



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ◇ Deo ◇ Gloria

## THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

### Sermon Notes

### *Jesus Christ the Guarantor*

Hebrews 7:20-25

July 5, 2009

<sup>20</sup>And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, <sup>21</sup>but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:

‘The Lord has sworn  
and will not change his mind,  
’You are a priest forever.’”

<sup>22</sup>This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

<sup>23</sup>The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, <sup>24</sup>but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. <sup>25</sup>Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

- ❖ Just over a year ago, in June 2008, a 61 year old British man named John Turner went to his local doctor in Cumbria in the United Kingdom complaining of chest pain and weight loss. After running a series of tests, his doctor concluded that his right lung was diseased with the asbestos-related cancer mesothelioma. Surgeons scheduled the surgery and removed the lung. However, after the surgery, the doctors were devastated when they realized Mr. Turner never had cancer, but rather, a non-cancerous illness. Yet, the lung had already been removed. Tragically, just five months after the surgery, John Turner died of bronchial pneumonia, contributed to by the surgery and the loss of his right lung.
- ❖ Countless stories like this one exist today where a **wrong diagnosis leads to a wrong cure**. Regardless of how good our medicines are, or how many cures doctors discover, if they cannot properly diagnose a problem, they can never properly cure it.

- ❖ And this is the problem in our world today with respect to our greatest problem – sin.
- ❖ **However, the world with all its religions and movements has fundamentally mis-diagnosed man’s greatest problem.**
- ❖ **In fact, this is where every false religion is fundamentally flawed – they do not understand man’s greatest problem (of sin).**
- ❖ In fact, the world would like to tell us that our problem is *intolerance* (and then it goes out and tries to solve it). The Buddhist would say our problem is stress and anxiety (and then it goes out and tries to solve it). Others, professing to be Christians would say our problem is **negative thinking**.
- ❖ Yet, the Scriptures are clear: our problem is sin. And only God solves this greatest of problems – **through the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

- I. **Jesus Christ Guarantees the New Covenant**
- II. **Jesus Christ Serves as a Priest Forever**
- III. **Jesus Christ is Able to Save to the Uttermost**

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**I. Jesus Christ Guarantees the New Covenant**

- Notice, in **Verse 20**, the writer of the Book of Hebrews states that “it was not without oath...”
  - The basis of the Aaronic priesthood was God’s divine decree: “[Moses] bring near to you Aaron your brother and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests” (Exodus 28:1).
  - Yet, no oath is mentioned.
- However, here in **Hebrews 7:20**, this is actually the second time that the writer has emphasized the truth of God’s word by pointing particularly to His use of an oath.
  - Recall **Hebrews 6:13 -14**: “For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself...”
    - This was a reference to **Genesis 22:16-17**: “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, ...I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and the sand that is on the seashore.”

- And also here, in **Verses 20-21**, the author writes, “And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, You are a priest forever.’”
- The oath the author is referring to occurs in **Psalm 110:4**. This is the fourth time the author has made reference to this particular psalm.
- It is important to note, however, that God *did not need to provide this promise with an oath*. God’s Word alone (without an oath) is absolutely sufficient and trustworthy.
- However, there is a sense of emphasis that the oath provides with respect to the promise.

William L. Lane states, “The divine oath verifies the absolute reliability of the priesthood of Christ, upon which the hopes of the Christian community are anchored. The achievement of its purpose is assured.”

John MacArthur agrees, “The oath does not represent greater truthfulness but puts the emphasis on permanence.”

Donald Guthrie writes, “The oath, in the psalm, is directly linked with the changelessness of God. Here the thought is repeated, in order to impress on the readers the authority which lay behind this exposition of the high-priest theme.”

- Then, in **Verse 22**, the author draws the conclusion: “This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.”
  - Grammatically, the emphasis in this Verse is on the last word in the original Greek text: *Jesus*.
  - Also, this is the only place in all of the New Testament that the Greek word for “**guarantor**” or “**surety**” occurs.

John MacArthur comments, “The word is *engyos*, and it was used in ancient legal documents for ‘one who stands security.’ The *engyos* offered his goods or even himself as security to ensure what was promised.”

Donald Guthrie agrees, “The word (*engyos*) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It is common in the papyri in legal documents in the sense of a pledge or as a reference to bail. When a father assents to the marriage of his daughter he gives a surety of the marriage dowry.”

