

The Only High Priest You Will Ever Need

The Book of Hebrews

By Chris Hand

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Bible Text: Hebrews 7:20-28; Exodus 29:1-28
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Crich Baptist Church
Market Place, Crich
Derbyshire. DE4 5DD (UK)

Website: www.crichbaptist.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/crichbaptist

Well, we proceed through this wonderful letter, the epistle to the Hebrews, and this evening we're well embedded now in this most detailed argument that the writer is deploying and we're in verses 20-28 of chapter 7 as we read a moment ago and the title of the sermon is this, "The Only High Priest You Will Ever Need." The only high priest you will ever need.

Well, the writer has now well and truly developed his theme of Melchizedek, that when we considered those weighty, very solemn themes of Hebrews 6:1-8 in the scriptures there about what apostasy looks like and how it can be fallen into. Well, the warning given, he then was able to warm to the theme that he digressed from which was the scene of Melchizedek and how Melchizedek, and we looked at him, didn't we, the other week, is a type of Christ, that there are things about him though it is but a few verses in Genesis 14, that are the actual narrative and revealing of who he was, at least as far as scripture wants to tell us, and we saw that in his ministry, the dignity that he had, the way in which he was able to bless Abraham and the lesser was blessed by the greater, when Abraham paid tithes to him. Priest of the Most High God, king there of peace, king of righteousness, and as such has titles and dignity and bearing that makes us think of the Lord Jesus Christ and we'd be right to think that because then, of course, Psalm 110:6 which really is the verse that launches here quite a few chapters in Hebrews, but it speaks to that very thing. Just to speak again of that in Psalm 110:6 in that way and we read there, don't we, that he is that priest forever. Verse 4 rather, "The LORD has sworn And will not relent, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." Well, that is intriguing and that is embedded within the messianic psalm, Psalm 110 which speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ, and there as it continues on with the first two verses, "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"

Thus equally then in verse 4 it's speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, of a priesthood not from within the family of Levi, within the Aaronic priesthood, but a totally different tribe. Well, we know he came from the tribe of Judah. We don't know where Melchizedek came from at all because he has no genealogy, and in respect to the priesthood, neither does our Lord Jesus Christ. Can't refer himself to the line of Aaron. Doesn't come from the family of Levi. He comes from the family of Judah. Just as

Melchizedek leaves the pages in scripture there, no record of his death, no record of when he surrendered up his kingship or his priesthood, well, he is speaking to us there of our Lord Jesus Christ and that unchangeable priesthood, that endless priesthood that doesn't end, who is now in heaven and he always lives to make intercession for his people. Always lives just as Melchizedek in a way, as far as scripture is concerned, hasn't died, doesn't die. Of course, he did in one sense but his ministry, there's no terminus point, there's no date in which it's said he died and then somebody else took his place. No, not recorded and the Lord Jesus Christ when he died, he rose again and he lives forever and so his priesthood lives forever and that is the high priest that is before us here.

So the writer is very bold, isn't he, when he talks, as we saw last time, of the ministry of Aaron by comparison the ministry of the high priest inaugurated in Exodus 29 which we read in detail a moment back, that by comparison that ministry is weak and unprofitable. There is a bold word and so those who are zealous for the Lord would have heard that and their eyebrows would have been raised, but that's the fact. By comparison, the Aaronic priesthood has been totally eclipsed now as just the light of a candle is eclipsed by the sun in its full noonday strength, and really that is what we're seeing here. What the writer is trying to prove here and this is the fact that this ministry is a superior one. Verse 22, "by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant." Everything is better. Better priesthood. There's a better covenant. It's a better mediator that we have. Brings better promises. Everything about it is better which shows, therefore, the illogicality of the people wanting to go back on that and revert to something more resembling the old covenant order and settling themselves again under the priesthood of Aaron and his successors.

So the first heading is this: made high priest by special appointment. Well, we read of Aaron, he was appointed by God. No high priest takes that honor upon himself. He has to be appointed by God. And there was a lengthy appointment that was necessary for him to enter into office, he and his sons. We read of all the sacrifices that needed to be made. These were weak men. These were infirm men. These were people of whom when we look in our Lord's qualification, were not holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. They were sinners themselves and hence the rams that had to be offered and all the bulls that had to be offered, the way in which their garments had to be sprinkled and sanctified with that blood that had come from one of the rams, the way in which their ears and all their acting parts, thumbs and toes, they were needed because they were a sinful people and not always going to hear it right, they're not always going to be able to do it right. They needed sanctification in the carrying out of their duties because they're weak in that way.

