



Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for 8 June 2008

Released on Wednesday, June 4, 2008

“Christ as Intercessor”

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 7

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 110

TIME: about A.D. 67

PLACE: unknown; but probably sent to Jewish Christians.

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT: (Hebrews 7:20-28)

20 And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest:

21 (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)

22 By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

23 And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:

24 But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

26 For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

27 Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

28 For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

TODAY'S AIM

The Aaronic priesthood had been instituted by God and had served its purpose. This week's lesson makes the case for Christ as the ultimate intercessor.

Facts: to examine a passage that sets forth the superiority of Christ's priesthood.

Principle: to show that Christ is the perfect intercessor for us.

Application: to help us more fully appreciate the Lord Jesus as our perfect intercessor.

HOW TO SAY IT

Aaron. Air-un.

Levites. Lee-vites.

Melchizedek. Mel-kiz-eh-dek

INTRODUCTION:

In the book of Exodus, God ordained Aaron and his descendants to be priests for the Lord. As priest, they offered sacrifices in the temple. The priests of the Old Testament were ordained by God to sacrifice animals as a stopgap remedy for sin. They performed a valuable function in their time and served as intercessors before God for the people.

This week's lesson shows us how Christ, the ultimate intercessor, made the old Aaronic priesthood obsolete. The office is no longer required since animal sacrifices for remission of sins has been done away by Christ's ultimate sacrifice (His finished work at Calvary).

"I Am the Greatest!"

The famous world champion boxer Muhammad Ali is known for many memorable sound bites. But none is better known than his claim to be the greatest boxer of all time. It is impossible to find out whether he was truly better than all those who came before him. Neither is it clear that he could have beaten all the boxers that have come since his heyday. The fact that Ali lost five fights clouds the issue.

This is the way of all humanity; someone will always come along to take your place. The author of Hebrews proves to the reader that Jesus, the Son of God, is different in this respect. Jesus is truly and absolutely the greatest of all eternity. There has been no one before Him who was greater, and there will be no one after. There will be no one to take His place, because there will never be any need for anyone to do so.

LESSON BACKGROUND:

The portrait of Christ as Intercessor would be an encouragement to the original readers of Hebrews, who faced daunting opposition for their Christian faith. Their Savior was superior to the angels, the prophets, and even Moses. But an image of Christ as High Priest and Intercessor would encourage them because these images were very important to their system of worship.

This theme first emerges in Hebrews 2:16-18, where Christ is seen identifying with human beings, even to the extent of being tempted. It is reintroduced in 4:14-16, where believers are urged to enter God's presence boldly, knowing that Christ is representing them there. Following this (5:1-10), Christ's high priestly qualifications are enumerated, and the author of Hebrews shows that through His divine appointment (5:5-6), His compassion (5:7-8) and His perfect offering for sin (5:9-10) that Christ meets the requirements of a high priest.

QUESTIONS

A PRIESTHOOD BASED ON A DIVINE OATH (Hebrews 7:20-22)

1. Why did the readers of Hebrews need to have proof that Christ was now their High Priest (Hebrews 7:20)?

The priesthood was central to Jewish worship, and Jewish converts to Christ would have been reluctant to leave it behind. For centuries their priests, the descendants of Aaron, had received their sacrifices and interceded for them before God. Christ was not a descendant of Aaron (He was of the tribe of Judah and not Levi), so the writer had to show how Christ was a high priest and justify ignoring the Aaronic priesthood.

In Hebrews, Christ is identified with the priesthood of Melchizedek (6:20), which was superior to Aaron's. Psalm 110 linked the Messiah with this priesthood (Ps. 110:4; Heb 7:17). So after establishing the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek, the writer specified how Christ's priesthood fit this pattern.

2. What impact does the fact that Jesus is priest forever have on your life? How should that fact help you grow spiritually (v. 21)?

The thought conveyed in the word *priest* is that of a bridge builder. Old Testament priests were to bridge the gap between people and God. But that system was temporary. Levitical priests were limited by their own mortality. Read Psalm 90:10 and James 4:14. A priest would live out his life and die, but the need for intercession continued. Jesus, however, will always be there, building and being that bridge between God and us.

3. Why was it important that God sealed Christ's priesthood with an oath (v. 21)?

The writer of Hebrews had already told his readers in Hebrews 6:13-18 that God's covenant with Abraham was based on immutable (or unchanging) things. God, wishing to establish the inviolability of His promise to Abraham and his heirs, swore by Himself to keep it. Thus, those who are heirs of this promise have double assurance that it will be fulfilled – His promise and His oath. So also His oath to the Messiah concerning His priesthood gave additional assurance that His Word was trustworthy.

Unlike the Messiah, Aaron's descendants assumed their priestly duties without an oath. By contrast, with an oath by God (Hebrews 7:21), the promise of an eternal priesthood was made to Christ.

4. How is Christ's priesthood the surety of a better covenant (v. 22)?

Hebrews 7:18-19 speaks of the "weakness" and "unprofitableness" of the law and hints at the need for a better covenant. In Christ Jesus, such a new covenant between God and man has been provided through a succession of events: His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and eternal priesthood. While His death was the basis for the covenant (Matthew 26:28), His priesthood is the guarantee of its continuing fulfillment.

Jesus became a "surety" or a guarantee of this better covenant (Hebrews 7:22). Jesus guarantees, through His priesthood, the perpetual fulfillment of the covenant. While it was His reconciling death on the cross that made the covenant possible, Christ's intercession guarantees its continuance.

