is the Lord Jesus compared to any of the other high priests that belonged in the era and the economy of Moses.

Well, Moses is our first heading tonight. Moses. Well, what a figure that he was. We may not be that familiar with all the Old Testament perhaps but I'm sure the name we will know. Well, there was nobody bigger in the Old Testament, it's literature in terms of his position before God than Moses. He spoke to God face-to-face, it says. He was the one who was on the mountain when the Lord revealed to him the law, gave him the commandments and everything that followed from that. We know, of course, perhaps there how he was the appointed deliverer sent to his people when they were slaves in Egypt, the Hebrews found themselves, well, for good reason then in the first place, escaping famine, finding corn in Egypt, settled there but then 400 years later found themselves as slaves and God raised up Moses to lead them forth. He sent them plagues upon the Egyptians, Pharaoh and his household, destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea when it closed back over them, led them then to Mount Sinai and the giving of the law that was the appointment that he had with them there, and the promises that were made to them on the land that they would be entering into, a place where they would go and be able to worship God. The rest of that reading showed that they didn't do very well in that, but actually they failed, that having received all that they did at Moses' hand, having been in the privileged position of the generation who saw the plagues on Egypt, saw the Red Sea part, heard the thundering and the lightning on Mount Sinai and the giving of the 10 Commandments written by God's finger on tablets of stone, and then in their hearts, turned back to Egypt, died in the wilderness. That's why chapter 3 ends with all those warnings. It's kind of continuing on the Moses story and showing that it didn't end particularly well for that generation who came out of Egypt, and there's a warning in there for this generation that the writer is writing to, that if you go backwards, well, you'll lose everything. You'll have no end that is worth receiving.

Well, we're turning then to Moses. He was the main figure, central figure in the Old Testament. And as much as our Lord Jesus Christ is called an apostle, a sent one, that's what apostle means, somebody that's been posted, an apostle, they've been sent, well, Moses very much was part of that story too. And we call what was given to Moses the law, the law of Moses, the Mosaic law, which we find, first of all, in the 10 Commandments but then we find if we read through the detail in the book of Exodus then in Leviticus and then in Numbers also in Deuteronomy all of the sacrifices that were necessary that obedient and observant Hebrews were meant to offer as to the tabernacle, tent that was used during the times of Israel's pilgrimage but then when they had a settled capital city in Jerusalem, a temple, a place where they went to worship and where in that worship sacrifice was very much a part of all that they had to do. And within that, a whole host of very detailed laws some of which came out of the 10 Commandments, dealt with such things as property, theft, borrowing things, treatment of servants and slaves, marriage, various regulations from which we derive many of the principles of law today. But then there were other ceremonial observances, things that the priests were meant to do, how they were meant to dress, how they were meant to conduct themselves, what were their duties, which days their duties were performed on, how many sacrifices at this feast, how many sacrifices at that feast, and these were very very detailed things

and all of it was part of the law of Moses. But that law governed the religious life of Israel right through the whole of that period that we would call the Old Testament, from the Exodus from Egypt, when Israel was established as a nation with its laws and a territory to come which they would inhabit.

Well, those were significant significant events establishing the nation, making them a people under the kingship and authority of God, a nation with laws and the Psalms would reflect on those laws. A nation has laws like these, who is provided for like this, that knows the will and mind of God and is given opportunity to respond to his mercy in obedience to those laws. No other nation that God treated like this and the members of other nations came and saw and some of them allied themselves with this because they realized God was at work in them, that this was the place that they needed to be, that there was something different happening here, and all of this following on from the law of Moses, the book of Moses, and that comprises the first five books of the Bible, in a sense. And yet through all of that and the writer here is not belittling Moses, he's not saying of him, "Well, he's nobody," that he's not as significant a person at all, but he's saying far from it, he was very significant, and in the time when his ministry was being exercised and in the time that it followed from that where the law of Moses governed the religious life of Israel, well, his place was very very high. But now change has come and now one greater than Moses has come, and one who has made a covenant with his people that exceeds anything that God spoke through Moses promises that God made to the people of Israel, then there was still much to be fulfilled, then there was still much that set before Israel an impossible standard which they failed in and that's why we read at the end of chapter 3 of their failure. They didn't listen. They weren't capable of learning and they died many of them in the wilderness in a state of unbelief.