- Throughout the Scriptures, it is common for the LORD to provide surety of what He has promised in his covenants with His people.
  - Consider God’s covenant with Noah. After the deluge, the LORD said, “I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth” (Genesis 9:13).
  - Also, in **Jeremiah 31:35-36**, God said, “Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – the LORD of hosts is his name: ‘If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.’”
  - And so it is here that the very life – the eternal **indestructible life** – of Jesus Christ is the surety of the New Covenant of God.
- In **Genesis 43-44**, Moses provides a beautiful example of a guarantor in the story of Joseph and his brothers.
  - In this passage, it states, in **Verses 1-4**, “Now the famine was severe in the land. And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, ‘Go again, buy us a little food.’ But Judah said to him, ‘The man [Joseph] solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’ If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food.”
  - Then, in a moving plead to his father, Judah said, in **Verses 8-9**, “Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.”
  - After the brother traveled to Egypt the second time and received food from Joseph, they were stopped by one of Joseph’s stewards. Upon investigation of the sacks of food carried by each of the brothers, it was discovered that Benjamin had apparently stolen a silver cup from the house of Joseph (although Joseph had intentionally placed it there).
  - After the brothers were taken back before Joseph, he said, in **Genesis 44:17**, “Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father.”
  - Devastated, Judah cried out to Joseph (whom he did not recognize as his brother), in **44:32,33**, “For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall

bear the blame before my father all my life.’ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers.”

- In fact, so moved was Joseph by this act of guarantee that he wept aloud and revealed his true identity to his brothers.

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- Consider as well the example of the Apostle Paul offering himself as the **surety** for Onesimus, the runaway slave: “<sup>18</sup>If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.” (Philemon 18,19)

- **How much more, therefore, can we trust the surety that God the Father gives us by providing His only eternal Son as a pledge of our salvation.**

□ Again, **Verse 22** states, “This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.”

- It is here, once again, that the author takes up the theme of Christ’s superiority to Old Testament Judaism.
- However, here, for the first time, the author uses the word “covenant.” The concept of covenant is absolutely central to the Book of Hebrews, and the word itself is used a total of seventeen (17) times in the whole epistle.
- One mistake, however, that modern readers must avoid is to conclude that the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, was bad. The Mosaic Covenant was good. It was perfect, and it was perfectly **sufficient** to accomplish all that God intended for it to – to point the way to the Christ.

As many of you know, our oldest daughter, Isabella, loves space. In fact, a few weeks ago we traveled to Space Center Houston for her birthday. We saw the astronaut training areas, the suits the astronauts wear, and the Saturn rocket. In one of our conversations, I attempted to explain how the Space Shuttle is launched into space. I told her about the rocket boosters that provide the necessary thrust (83% in fact) for the Space Shuttle to launch into space. Then, when the Space Shuttle reaches a height of 150,000 feet in elevation, the boosters are jettisoned and remove themselves from the shuttle – never to be used again. Without the boosters, the Space Shuttle would never get into space. However, if they remained attached, the Shuttle could never get into orbit either. Their purpose was good, but temporary.

- And so it was with Mosaic Covenant. Its purpose was good, but temporary, leading to a better covenant, with respect to Salvation – a Covenant guaranteed by the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## II. Jesus Christ Serves as a Priest Forever

- Then, the author of Hebrews writes, in **Verses 23-24**, “The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.”
  - It is here that the Hebrews author makes one of the most convincing (and obvious) arguments with respect to the superiority of Christ’s high priestly office and function to that of the Aaronic order – **Christ lives forever**.
  - According to the first century Jewish historian, Josephus, eighty-three high priests officiated from Aaron to the fall of the Temple in A.D. 70.
  - Consider the account recorded in **Numbers 20:23-29**: “<sup>23</sup>And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor, on the border of the land of Edom, <sup>24</sup> ‘Let Aaron be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land that I have given to the people of Israel, because you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah. <sup>25</sup>Take Aaron and Eleazar his son and bring them up to Mount Hor. <sup>26</sup>And strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son. And Aaron shall be gathered to his people and shall die there.’ <sup>27</sup>Moses did as the LORD commanded. And they went up Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. <sup>28</sup> And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son. And Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. <sup>29</sup>And when all the congregation saw that Aaron had perished, all the house of Israel wept for Aaron thirty days.”
  - Shortly thereafter, Moses died.
  - The point seems to be clear: the Aaronic and Mosaic Orders were never intended to lead the people of God into the Promised Land. These orders were temporary and could not ultimately save. They were intended to lead the people to the One who would lead them into the Promised Land: the coming Messiah.

John MacArthur comments, “Neither the law (represented by Moses) nor the sacrifices (represented by Aaron) could deliver from the wilderness of sin and bring into the land of salvation.”

- The Greek word in **Verse 24** translated *permanently* means immutable – that is, not only is it unchangeable, it is wholly **unable** to change. Thus, **Jesus Christ’s**

**high priesthood is permanent in that it not only last forever, but it never changes.**

### **III. Jesus Christ is Able to Save to the Uttermost**

- Finally, in **Verse 25**, the author states, “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”
  - He begins this Verse with the word “Consequently,” implying that he is drawing a conclusion based upon what he has already stated.
  - In other words, *because Jesus is our eternal, unchanging high priest who lives forever* He is able to save.
  - In **Hebrews 2:18**, *Jesus is able to help those who are being tempted*, in other words, He is able to **sympathize**. But, here, the statement is much weightier. Not only is He able to *sympathize*, but He is able to **save**.
  - Further, the Greek word here for power is *dunamai*, denoting “power” or “ability.” The truth is clear: **only Jesus Christ has the power to save**.
  - But, the author of Hebrews uses a unique phrase here: “save **to the uttermost**.”
    - The Greek phrase here (*eis to panteles*), translated “**to the uttermost**” can properly have two distinct meanings: (1) with respect to *time* – that is, the salvation provided by Christ is complete with respect to *time* (i.e., Christ is able to save forever). (2) with respect to *extent* – that is, the salvation provided by Christ is thoroughly comprehensive, meeting our every need.
    - There seems to be little doubt that the author has both meanings in mind here.

