



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ◇ Deo ◇ Gloria

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

Jesus Christ the Fitting High Priest

Hebrews 7:26-28

July 12, 2009

²⁶For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

- ❖ On August 17, 2008, in Beijing, China, U.S Swimmer Michael Phelps won his eighth gold medal in the 2008 Olympic Games, breaking Mark Spitz's record, which he had held since 1972.
- ❖ Immediately after the amazing feat, Mark Spitz himself was asked what he thought about Phelps's accomplishment. He responded: "Epic. It goes to show you that not only is this guy the greatest swimmer of all time and the greatest Olympian of all time, he's maybe the greatest athlete of all time. He's the greatest racer who ever walked the planet."
- ❖ Ever since Phelps's rise to fame in 2004, Sports Commentators have asked, "What makes him so great?" Well, it seems that he was literally "made to swim."
- ❖ **Consider the following:**
 - **He is 6'4"**
 - **His arm span is 6'7"** (According to Ian Speigleman, "Generally a man's arm span equals his height; yet, Phelps's is three inches more than his height. Naturally his arms work as powerful propulsive paddles, giving him a clear edge over others.")

- **His lower body is shorter than that of an average man of his height.** His relatively short legs result in less drag or resistance in the pool.
 - Basically, Phelps has an upper body of a 6’8” person but his lower body seems to be of someone who is only 5’10”, which “makes the perfect plane in water.”
 - Next, he has size 14 feet with double-jointed ankles which allow him to do a ballerina's 'pointe' standing on the tips of the toes. It allows him to whip his feet as if those are flippers and break loose.
 - Further, his body produces less lactic acid than others which means Phelps takes less time to recover.
 - Next, one commentators adds that the reason he seems to never get tired is attributed to his Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD]. This, then contributes to his daily incredibly grueling daily routine which few people can match.
 - Further, his body is able to consume somewhere around 8,000-10,000 calories a day and he trains nearly 60 miles every week.
 - So incredible is Michael Phelps’s physical constitution that one Olympic Russian swimmer (Alexander Sukhorukov) said that “[Phelps is] just a normal person, from a different planet, a planet from a different galaxy.”
- Yet, as great is Michael Phelps is as a swimmer, life is about a lot more than swimming and gold medals. In fact, in 100 years, most Americans will not even recognize the name “Michael Phelps.”
 - As we saw last week, the great problem in life is not a lack of athletic ability. It is not that we are intolerant or are unable to rise above the social problems and oppression in our day. Our problem is sin.
 - And, whereas, Michael Phelps seems to have been “created for swimming” and “perfectly suited to win gold medals” there is only **One who is fitting to be our eternal Savior – Jesus Christ.**
 - And this is the focus of these few Verses at the end of Hebrews 7.

- I. **Jesus Christ Alone is Fitting as our High Priest**
- II. **Jesus Christ Alone is Fitting as our Perfect Sacrifice**
- III. **Jesus Christ Alone is Fitting as the Object of our Worship**

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- The French Benedictine commentator, Herveus of Bourg-Dieu (1080-1150), stated that when examining any sacrificial system, one must consider four elements: “**Namely, (1) what is offered, (2) to whom it is offered, (3) by whom it is offered, and (4) for whom it is offered.**”

- At this point in the Book of Hebrews, at least two of these elements are clear: (1) *for whom the sacrifice is offered* – for this is clearly for sinful man condemned under the Law. (2) Secondly, *to whom the sacrifice is offered* is equally clear. The Righteous Judge of the Universe, the One, True and Living God demands a sacrifice for remission of the sins committed against Him.
- Yet, it is here, in these final view Verses that the (1) **sacrifice** and (2) **the one offering the sacrifice** becomes clear.

As the Puritan theologian John Owen writes, “Unholy sinners stand in need of a holy priest and a holy sacrifice. What we do not have in ourselves we must have in him, or we will not be accepted by the holy God, who has such pure eyes that he cannot look on sin. Such a high priest is the Lord Christ.”