So Moses, well, what do we read about him there in verse 5, is a servant. He was a servant of God. He did what God required of him in the house of God, amongst God's people, that's saying. That house, it's not a building, it's people and Moses served the people. He was one with them. He had his own frailties, his own fallibilities, but that was his position, a servant. Well, he did very well in it. He was faithful. We see that in verse 2, "was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house." That God appointed for Moses a position and it is said of Moses he was faithful. He did what was required of him. He relayed the messages that God gave him, the verdicts and the judgments. He led as God would have him to lead and was therefore declared to be faithful and the writer says this. He was good. He did a good job.

And beyond that, well, there is glory and honor, "For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses," and Moses had glory. There was that that God lent to him, gave to him that made him stand out from others. And those who opposed his leadership, and some did, you know, there was Miriam and others too who rose up against him and felt, "You take too much to yourself. You, this position that you've got." It didn't come out well for them. They died or had leprosy sent upon them.

So Moses had glory. He had honor. And were we to just read in 2 Corinthians 3:7-8, can't explain the entirety of the context of this but just to comment there but the glory that was

part of this ministry of Moses is spoken of when Paul writes, "But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?" Well, Paul is making the same contrast here as is the writer to the Hebrews. That's why some people would say, "Ah, the writer to the Hebrews, that must have been Paul." For sure the fact is the themes sometimes are very very similar but what Paul is saying there, this ministry of death, a ministry that showed the 10 Commandments and said, "Obey these. Obey these, you will live," which was meant to drive the people not to confident assurance that we can do it, but to show them that we're dead, say, "We can't do this. We need a Savior. We need someone to help us in this. No way can we match the requirements of this law." That was a ministry of death but says Paul and it is written and engraved on stones the 10 Commandments, it was glorious because there was glory on the face of Moses. His face glowed and they had to put a veil over Moses' face because people couldn't bear to look at this brightness. That was God conferring on Moses a particular authority and showing that, "I am dealing with this man and you should listen to him."

So what glory indeed he had. A key event was the giving of the law, and yet for all of that authority, there were better things to come. So in John 1 and I'm sure we read this in a few weeks' time as our carol service here and in verse 17 we learn of this, "For the law was given through Moses," and then the contrast, "but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." And in place of Moses, well, we're just to stay with our finger in John's Gospel a moment in John 5 and our Lord's words, verses 45 and 46, he writes to them there, "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you--Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me." Well, Moses was a significant figure and our Lord is saying that, "He will actually accuse you unbelieving Pharisees because he wrote about Me and you don't want to believe in Me. So basically you've just scotched what Moses is saying, your great authority figure."

And that law and here coming particularly to this issue of the high priest, the law that was given at Sinai with all of its detail about the priesthood and how they were to be in charge of offering sacrifices, intermediaries and the worshiper would come with whatever creature was going to be sacrificed, but it was the priest who was the mediator who would receive the sacrifice, see that it was killed in the appropriate way, and what was to be done with the blood was done in the appropriate way and other parts of the animal were distributed or burned, whatever it might be, the particular requirement of that sacrifice. But above the priesthood at the very top, the most sort of elevated position was the high priest. The high priest, and the first high priest was Moses' brother Aaron, and Aaron had that dignity and that wonderful costume that was given to him designed by God, marked out his ministry in its beauty and its holiness and excellence, and the high priesthood traveled down that family line, a descendant of Aaron. And the high priest had very special special responsibilities that he had to see that all of the offerings that were done, the behavior of other priests was all in line with the law of God. They were

responsible and so if there was a problem down the line with how the priests were behaving, then the high priest would be the one that God would ask a reckoning from.

And the high priest also had a very very elevated duty. Once a year and the writer to the Hebrews is going to develop this later on, but just to mention it now, a very special day in the calendar, the Day of Atonement. Then and only then the high priest could enter into the temple or tabernacle, whichever it was and whatever time, and could go into part of that building, part of that tent structure there was the Holiest of Holies, and a place that God, as it were, visibly was dwelling. And the high priest could only go in once a year not without blood and make an especial sacrifice, and that sacrifice annually offered was the sacrifice that atoned for the sins of the community. Everything, all that had been missed. All of the things that had been done, everything that bore down upon the conscience of the people, well, the Day of Atonement, that reconciliation was the day the high priest really came into his own in terms of his function and his role. A wonderful position. A high position. An elevated position.