So there it was and we read that appointment in Exodus 29 and through those verses. We could have read further as there was more still, and there was all that to do with the appointment because they needed sacrifices to be made. For sure, it was with great dignity. We read of the garments that were there for beauty and for dignity. The ephod and the breastplate and the turban and the crown upon it, and the sash around the waist there and all the other garments too which are listed in Exodus, special trousers that were to be worn and everything else that marked them out as distinct and separate unto God in

their ministry. But they were there for a fixed contract, in fact, that Aaron and his sons were there show that one day, and we read the passage in Numbers where the record of Aaron's death is, dying on Mount Horeb, and it shows that this is what is there a fleshly commandment, it's a fleshly commandment, it's one that pertains very much to earthly things, to life there and the way in which the high priest would die one day and his sons would have to take his place. It was in that way a fixed contract though prevented by death from continuing. Verse 23, there were many of them. It's recorded there, somebody has done some calculation that when the temple was finally destroyed AD 70, that there had been something in the region of 100 priests, 100 high priests that had sat, as it were, in that office who had exercised that function. They had come and they'd gone because they're prevented by death from continuing. It was a fleshly commandment, an appointment that they had, one that pertained to earthly things, earthly people, who themselves would one day die. But our Lord, well, that was different and none of this ceremony of Exodus 29 was needed. He had no sins to atone for, no reason for a sacrifice to be made on his behalf, no blood that had to be shed because to be able to approach God as a sinner, there had to be the shedding of blood even for the high priest. No, not for him.

His appointment, as we have been seeing, is according to the order of Melchizedek and it was not without as others take God as we saw in Psalm 110, had sworn and will not relent. Well, that's powerful. We saw that, didn't we, with regard to the promise made to Abraham and how Abraham received that promise of multiplying, "I'll multiply you. Blessing I will bless you." The Lord says showing that this is serious, the promise of what is going to happen through that special seed of his and God underlined it by actually making an oath, by swearing, that he could swear by none higher than himself so he sword by himself, and this, most surely, would happen. Of course, it did and here similarly, this most surely will happen, that our Lord Jesus Christ would enter into a different priestly order from the priesthood of Aaron amongst a sinful race. This is a different tribe and it's going to have no end.

Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek and there's the quotation in verse 21. That marks it out, doesn't it, as different? That places upon it an extra dimension, that the Lord should speak of this priesthood in the way that in Exodus 29 is spoken of the priesthood of Aaron. It doesn't speak of him that way there but he does here, and this is to single out and identify and highlight our Lord Jesus Christ as exercising a ministry that is superior and elevated beyond the priesthood of Aaron and the Levitical sacrificial system. It has an extra significance, an extra importance, an extra authority and power, and the writer is going to develop these themes on into chapter 8, on into chapter 9, to show it and always relentlessly with logic so we keep coming back to it from a slightly different angle and make essentially the same point again and again to try to get it through to those there who were dull of hearing, that they would get the message and that they would not back away from the high priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ which is the only high priest that we will ever need.

So he is, his ministry as we see in verse 22, well, it is a greater and a better covenant that is brought in, in the new covenant that was there in the old covenant. It takes us further,

gives us more solid reliable assurances, deals ultimately with the issue of sin and so it leaves comfort to those who benefit from it over and beyond the comfort that could be enjoyed by those who sat under the ministry there of the Mosaic system. And we see some words there which are important words in their place and in the whole way of God's dealings with us. Let us draw our attention in verse 22 to surety and covenant. Big words, important words, and words that tell us how God deals with us, deals with people, and it is according to a covenant. It's an agreement. There are terms and conditions that God treats with people, deals with people on the basis of an agreement. There's something established that has, if you like, something of a kind of legal aspect to it. There are promises involved. God makes pledges to us and we, in turn, respond to him, make pledges to him.

So we have a covenant. The covenant was made originally with Adam in the garden of Eden, covenant of works that if he was to obey, he would inherit eternal life. He disobeyed and so the covenant of works, which brought death upon him and still is in effect, it brings death upon us all. There is the law, you obey the law, you will live. Well, none of us can. That's the covenant of works, we all of us perish if that is the only agreement that God made. But it isn't and he makes a covenant of grace with us, a covenant for sinners, covenant that reaches out to them and finds them where they are.