A.W. Pink comments, “The word [“uttermost”] may have a double meaning: it may respect either the perfection of the work, or its duration, so it is variously rendered, completely and entirely or forevermore and forever. Take its first meaning: Christ will not effect part of our salvation and then leave what remains to ourselves or to others. ‘He does not relinquish it by reason of death, but He lives on as long as it is necessary that anything should be done for the salvation of His people (A. Barnes). Consider its second meaning: whatever hindrances and difficulties lie in the way of the salvation of believers, the Lord Jesus is fully competent, by virtue of the exercise of His priestly office, to carry out the work for them unto eternal perfection. No matter what oppositions may arise, He is more than sufficient to cope with and overcome them all. Combining the two meanings: a complete salvation is a never-ending one.”

- Christ’s salvation *to the uttermost* makes even more sense when one considers the Old Testament understanding / picture of salvation – deliverance from judgment (usually at the hand of foreign geopolitical entity such as Egypt or Babylon). Yet, eternal salvation is deliverance from judgment from an infinitely greater and more powerful enemy (than Egypt or Babylon) – God Himself. Yet, this is where eternal salvation differs from Old Testament deliverance. Rather than the defeating of the enemy – eternal salvation results – not in the defeating of the enemy – but in actually making peace with Him – the lion laying down with the lamb.
- Therefore, the essence of salvation – **knowledge and nearness to God** – is accomplished only through the atoning and interceding work of Jesus Christ.
- Furthermore, since the enemy that must be *appeased* is Almighty God, only He can ultimately provide **for Himself what He requires**. In other words, the obstacles that must be overcome are those separating us from a loving, intimate relationship with a Holy God. Thus, Jesus Christ is the only one who *is able* to destroy every one of these obstacles and hindrances separating us from God.
- This is the point of the words of the Prophet Isaiah in **Isaiah 40**:
  - <sup>3</sup> A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
  - <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level,’

- And most certainly the great obstacle between us and God is **sin**. And it is sin that only Christ can effectively deal with.

- Notice how the author concludes this Verse: Christ “is able to save to the uttermost *those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*”
  - “Those who draw near to God through [Christ]” are those that the Father has given to the Son and drawn effectually to Himself. **John 6:37** states, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

- But, finally, notice the emphasis on the intercessory, high-priestly work of Jesus Christ – *he always lives to make intercession for them.*
- Therefore, salvation and intercession are directly linked in this passage.
- In other words, **our salvation is eternally secure since Christ lives to make intercession for us.**

Andrew Murray writes, “Without ceasing there streams forth from Him to the Father the prayer of His love for every one and every need of those that belong to Him; His very person and presences is that prayer, so closely and inseparably is He identified with those He calls His brethren.”

- The word for intercession is used by the Apostle Paul when speaking of the Holy Spirit’s intercession (Romans 8:27) as well as Jesus Christ’s intercession (Romans 8:34).
- As Christians, we must come to realize that if Christ, in any way, fails we are to be supremely pitied. That is, we must come to the point that we have placed all our hope, all of our “eggs (so to speak)” in Christ. There is no contingency of “back-up plan.”
- **Only Christ is able to intercede for us, and therefore to ensure the security of our present and future salvation.**

Philip Hughes states, “To rely upon angels or saints or any other finite beings (such as deceased relatives or the virgin Mary) for their intercessions is not only futile; it also betrays a failure of confidence in the adequacy of Christ as our intercessor, and it is to honor the creature rather than him who is our Creator and Redeemer.”

- Thus, as long as Christ lives, we are safe.
- **And so the words of the Apostle Paul, in Romans 8:33 come into full focus:**

Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?  
 It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?  
 It is Christ Jesus who died,  
 Yes, who was raised from the dead,  
 Who is at the right hand of God,  
 Who indeed intercedes for us.

- In conclusion, consider the lyrics to the great hymn *Arise, My Soul, Arise*, by Charles Wesley:

Arise, my soul, arise,  
Shake off your guilty fears;  
The bleeding Sacrifice  
In my behalf appears:  
Before the throne my Surety stands,  
Before the throne my Surety stands,  
My name is written on His hands.

He ever lives above,  
For me to interceded,  
His all-redeeming love,  
His precious blood to plead;  
His blood atoned for every race,  
His blood atoned for every race,  
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

Five bleeding wounds he bears,  
Received on Calvary;  
They pour effectual prayers,  
They strongly plead for me.  
“Forgive him, O forgive,” they cry,  
“forgive him, O forgive,” they cry,  
‘nor let that ransomed sinner die!’”