So we have Moses, his law to introduce the place of the high priest and his function representing the people, that intermediary taking the blood there of a creature as representing the sin of his own people and standing before God. The people would wait with bated breath, "Would the high priest come out of the holiest place alive? Would he have been struck down as an indication of God's displeasure?" Mighty relieved they were when he would emerge safe and able to relate that God for another year had received them and had owned them as his own people.

Well, that was a very elevated and a very significant testimony, and Moses who was faithful in doing this work, all that the old covenant, that's what this is, the promises God made, they were operative through the priesthood, through the law that was given at Mount Sinai, were a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, that there was something future, something next that was following, that this was not the finished article as though the Lord was going to preserve now forever Aaron and his family performing these sacrifices on these days in exactly the same way until whatever, the end of the world, as though the law of Moses and all of the details about what had to be done here and what had to be done on a new moon, what had to be done on a Sabbath day, or at the tabernacle, feasts, or on Pentecost, or at Passover, that it was pointing beyond those things. It was a testimony to something that will happen afterward.

Well, we read in one of Paul's letters, Galatians 3:21-25 the following. Galatians 3:21-25 where Paul is trying again here in a different context to show what is the place of Moses and his law and he says there, "Is the law then against the promises of God?" The promise that by faith we would be saved. "Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." And Paul is addressing similar kind of territory here, that for the

people there which constituted a nation at Mount Sinai, Israel, there was to be a period in which they were kept under a tutor, they were kept in a state of infancy, they hadn't matured fully, they hadn't entered into the fullness of their inheritance, kept under guard by the law, set as sort of limits as to how much they could understand, how far they could travel in their spiritual experience. Kept ever before them, the unresolved issue of their sin, that they are relying upon the blood of shed beasts. Well, is a beast able properly to represent a human being? The answer is no, and there is therefore something unremedied, something incomplete, something that needed further addressing. And so this state of unfulfillment hung in the air and Paul writes about this here.

They're confined all under sin. They were conscious of sin. The sacrifices were a reminder, daily reminder of their sin, and that this blood had to keep being shed, that there was no end in view yet. And Paul is saying, of course, when the Lord Jesus Christ came and faith which is now faith in him, when that appeared, when that became a revealed truth, well, the place of the tutor, of the Mosaic law functioning as it did for Israel of old had ceased, it had gone. That is now past. And just as Paul here is writing to the Galatian people and saying, "So don't go back to circumcision, don't go back to following the laws of the temple and the tabernacles and all the various feasts and various things like this, that is past. Christ has come and now this is where we are to focus our attention."

Moses was partial and temporary and the power of that ministry was limited. The law could not give life, that you could state good things, but those things written on tablets of stone didn't have a power to change the people who heard it. They remained sinners. They didn't move very far and many of them, of course, perished as these people we read in Hebrews 3 at the end, perished in the wilderness. Moses pointed to something greater, a greater fulfillment that was for those who were going to be partakers of the heavenly calling.

So that is Moses. He introduced through that ministry God gave him the place of a high priest there in the time of the old covenant. Now my second heading: the greater than Moses. The greater than Moses. These people are beginning to drift back to Moses, looking again at the priesthood that was Aaron's priesthood and where there was the present occupant of that. They were thinking, "The sacrifices, perhaps we should do those again. And the feasts and festivals, perhaps we should observe all of those. And perhaps we should follow the letter of all that we were given at Mount Sinai, so that that would be a way of obedience there and surely that would please God." And the writer is saying, "No, that would not please him at all because if you do that, you've now just pushed away Jesus Christ and resurrected something that was only temporary and only partial and which itself was pointing towards something better. You've got rid of the something better and returned to the something inferior. You've gone back from being sat now under the Master to being under the tutor. You've walked away from your freedom to go back into a period of infancy and immaturity." And he's saying, "Don't do it." And as he begins to open up that subject here, he points to the supremacy again of our Lord Jesus Christ. He's the high priest that counts. This is the one who is beyond what Aaron could do. He

is the one that exceeds in terms of what he accomplishes anything that Moses and Aaron and that particular way of doing things could ever achieve. He is the greatest high priest.