I. Jesus Christ Alone is Fitting as our High Priest

- **Hebrews 7:26** states, “For it was indeed fitting that we have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.”
 - The **ESV** translates **Hebrews 7:26a** “For it was indeed fitting that we have such a high priest.”
 - However, the **NIV** translates it “Such a high priest meets our need...”
 - And the **NEB**, “Such a high priest does indeed fit our condition...”
 - This seems to be the essence of the Verse: “Jesus Christ is the only One whose *characteristics* “fit” our problem and need.
- It is here that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews clearly explains why Jesus Christ alone is fitting as our perfect High Priest.
 - The author here uses five ways of describing Christ’s perfection as our High Priest: (1) Holy; (2) Innocent; (3) Unstained; (4) Separated from sinners; and (5) Exalted above the heavens.
 - With respect to the first three adjectives (Holy, Innocent, and Unstained), theologians Philip Hughes and William Lane describe them in the following manner:
 1. **Holy** pertains to the religious qualification of the High Priest. It pertains to God (the Father) and Christ’s relationship with Him;
- A.W. Pink adds, “That which is here in view is the absolute purity of Christ’s *nature*. He was entirely free from the slightest spot or taint of our original defilement.”

- This, of course, is why he was “conceived by the Holy Spirit” (not an earthly father). Therefore, Christ does not possess the fallen Adamic nature that we do.
 - 2. **Innocent** pertains to the moral qualification of the High Priest. This primarily refers to the Christ’s relationship with others and the truth that He never wronged his fellow man in thought, word or deed.
- Pink writes, “‘Holy’ tells of what Christ was Godwards: perfectly conformed to the Divine will inwardly, evidenced by His perfect outward conduct. ‘Harmless’ tells of what He was manwards. He is the only one who has ever walked this earth who never contaminated, tempted, injured, those with whom He came into contact. As ‘holy,’ He loved the Lord His God with all His heart; as ‘harmless’ He loved His neighbor as Himself.”
- In other words, Christ fully obeyed the greatest commandments: (1) To Love the LORD your God with all your heart soul and mind and to (2) Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36-38).

- 3. **Unstained** pertains to the cultic or professional qualification of the High Priest. In other words Jesus Christ is pure and undefiled in His nature and person, making Him alone uniquely qualified for priestly service.

- Pink states, “Just as the rays of the sun may shine into the foulest stream without losing any of their purity, so Christ moved in and out amongst the vilest without the glory of His holiness being sullied in the slightest degree.”

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- Yet, not only is Jesus Christ **holy, innocent, and unstained**, but then the author of Hebrews says that He is:

- 4. **Separated from sinners;**
- 5. **Exalted above the heavens.**

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- One of the greatest qualifications of Jesus Christ as our perfect high priest is that although He came to this earth, born of a virgin “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3), He was without sin.
- It is in this way that He was “**separated from sinners.**”
 - John Owen writes, “He was not set apart from them in his nature, for God sent his own Son ‘in the likeness of sinful men’ (Romans 8:3). He was not set apart from men during his ministry on earth. He did not live apart from everyone in a desert. He spoke with tax collectors and prostitutes,

and the hypocritical Pharisees rebuked him for this. Being set apart from sinners declares what Christ is, his state and condition. He is holy and undefiled...He was separate from sin, in its nature, causes, and effects. He had to be like this for our benefit. He became the middle person between God and sinners and had to be separate from those sinners in the thing he stood in their place for.”

- And, finally, Jesus Christ is “**exalted above the heavens.**”
 - Jesus now intercedes for us in the exalted, sinless realm “**above the heavens.**”
 - It is here that He is seated, transcending the temporal and sinful. He is our exalted Christ, the One who endured all the sin we will ever faced, and defeated it. **Therefore**, the Father exalted Him to the “highest place” “above the heavens” to the place of eternal enthronement and intercession.
 - John Owen writes, “On the cross, we behold Him in the place of sinners, but He occupies that place no longer. Death is for ever behind Him. He is now, in the absolute sense, ‘separate from sinners,’ that is, distinguished from those from whom He is interceding. He has been removed from their society unto another sphere. Thus, this clause points to another contrast from the high priest under the law. Aaron offered atonement for sinners, and continued amongst them afterwards. Not so with Christ.”