Well, Sinai, covenant that was the old covenant and which is the operative covenant under which Aaron functioned, it had grace within it. It surely did. It also had plenty of works within it and held up to the nation of Israel what was expected of them in the broad outlines of the morality and spirituality that they should adhere to which broad outlines they utterly failed to adhere to. And so here it is that God now establishes a new covenant, a better covenant, and in Hebrews 8 we'll see something more of that in detail, but here just to comment upon it. This arrangement between two parties, this agreement that is established and the direction of travel is all from God towards people, sinful people. God will have a people. His basis of the covenant is, "I will be their God and they will be My people." But how can that happen? God is holy, God is pure, we are not, how can God have a people? How can he make a covenant with people and be God to a people and they be his people in return if they are defiled, wretched, sinful, evil, regarded by him as dreadful and to be condemned? How can something be done in order that people that God will have as his people can be holy, can be in his presence, can commune with him, fellowship with him, he with them and on the basis of a freely established arrangement? How can this covenant be?

Well, it is this new covenant, a better covenant than anything that was there forged at Sinai. This is a covenant that is established through our Lord Jesus Christ because he, and this is this other word here, is our surety, and it is that there is to be an agreement. Well, sometimes there needs to be a mediator, somebody to represent both parties to this agreement, to make the agreement work, to bring it to pass, to fulfill whatever conditions need to be fulfilled in order that the covenant and its terms can be met. Well, of course, there was this outstanding problem of our sin, that how could God be generous to us, meet with us, treat with us if we are there clothed in our wretchedness and in our sin? How can we be reconciled to him? How can this covenant operate if we cannot fulfill any

of the terms that may be required to fulfill it because we're unholy? Well, we have a mediator, somebody who steps in between both parties who is able to represent both parties completely and who is able to bring to pass what is necessary for those terms to be fulfilled that we can be God's people.

And he's a surety which means he says, "I will do what they can't. I will make Myself responsible for fulfilling terms that they can't fulfill." It's like standing bail for somebody or saying, "Well, their debt, I will be the guarantor for it. I stand to make Myself responsible for the discharge of their debt." And that, of course, is exactly what we needed. We needed our Lord Jesus Christ. Fully God, fully man, so he represents both parties and there as he comes in the body and yields up that body on the cross to die that the law may be satisfied, justice may be done, that God can then be propitiated in his wrath, his anger can be pacified, that he can look upon his Son and see that there is fulfilled the terms required for us to be forgiven, that there must be death, there must be the death of those who have sinned. An animal, that won't do it, that doesn't cover it. Temporary, only for a while. It needed someone to pay and here in the infinite glory of his own Son, that someone has been found and that someone can pay for as many sinners as he could care to pay for, and he in the majesty, infinite richness of his person, brings to pass all that's necessary that we can be brought to God, that we who are far off can be brought near through the blood of the cross.

Now this covenant works. We are the people of God and God is our God, owns us as his people, loves us, cares for us, leads us and guides us because the terms in his Son, our mediator, the one who is our surety has said, "I will do what they can't. I will make Myself responsible to pay the debt they can't pay," so that then through him, we come to God through his blood, through what we see here at this table. We come to God and God extends grace to us in favor, God extends his lovingkindness to us, and assures us of these things and is satisfied and there is his Son forever now in his presence bearing the marks, the wounds of his sacrifice, the blood that was shed, the spear thrust in his side to prove he was truly dead. There was his blood shed literally there and now this covenant and all of the peace and all of the promise within it is operative and is functioning, and what a great covenant that it is, that now all matter of sin is removed from before our gaze and God would assure us, "I do not now hold you responsible," not going to have repeated sacrifices, we haven't go to have an annual Day of Atonement, we haven't got to have Sabbath day morning and evening and other days' sacrifices and special seasons and so on and so on. That's finished and it's done and God is satisfied that it is done and we can be satisfied that it has been done because of our surety, the one who stood in for us, our substitute and representative, and this covenant reaches to the very depths of our soul to assure us of peace.