So when he calls him there the apostle and high priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, consider him we're told, consider him. He is the one who is faithful to him who appointed him and therefore our focus needs not only for these people then but our focus today has to be upon him. And the high priest offers gifts and sacrifices, officiates before God representing sinners, the people, being the one to take of their sacrifice, shed the blood that should have been there's to shed, stand before God to offer that blood offering before the throne of God. Well, that was Aaron doing it with literal beasts and doing it with blood from calves and bulls and goats and such things as this, but now there is one who does more than that, one who makes a greater offering than that, one who makes an atonement that now leaves every day of atonement unnecessary to be performed because the ultimate Day of Atonement came. The high priest has entered into the most holy place when the curtain in the temple was torn from the top to the bottom, and we're able to enter in through the Lord Jesus Christ and his shed blood.

How much greater the Lord Jesus is to Moses, that it was God, he is the builder of the house. Moses was the servant in the house but it is God who is the builder of the house, and it is his Son who governs and is in charge, and is the Master of that house. Moses was but a steward. He was a servant. He was going about the business of the Lord and now the Lord himself is here and it is his house, after all, and he is officiating and he is serving, and he is the one that now should occupy our attention. He's the Son. There is his title, verse 6. If Moses was a servant and an elevated one, that his face glowed with a radiance when he'd been in the presence of God, for then in verse 6, "but Christ as a Son over His own house," it wasn't Moses' house, he was simply serving in God's house, but now this is the Son. He is the high priest and it's his own house and his ministry is a greater ministry and one in which we should be fully fully confident for this high priest didn't offer a beast, didn't offer a bull, didn't offer some other creature. He offered himself. He offered his own body and that, of course, was now an equivalence that was established for it wasn't the bull that had sinned, it wasn't the lamb that was the offender, it was the human being who was offering the lamb. There was the offender. It was the woman who was part of that family there, she was the offender. Human beings.

So if it is that God requires an exact price, a human being to die, that the animals were temporary, that that was just for then, there was something beyond it, it was a testimony about somebody else, not a lamb literal, not a bull literal, not a creature belonging to the four-footed variety but actually a human being, a fully functioning human being, totally human being. Oh, and also as we know from the beginning of this book, also totally God. Now that person there is what we were looking forward to, a high priest beyond Aaron, one who is working beyond the law of Moses and fulfilling the hopes, the only hopes of the law of Moses, fulfilling the expectations but in met expectations of the book of Moses. The Lord Jesus Christ, he is his own sacrifice and he is the high priest who brings himself as the sacrifice when he goes to the cross and the cross, you might say, in that place where our Lord was, was the altar. There was the location for that sacrifice. There was the proper structure for it.

So the Lord Jesus provides everything. All of it. He is the high priest who doesn't rely upon some other kind of altar. He is his own altar. He does not rely upon some other creature to be offered. He offers himself. And he's not looking over his shoulder for the high priest to be sort of ushering him in. He ushers himself in. And so everything that the high priest was to do the Lord Jesus did but more thoroughly and more totally for here is the ministry that does atone for sin. Here is the ministry that abolishes the need for anymore blood sacrifices, that now ends the kind of endless repetition of sacrifice, of death of beasts, of blood being sprinkled, of various ordinances to be followed to the letter. That is now past. That has now been superseded and we gaze upon him, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faithful. Oh, he was faithful, wasn't he, just there, his faithful ministry in verse 2. How difficult was his work? How incredibly arduous. How many temptations, how many obstructions, how much opposition did he face? It's extraordinary. You might have thought enough all of this obtuse behavior by the Pharisees. Enough all of the disciples and their total failure at times to comprehend what to us seemed quite straightforward things to get. They were with him and they didn't get it and we are amazed. But he was faithful in going through the trial that he did, and having to answer there before wretched high priests that were there then Annas and Caiaphas, corrupt men, depraved men, and yet answering with carefulness and dignity with accuracy, without reviling, without accusation. That's faithfulness. He's holding to this task that he will go and offer himself on the cross and there will be nothing but absolutely nothing that will stop him doing it.