- And, so Christ is infinitely greater to the Old Testament Aaronic High Priesthood in that He and He alone is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.
 - Consider, for a moment, the imagery in **Exodus 28**. Moses writes of the special outer garments worn by the high priests in the Old Testament. **Verse 4** states that these garments were “a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a sash.” Each of these pieces were to be made of gold and adorned with precious jewels.
 - Richard Phillips comments, “The priestly garb showed the resplendence of holiness. Going before God, a priest needed to appear righteous and holy, and his garments served that purpose. The very need for this outerwear, however, vividly showed that those high priests lacked the holiness they needed.”
 - John Calvin agrees, “What was required for the proper discharge of the office was lacking in the priests of the Law...The external adornment of the high priest showed this defect...because the reality was absent.”

- The incredible truth, though, is that **the “beauty” and “holiness” that was the high priests’ externally is Christ’s through and through.**

“Jesus is everything we are not, so he can stand before God on our behalf.”

Richard Phillips

II. Jesus Christ Alone is Fitting as our Perfect Sacrifice

- Yet, not only is Christ alone fitting as our High Priest, but, **He is fitting as our Perfect Sacrifice.**
- **Hebrews 7:27** states, “He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.”
- This is certainly one of the greatest distinctions between Jesus and the Old Testament High Priesthood: since He was holy, innocent, and unstained, He did not need to offer daily sacrifices **first for His own sins!**
- With respect to the Old Testament high priesthood John Calvin correctly asks, “How could He [the Old Testament high priest] have appeased God for others when God was rightly angry with him himself?”
- It appears that the author of the Book of Hebrews has in mind two things as he writes this Verse: (1) The daily sacrifices of Leviticus 4:3 and (2) the Day of Atonement (Yom Kipper) in Leviticus 16.
 - **Leviticus 4:3** states, “...if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer for the sin which he has committed a young bull without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering.”
 - This was an integral part of the daily sacrificial ritual. Before the high priest could offer up an acceptable sacrifice, **He himself had to be acceptable to God.** Therefore, he had to offer up a sacrifice *for his own sins* first.
 - Yet, not only did this ritual occur every day, but it also was an essential part of the most sacred day of the year: *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

“The Day of Atonement, when annual atonement was made for the sins of the nation, was the holiest day in the Old Testament calendar. It fell in the Hebrew seventh month (October) and involved the offering of various sacrifices, the entry of the high priest into the Most Holy Place (in this chapter referred to simply as the ‘Holy Place’ or ‘holy sanctuary’), and the dispatch of a goat into the wilderness carrying the people’s sins. The Day of Atonement proceeded according to the following steps:

- (1) The high priest washed and dressed (v. 4);
- (2) He sacrificed a bull as a sin offering **for himself** (v. 6; cf. v. 11);
- (3) He entered the Most Holy Place and sprinkled the ark with blood (vv. 12-14);
- (4) He took two goats and by lot chose one to be the scapegoat (Azazel), the other to be a sin offering (vv. 7-8);
- (5) He sacrificed one goat as a sin offering (vv. 9, 15);
- (6) He entered the Most Holy Place and sprinkled the ark with blood (v. 15);
- (7) He went out to the outer part of the tabernacle of meeting and sprinkled the blood (v. 16);
- (8) He went out into the courtyard of the tabernacle and sprinkled the main altar with blood (vv. 18-19);
- (9) He confessed the sins of the Israelites as he laid his hands on the scapegoat's head (v. 21);
- (10) He sent the scapegoat into the wilderness (vv. 21-22);
- (11) The scapegoat gone, the high priest changed into his regular garments and washed (vv. 23-24);
- (12) Finally, he offered burnt offerings for himself and for the people (vv. 24-25).