The old covenant left sin in measure unresolved. Chapter 10, verse 3, tells us there, doesn't it, "But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year." Day of Atonement every year, reminder that sin still God holds it before himself there, still being reckoned with, reckoned on, that it's not annulled, not canceled. There has to be a repeat sacrifice again, more deaths, more blood has to be shed, constant reminder. Well, now that constant reminder has gone and so we have the constant reminder at the Communion

Table to remember that it's finished and it's done and here is the body and here is the blood, here is the sacrificial victim. Be at peace. Be assured. Be happy in your soul. This is a better covenant than anything that went before and as we'll see perhaps, God willing in a couple of weeks time, it deals more thoroughly with the conscience and brings peace to the very depths of the being of our soul. Well, that could never happen under Aaron. All resolved. Peace and joy that was not available quite in that way, not accessible. They could see it from afar off and, well, there could be intimations of it and Psalm 32, David got hold of it there. But still it was more of a fleeting experience, something that was still out of reach, a promise that was awaited, the promise which now has come near to us through our Lord.

So my second heading: the high priest we need. There is having been appointed by oath better covenant. He is the high priest and we need no other. How can we? If the matter of sin has been ultimately concluded, well, that's what the priests were there to do, to mediate in this whole matter of bringing people before God and being able to make them presentable and offering the necessary sacrifices for them to have fellowship with God but that's now finished. So there is no other high priest that we need and we certainly don't need Aaron, good and valuable though his ministry was in its day, appointed by God, it was necessary, it was there provided but now it has been well and truly superseded and our Lord Jesus Christ concluded the whole issue of atonement. Atonement, making us right with God, one with God.

Well, we are now through him emphatically, totally, finally. He does not have to offer sins or sacrifice for his own sins. None of that he has to do and we can see that that is so, verse 27, "does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all," once for all, "when He offered up Himself." Offered up himself. Well, that's it. There's no other sacrifice needed here. The Son of God, immense dignity, royalty, God himself. So we have to say and specify carefully, well, God didn't actually die, it was the God-man who died, in his human nature he died but not God who died. And people say, don't they, that the divinity was the altar on which the humanity was offered as a sacrifice. And so in the glory of the one person of Jesus Christ, the one person, God and man brought together in himself, then we can talk about God purchasing with his own blood in the person of Jesus Christ. The extraordinary thing that that blood can have attributed to it all the value of divinity, even those, strictly speaking, God himself did not die but in the person of Jesus Christ, well, we can say there it is, the blood of the God-man having the value and intensity and perfection of divinity. So, well, really we can see however heinous our sins, however evil and wicked any have been, that there is a sacrifice to answer for the sins of any and every that might desire that salvation at the hand of our gracious God.

So was a sacrifice that that is. There can't be anything beyond that, can there surely? And also the fact that this is the Son of God and the fact that his ministry is most acceptable because he is perfect and holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has now filled the heavens, he's now exalted above the heavens because of who he is, the reward for his ministry and the reward for who he is having done all things well is that he now lives forever at the right hand of God. Now that has within it the idea of royalty and

reigning and ruling but he's ruling as our high priest as much as anything else that he's ruling as. And the high priest had that work, he was an intercessor as well. He prayed for the people like this mediator, this go-between. He also had a function toward the people to bring the blessing of God to them. So there were his prayers and petitions and intercession. Well, again, we know that the high priest even at his best was still a sinful man, a weak man, but here we have our Lord Jesus Christ who now has gone into the heavens, shed his blood, that is now the accomplished salvation, and he has now entered into heaven to live forever, amongst other things, to pray for his people as the high priest would pray for the people. Well, here our Lord Jesus Christ is now praying for his people.

What a thought that that is, that this is where he's gone and his appointment, well, his qualification, it's all listed there, isn't it, in verse 26 as we've been quoting it. All his life proved all of those things to be absolutely true.

Holy, well, he was set apart, he didn't descend from our sinful line, the virgin birth secured that. Separate from sinners in that way, but identifying with them.

Harmless, how he went around doing good. That is what he did, the bruised reed he did not break, a smoldering flax he did not quench. The woman, imagine caught in adultery, there she was and the Pharisees wanting to stone her to death, and his gentleness and his approach both upholding the law and yet proffering forgiveness. Harmless, he did sinners good. The woman that came when he was eating there with Simon the Pharisee and weeping at his feet and washing his feet with her tears and pouring ointment on him there. Well, she had been forgiven much and she loved much and how he was to her everything. That's why she poured out her whole life there before him and wept and didn't cease to weep the moment she came into that meal and began to do these things to him. Yes, he did sinners good.