He is entering into that place of punishment and bearing the wrath of God on behalf of his people, not allowing for something else, a creature to represent them, something that can't really be equivalent to a human being but that that will do. No, he knew that would not do. It had to be himself and he would offer himself and he would not be deterred, and he would not be stopped, and though Satan might try and though the rulers of the darkness of this age might try their worst, though Satan looked constantly for his opportune time, he would prevail and he did prevail and he entered in on our behalf there into that place, receiving what the law would bring to each of us if we do not believe, that punishment, that condemnation, and that was his to experience on behalf of his people.

So we are to consider him. We would be partakers of the heavenly calling if we be holy brethren, then it's him that we confess. It's his name that is upon our lips. If we're asked, "Well, why are you hoping for heaven? What's this heavenly calling? What's the basis of that? Why do you think that you're going there?" We don't talk about the law. We don't say, "Well, because I'm obeying the 10 Commandments actually." Or, "Because I'm quite a nice person actually." None of that. We say none of that is true. But he's true and we're leaning on him. We're putting our confidence in him. He's the rejoicing of our hope because we believe he's paid for our sin. We believe he is the Son of God. We believe that what he offered has ended any need for anymore sacrifice, and that our guilty conscience seeks no sacrifice beside and that makes us very happy and very peaceful, and that makes us able to face life in a totally different way and we can look at death in a different way and we are living now for a wholly different set of values and principles.

We've been liberated from fear and we're looking on, we're rejoicing in hope. Now the world is different, we're now new creatures and we wouldn't change it or think about it any differently.

Consider him. Well, we've been doing a bit of that under the rather interesting title of Christology on our Thursday nights back along. Christology, that's the study of him. Consider him. Look at him. Consider who he is, what he's doing, what he has done, and believe in him and rehearse that. Our identity, we're his house, Christ's house. You see, he is the one in charge of church. He is our living head and we rehearse our identity, partakers of a heavenly calling. He's gone to heaven, rose from the dead. He is our high priest who has gone ahead for us and as high priests did, they prayed for the people. Well, he's praying for us now and we'll meet him one day and he's got a great position of honor and we will see him with our own eyes saving sinners to the uttermost. And here's the wonderful thing, you might say it to yourself, "He saved me too."

Then we pray in his name as he's there as a high priest praying for his people. Well, we can pray in his name which is not just like a formula on the end of our prayers to try and make the prayer happen if we say it, "In Jesus' name," there it is like a magic wand or something, the prayer will come true. Now that's trivial. That's taking his name in vain if you think that. No, we're resting in him. We're leaning upon him and believing that we'll be heard in heaven and that our prayers will be answered because our confidence is not in us, the prayer is not in us, in our merit, but it's in him. Our confidence is in him and we are holding fast that confidence, and to say we pray in Jesus' name is as though to say we're confident in our prayers because we're confident in him. And we think in heaven he is the favorite, we think he's the King of kings, and we think he's the Lord of lords. We think angels fall before him. We think the elders as representing church from the Old and church from the New Testament cast their crowns before him. We think he's rather special. We do and we're confident that that's an agreed thing in heaven.

So we pray in his name and we entertain thoughts of heaven because of him. To do less is unbelief actually. To think that somehow he's not sufficient to make that heavenly calling true, to somehow dislodge us and disinherit us from being partakers, that's unbelief. He's going to come to unbelief, isn't he, and we'll have a look at that next Lord's Day evening, God willing. We've got to entertain high thoughts of heaven because we're entertaining high thoughts about him. We're confident in him, very confident in him. Come what may, come storms, come showers, we're confident in him, face death, we're confident in him. He takes his people to heaven.

So, well, we have there, I trust we can see the high priest who counts. But oh, we revere Aaron and all that came through the Mosaic law and the things some of which remain like the 10 Commandments, but much of which no longer is necessary. All the blood sacrifices no longer necessary. We have the sacrifice that really counts offered by the high priest that really counts and in that we should be, as the writer here instructs the people then, those who hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. Let's do that.