

A Better Covenant

Hebrews 7:20-22

We have been spending some time studying and meditating on the nature and reality of Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest of our confession. In the book of Hebrews this topic is obsessively focused on, and is intended to give great comfort to a beleaguered church to keep going in their Christian walk, to keep the faith, to not drift away from the truth that they have received in the gospel.

How comforting it is to know that we have a High Priest who has been made like us in every respect, yet was without sin, and therefore is made to be a perfect priest who can rightly represent us to the Father and who can give us His own perfection of obedience so that we are counted as righteous before God?!

How strengthening is it to remember that we have One who continually stands before the throne of God interceding for us, praying for us, and giving us all the mercy and grace we need in times of need?!

How secure is it to remember that we are anchored to the Word of Truth, with our future inheritance in the saints guaranteed forever more, and present help through the presence of the Spirit in us? We don't need to go to any other source for ultimate truth than in Jesus Christ. He is both the mediator of the Word and the Incarnate Word of God.

We have seen how much better Jesus' ministry as a priest is than the human institution established by Moses, as well as the enduring legacy of Jesus' priestly office since He rose from the dead never to die again, but always living to make intercession for us!

Practically this means that there is nothing we need fear from the Lord when we come to Jesus. There is nothing we need worry about in our lives when we remember that we have a High Priest who knows and moves to meet our needs even before we know to ask! There is nothing which can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ because Christ has secured that love and has poured that love into our hearts by His Holy Spirit! We can walk through life with great assurance, patience, steadfastness of hope, and joy since we are walking with our Priest who loves and gives to us of His very self.

Now we will finish chapter 7 by arriving at the most beautiful vista point that the Writer gives of Jesus' priestly office. From here we will see Jesus in beauty as worship Him in light of this glorious description of what He has done for us.

Hebrews 7:20-22

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.’”*

Priestly Oath

Last week we saw the two superior works of Jesus as Priest: a better salvation, and a better hope.

This week we will see the context in which these works rest. If we consider the two works of Jesus to be beautiful gems of incalculable worth, then the backdrop in which it rests will be the beautiful velvet which sets the stage and highlights the beauty of, His works.

We are going to be putting on our thinking caps today and do some theological legwork. My goal as a pastor is to display Jesus and have a you all fall in love with Him and to work out that love in your lives. This doesn't mean that we put our brains down at the altar, but in order to truly grow in love for our great God and King, there are times when we need to use our brains to better understand what He has given to us in His Word. Sometimes the Scriptures are full of easy to find applications, and other times require us to humbly study more diligently that we might more fully grasp the magnitude and infinitude of God.

Today is one of those times that we must do some more diligent study, so let's put-on our thinking caps and dive in!

The Writer is once again showing the superiority of Jesus' ministry as High Priest by highlighting the fact that no other High Priest ever received an oath by God to confirm or establish his office. But, in Jesus, God the Father confirmed His eternal ministry of the High Priest of His people past, present, and future. To no other priest did the Father do this than with Jesus.

The OT verse quoted is again from Psalm 110, which is a very important Psalm for seeing the kind of relationship between Father and Son.

The verse quoted establishes the eternal nature of Jesus' priestly office and ministry in the lives of His people.

The purpose of the oath is not to make sure that God follows through, for He is perfect and never fails, but to make sure that we are fully convinced and have strong

conviction in the One He appointed for us! It is the wonderful condescension of God to fickle and timid humanity which prompts the Father to make the oath confirming and establishing Jesus' priestly office for all time!

What is the better covenant that the Writer is discussing here? A better question to start with is: what is a covenant in general?

A promise between two parties with conditions and expectations.

Why is it important to think about covenants with regard to God?

Covenants are the ways in which God relates to humankind. He sets up conditions and promises between Himself and us

We see God making covenants all over the place:

Adam: He received the covenant of works; eternal life offered if Adam obeys the commands to multiply and have dominion, and to avoid eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He fails, plunging humanity into sin

Noah: Covenant to creation (not destroying the earth by flood)

Abraham: Covenant of righteousness by faith alone

Moses: Old Covenant of Law

David: Covenant of eternal kingship

Jeremiah: New Covenant prophesied

Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant, the covenant of Grace, by which He acts as the last Adam, living life in perfect worship, love, and obedience as Adam was called to do yet failed in. The covenant of grace says that we have failed, but that Jesus has succeeded and offers salvation and transformation through His life, death, and resurrection, applied through the Holy Spirit in our lives.

What is the "better covenant" which the Writer is referring to?

The Covenant of grace: God's redemptive favor that He shows us in Christ and to those who are united to Him.

The Covenant of Grace is the gracious agreement between the offended God and the offending yet elect sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ and the sinner enters the covenant by faith alone...

– Louis Berkhof

Yet, this Covenant of Grace is really the outworking of an older and more weighty covenant, namely the covenant between Father and Son from eternity past, which we call the Covenant of Redemption.

Obviously, these are highly theological terms, and you will not find them anywhere in the Bible, but take very clear truths and teachings and put together to create a theological construct by which we can better understand the magnitude and beauty of what Jesus has done for us and is doing in us now by His Spirit.