5. Why is it essential that our High Priest be human?

Becoming human enabled Christ to sympathize with the things that we endure. Christ can identify with our needs. It is because He became human that He can now intercede for us. Although He is also God and presently occupies a glorified body, He can identify with our needs because He has gone through the things we go through. Having gone through similar trials, Christ can be a compassionate high priest and come to our aid (Hebrews 2:17-18).

He became human and took on man's nature. He was tempted like we are, yet without sin, so that He could understand and sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). This allows us to come boldly to Him to seek mercy and grace in our times of need (Hebrews 4:16).

A PRIESTHOOD BASED ON AN ENDURING LIFE (Hebrews 7:23-25)

6. Why did many Aaronic priests have to serve in succession (vs. 23, 24)?

The descendants of Aaron were "many priests" (Hebrews 7:23) in the sense that many served in succession. So even though there was only one high priest at a time, there were perhaps eighty-three of them who served from Aaron to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Eerdmans).

The reason for this succession was death. The Lord's arrangement for the priesthood was with the house of Aaron, not merely with Aaron himself. This is the only way the priesthood in Israel could be perpetuated. To fulfill its function, this institution had to rely on a perpetual line of successors.

As mentioned previously, it is not so with Christ's priesthood. Because He lives forever, He has an "unchangeable priesthood" (Hebrews 7:24). His priesthood is changeless; it will never pass on to a successor.

7. How does Jesus' intercession guarantee complete salvation (v. 25)?

Because Jesus is an eternal priest, the guarantor of an eternal, irreplaceable covenant, He alone is able *to save* people. *To the uttermost* means that there is no limit to Jesus' ability to save—neither the depth of sin nor the number of sinners.

The object of Jesus' saving, though, serves as a condition: *them ... that come unto God by him* means that God turns away no one who comes to Him. But each must come on God's terms. The only way to come to God is through the Son (John 14:6). The Son is able to save all because He lives eternally for the purpose of making eternal intercession (Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1).

This message strengthened the faith of the original readers (Jewish Christians) as they began to realize the greatness of their Savior and their salvation. But this message is no less valuable today. How many lost people fear coming to God because they doubt that He will forgive them? How many Christians doubt their salvation because they dwell on their sin?

A PRIESTHOOD BASED ON A PERFECT CHARACTER (Hebrews 7:26-28)

8. How is the character of our High Priest described (v. 26)?

Another basis for the superiority of Christ's priesthood is His flawless character. Jesus is a fitting high priest because He is, first, holy. This refers to His devout, pious character. He is completely without guile – without a sinful nature. He is morally undefiled and separate from sinners.

He has been also exalted above the heavens. This refers to the exaltation that occurred after His earthly humiliation (Acts 1:10-11; Ephesians 1:20-21; Hebrews 4:14). He now enjoys the position due Him for all He accomplished in God's plan.

9. What do you appreciate most about having Jesus as your high priest?

We know our sins and how far we are from the Father. We know we do not deserve access to the Father. But we also know that Jesus, as the great high priest, is without sin. Not only does He have access to the Father, He is with the Father.

All of our needs are known by the Father because our high priest is there interceding for us. The Father forgives all of our sins because the blood of our high priest has covered them, and Jesus stands as our defense attorney before the Father. Thus we have hope.

All this should result in two things that permeate our daily lives: a feeling of assurance and an attitude of humility.

10. Why was Jesus' single sacrifice better than all the rest (vs. 27, 28)?

The Levitical high priests had repetitive duties that Jesus does not have to perform. Sin offerings had to be offered repeatedly under the old covenant. In addition, the priests were vulnerable to sin like everyone else, and this required daily sin offerings, for themselves, to guarantee their fitness for service (Leviticus 4:3).

Jesus, however, was not bound to this endless cycle (Hebrews 7:27). He did this once (literally, "once for all") when He offered up Himself. As both High Priest and Sacrifice, He put an end to the necessity of animal sacrifices. He could do what they never could – remove sins (Hebrews 10:4, 11-12). Jesus validated His priesthood through a perfect sacrifice – Himself.

He was not offering Himself for His own sins. Unlike the Aaronic priests (v. 27), Jesus had no sins to atone for so His priesthood was better than the arrangement of the law that utilized high priests with normal human frailties. So Jesus is consecrated forever to this ministry, and it is He who represents us in heaven this very day.

CONCLUSION:

The Hebrews of Bible times were very familiar with the priests who offered sacrifices in the temple. Since Moses' time, the priest had served as intercessors before God for the people.

In this week's text, the writer to the Hebrews portrayed Christ as the ultimate intercessor, far superior to the priests of the old covenant. He is timeless and sinless. His work of self-sacrifice on the cross is a completed work that results in complete salvation for those who trust in Him.

Christ is not like the priests of old, whose death ended their priesthood ministry. Just the opposite took place with Christ because it was His death that made it possible for Him to become our High Priest. Christ is our unchangeable High Priest and our blessed Intercessor.

PRAYER

Loving Father, we thank You that You gave us just the right priest, who is really able to remove our sins and make us presentable to You. We offer our thanks in the name of the one who is Your appointee, eternal and utterly perfect, Jesus Your Son, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

No fear!

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:

Next week's lesson will focus on **Christ as Redeemer**. Read Hebrews 9:11 – 10:18.

Lesson Summarized by:

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