Undefined. All that time in a sinful world, and it was so so hostile to him, it was so antagonistic at every turn. As we looked through the gospel of Mark some year or two back, we saw this mounting opposition, how it just grew in intensity until finally, of course, it brought out its worst spite and venom at his trial and all the false accusations, all the evil that was spoken against him. Well, he'd been in the temple there teaching them day and night and he was teaching things that weren't harmful, they were in that sense harmless. They were good things, good for the soul.

He didn't come to do evil, bring insurrection. He came only to do good but they would not hear any of that and so to death he had to be put. How he showed himself so so suited to office, so absolutely perfect in all his deportment, his demeanor, his behavior, his words, his reactions, his speech. Everything placed in the crucible there of his affliction, a trial, and then being led to the cross and all the hatred and the reviling that he received and answered there only words, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do." What a Savior this is. What a high priest he's proved himself to be and that which is beyond our comprehension was still ahead of him, whatever all of this was. It wasn't anything yet compared to bearing wrath for our sin, carrying that weight, and here having

to bear its agony and its pain, knowing that it wasn't properly speaking his by deserve, it was ours by deserve. But he was our surety, he was going to do what they can't do. "I will bear their sin. They will perish but I will be able to bear it and come through with the joy that's set before Me. I'll be raised to life. I will not see corruption." And that holy one will be raised to life and that is that great high priest.

So with those qualifications, death had to release him, couldn't hold him, loosed the bands of death, and there he is now at the right hand of God, gone into the heavens, higher than the heavens itself, higher than the angels, above every name that can be given in this age or the age to come, above all power and dominion, might, everything that can be named in heaven. He's exceeded it, excelled beyond it and he intercedes now for us, praying for us. Is that rather comforting? Is that not the high priest that we need? The best of high priests, well, the only high priest we'll ever need because he's so sufficient and so all powerful. He is so suited for us. There he is.

This is the kind of high priest who is fitting for us, this high priest fitting for us, verse 26, praying for us in our battles and our struggles, in our trials. He knows all about them, knows every single one of them, knows our hearts, our woes, our griefs, our needs, all that we carry, all that we bear, and he's praying for us. Well, we sit here, don't we, and we are few but thou art near and we can say that as we are few and he's praying for us. It doesn't matter how big the church or how small the church. Two or 3 suffering Christians in prison cells and in places where nobody cares for them but he does and he's praying for them as he's praying for us. When we sleep, well, we don't sleep at times sometimes, but when we sleep, putting it in a happier way, he's praying for us, watching over us, watching over us in our slumber when we're unconscious. When we're tired, not at our best when we're tired, are we? We can't think straight. We don't do straight. We're not able. We're infirm. We're weak creatures and he's praying for us, praying for us that we'll find something, we'll find grace. When we feel extended beyond our capacity, when we feel burdened beyond measure as Paul felt when he was in Asia and talks about it, doesn't he, in 2 Corinthians 1, then he's praying for us and he's looking there to build us up and teach us, bring things to our minds and open us up to something we hadn't thought before, or some scripture we'd never quite seen its application or felt its power and he's keeping something by for such times as this. When we're confused, when we're sad, then he's praying for us. When we're ill, when we're weak, we hardly can raise ourselves, well, he's praying for us, praying for strength for us in whatever is happening in the body outwardly wasting away but inwardly we're being renewed and that is his ministry and how he loves to do that ministry.

A high priest not weary in prayer, he doesn't find praying for his people a slog and a burden and, "How long have I been doing it now? And do I have to do anymore of this?" He so willingly does it and with such knowledge and with all of his omniscience and omnipotence and omnipresence that he can be with all people where we are here and every other church in gathering of saints, and every individual believer, and he's with them and he's praying for them. When we don't know what to pray, how often that is the case, we don't know what to pray. We are outside of our experience, we don't know the full situation, stumbling around, we pray as best we can. Well, no matter, he's praying for

us and praying for those that we're praying for and praying for them in a better way than we could pray in perfecting our imperfect prayers.

What a comfort and is the only high priest that you and I will ever need and it's truly blasphemous to look for another. It's truly illogical, irrational, it makes no sense to look for any other when he has at every turn proved himself so absolutely suited, so full of compassion, full of willingness, full of love, and committed to us as though there he is now, that unchangeable priesthood that never ends, his days in office praying for us will never come to an end, he will never weary, never be deposed, never replaced, death will never destroy that for he has now the endless ministry. And here we are in our need, battle, struggle and tiredness and he's praying for us. Dear friends, he is praying for you, he's praying for me and that truly is the only high priest that you and I will ever need.