Pactum Salutis (Covenant of Redemption)

Have you ever gotten to go behind-the-scenes at a major theme park like Disneyland or Universal Studios or something? I have, and it is sort of strange to go from this magical experience to the mundaneness of what is used to create such a magical place. Well, the author is doing the opposite with us. We will be moving from the mundane to the majestic as we study the Covenant of Redemption in these next few minutes.

Covenant of Redemption

A very strongly affirmed and exalted teaching which became very well known through the Reformation in Europe, culminating especially in the 17th and 18th centuries. It combines together many different Scripture passages which focus on the relationship between the Father and the Son with regards to our redemption, which when seen in the larger view of the whole of Scripture, was not something God had to figure out along the way, or even a reaction to an unforeseen and unfortunate event, but was something which in the eternal counsel of the Triune Godhead, entered into for the ultimate purpose of bringing glory to God alone. It is the Covenant by which the Covenant of Grace flows from.

Covenant of Redemption Defined

The pretemporal, intratrinitarian agreement between the Father and Son in which the Father promises to redeem an elect people. In turn the Son volunteers to earn the salvation of his people by becoming incarnate... by acting as surety of the covenant of grace for and as mediator of the covenant of grace to the elect. In his active and passive obedience, Christ fulfills the conditions of the pactum salutis... ratifying the Father's promise, because of which the Father rewards the Son's obedience with the salvation of the elect. And because of this the Holy Spirit applies the Son's work to his people through the means of grace.

– David Van Drunen

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Savior of His church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time

redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified...

– Westminster Confession ch. 8

Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated to the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, in which He was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; being yesterday and today the same, and forever...

– Westminster Confession ch. 8

Jesus is the covenant guarantor for us. He is the surety of the covenant. The word “guarantor” is only place in the Bible it occurs, and it literally means for someone to take on all the legal requirements and consequences for another person. As we have already mentioned, Jesus does this by taking on all the consequences for the sins of His people, and He does this by fulfilling all the requirements of the covenant of grace for His people. In using the word “guarantor” in our passage, the Writer is peeling back the temporal veil and giving us a behind-the-scenes look at the covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son applied by the Holy Spirit in our lives.

– Hebrews 7:22

I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom...

– Luke 22:29

Word “assign” is the word for “covenant.” Jesus is saying that He is covenanting us a kingdom, the One that the Father has already covenanted to the Son. Again, the peeling back of the temporal veil to see more of the eternal covenant of redemption at work

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

– John 17:4-5

The work of redemption which the Father and Son entered into before the world existed.

Yet it was the good plan of the LORD to crush him...

– Isaiah 53:10

The plan of the Triune Godhead to see the Redeemer take on the iniquity and guilt of His elect.

I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession...

– Psalm 2:7-8

The eternal decree of the father declaring the Son and giving Him a people from every tribe, nation, tongue, and people group.

The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

– Psalm 110:4

If Psalm 2 was the promise of the Son being eternal king, this psalm is the promise of the Son being the eternal priest

...even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will...

– Ephesians 1:4-5

Before the foundation of the world the plan was to make us holy and blameless, adopted into His eternal family, through Jesus, all according to the purpose of God's will before the beginning of the world.

Why is this important? Why am I spending time setting this up and teaching on this theological topic?

Practically, all of chapter 8 of Hebrews will be focusing on the topic of covenant and its importance for our salvation and continuing relationship with God, so it is necessary to establish some kind of context by which that discussion takes place.

To highlight the sovereignty of God over all things.

God alone is the One we must look to for help. God alone is the One we must go to for provision. God alone is the One we must seek for forgiveness of sins. God alone is the One we find love. God alone is the One we find our truest and fullest identity. God alone is the One who is to be our guide, our King, our best reason for doing anything at all! To go to anything else is idolatry and will eventually bring spiritual or even physical harm and death to our lives. God is life, and there is no life apart from Him.

To show that the ultimate purpose for all things that God does is for the pursuit of His own glory

Thinking high thoughts of God brings Him honor, and it encourages us and stirs up our own zeal for Him. These topics put on display the eternal wisdom, power, mercy, grace, love, and benevolence of our God toward His people! What glory we get to be a part of when we are part of His family! What an honor to simply serve as one of His servants. What a blessing to be an agent of His love in the world.

To encourage us that Jesus knows whose are His, and will never let them go, nor depart from them, nor let us ultimately fall away from Him!

This doctrine ought to give us great assurance in our faith and in our growing love for our Savior Jesus Christ!

As we continue to study and meditate on the office of Jesus being our High Priest, may we quickly and continually come to Him for all things. May we seek to bring Him all the glory and honor that we possibly can in our lives. May we seek to emulate the obedient love that Jesus shows us in the world. May we find our greatest joy and hope in the One who, from eternity past, intended to seek out, save, and gather in His lost and wandering children so that we might know true life and true love to the glory of God alone. Let's pray.

Lord's Supper

At the table we receive into our bodies the elements of the covenant of grace. We receive the bread of Christ's body, broken for us, and the wine of His blood shed for us, that we would be healed from our sin, and that we might be transformed in our love.