For the high priest, the most important aspects of the ceremony were his entry into the Most Holy Place with the blood of the sin offerings and the dispatch of the scapegoat into the wilderness. These actions atoned for the sins of repentant Israelites (vv. 16, 19, 21-22). All sin offerings served to cleanse both the earthly sanctuary and the worshipers, but on other occasions the high priest did not enter the (inner) Most Holy Place, but only the anteroom before the separating veil (usually called the 'Holy Place'), the chamber containing the altar of incense, the gold lampstand, and the table of showbread. Because the ark of the covenant, the focal point of God's presence in the tabernacle, was housed in the Most Holy Place, entry to the Most Holy Place was rare and dangerous (v. 2). That the high priest entered the inner chamber only on this one day of the year indicated the depth of atonement being made.”

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- However, Jesus Christ fulfills the Day of Atonement and is far superior to all of the Old Testament High Priests because not only does He **not have to offer up a sacrifice** for His own sins; but **He offers up Himself as the perfect, eternal, once-for-all sacrifice for His people.**
- In **Exodus 32:30-35** we read of an interesting story in which Moses foreshadows the perfect work of Christ. Following the scene with the golden calf in the wilderness, Moses attempts to intercede on behalf of the Israelites:

“³⁰The next day Moses said to the people, ‘You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.’ ³¹So Moses returned to the LORD and said, ‘Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. ³²But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.’ ³³But the LORD said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. ³⁴ But now go, lead the people to the

place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.”

- ❑ What we see here is an attempt by Moses **to offer up himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the people**. However, God does not accept Moses’ offer. Why? Because he himself was a sinful man and had to have his own sins atoned for.
- ❑ And so it was with the Old Testament High Priesthood.
- ❑ William Barclay makes the point clear: “The Levitical High Priest was a sinful man offering animal sacrifices for a sinful people; Jesus was the sinless Son of God offering Himself for the sin of all men...Because he was what he was, the sinless Son of God, he was equipped for his office as no human High Priest ever could be.”
- ❑ Indeed, **Jesus Christ is perfectly fitting as our once-for-all sacrifice**.
- ❑ F.F. Bruce comments, “...Jesus has no need to present a daily – or, for that matter, a yearly sacrifice – for his people’s sins. He presented a permanently valid sin offering on their behalf when he offered up his own life – an offering so perfect and efficacious that it needs no repetition.”
- ❑ Yet, notice how beautifully the Prophet Isaiah foreshadows the Messiah’s self-sacrifice in **Isaiah 53:10** (NASB):

¹⁰But the LORD was pleased
To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
If **He would render *Himself*** as a guilt offering,
He will see His offspring,
He will prolong His days,
And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His
hand.

III. Jesus Christ Alone is Fitting as the Object of our Worship

- ❑ Finally, not only is Jesus Christ our fitting High Priest and Sacrifice, but **He is fitting as the only object of our worship**.
- ❑ The late James Montgomery Boice, former Pastor of the historic 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, had a favorite sermon he called, “Where’s the Lamb?”
 - He took this from Genesis 22, where Abraham brought Isaac to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son as the LORD had commanded.

- Yet, the young boy, in Genesis 22:7 said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”
- Then, after the LORD provided the sacrifice, Abraham named the site, “The LORD will provide” (Genesis 22:13-14).
- Of course, this very place – “The LORD will provide” is the very place (the Temple Mount in Jerusalem) that the LORD provided Jesus Christ, His only Son to be the perfect, eternal and final sacrifice for our sins.
- But, the question, “Where is the Lamb?” is essentially the theme of the Old Testament. Not only this, but, “Where is the high priest – the Perfect High Priest?” [Imagine the countless times corrupt men held the office. Surely the God-fearing believers would have asked this question.]
- **Indeed, the true worshipper of the Old Testament would have asked this question often. Where is the [perfect] lamb?**
- **The worshipper at Passover would have asked the same question.**
- **Yet, praise God, as the Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 5:7: “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”**
- Not only this, but here in **Hebrews 7:26-28** we read that Jesus Christ is both our High Priest and our Sacrifice.
- As **Hebrews 7:28** states, “For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath [in Psalm 110:4], which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.”
- Consequently, Jesus Christ alone is worthy of our worship, for He is indeed our Lamb who was slain and now lives!

Revelation 5:9-10: “⁹And they sang a new song, saying,

‘Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
¹⁰and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.’”