

A Better Priesthood (part 3)

Hebrews 7:26-28



1. A Pure Priest (verse 26)
2. A Final Priest (verse 27)
3. A Perfect Priest (verse 28)

There are many things in life that you absolutely need to survive, to which you barely give any thought. For instance: you need oxygen to survive. But, how many times a day do you think about oxygen? You need to breathe. But, how many times a day do you consciously think about taking your next breath? You need the structures in your house to hold, so that it doesn't come falling down upon you, crushing you to pieces. Do you ever think about this?

You need the earth to stay above the waters, and not all crumble into the sea. My son told me yesterday that he learned that if the world had no mountains, the waters would cover the land at a depth of two miles all around the earth. Do you ever think about this? You need the atmosphere in the earth's surface to live. Without the atmosphere, it would be much colder upon the earth. Without the atmosphere, deadly radiation from space would come upon us. Without the atmosphere, smaller meteorites wouldn't burn up, but would free-fall upon the earth. Do you ever think about this?

You need the sun to keep burning. If the sun would stop burning and providing energy to the earth, we would all die quickly. Do you ever think about this? Let's go to a smaller scale. You need protons to keep repelling protons and attracting electrons. Without that, we would all dissolve. Do you ever think about this? You need your body to regenerate cells in order to live. Your skin will completely replace itself in a few months. If our skin cells didn't obtain replacements, then our bodies would soon be exposed to the world, and we would die. Do you ever think about this?

We could go on and on and on about all the things that are vital to our physical lives. And there are things vital to our spiritual lives as well, that we think so little about. We need God's patience and longsuffering in order to survive! Psalm 130:1, "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" If God would mark our iniquities and judge us today, none of us would stand. How often do you really sit down and think about this?

We need God's life-giving spirit to dwell in us. Job 34:14-15 says, "If He should determine to do so, if He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust." If God would take away His spirit from our lives, we would be dust. How often do you think about this? And, pertinent to our text today, we need a high priest to intercede for us. "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." If we would not have a great high priest before the throne of God, would we ever be saved? How often do you think about this? In recent days, more I'm sure, as we have been working our way through the book of Hebrews.

Let us begin by considering our text:

Hebrews 7:26-28

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

Once again, we find these three verses in Hebrews talking about how the priesthood of Jesus is "A Better Priesthood." Appropriately, my message this morning is entitled, "A Better Priesthood (part 3)." Part 1 began in verse 11. Part 2 began in verse 18. And now, this morning, Part 3 begins in verse 26.

Now, the reason why I have entitled my messages each week, "A Better Priesthood" is because this is the main point of the writer to the Hebrews. This section concluded with these words: "Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1). This is the main point of our section. We have such a high priest!

We have seen how the priesthood of Jesus is ... A Perfect Priesthood (verses 11-12), unlike the Levitical priesthood.

We have seen how the priesthood of Jesus is ... A Royal Priesthood (verses 13-14). Jesus is from the tribe of Judah, the line of kings.

We have seen how the priesthood of Jesus is ... A Worthy Priesthood (verses 15-17). Jesus became a priest, not because of His ancestry, but rather, because of the power of His life.

We have seen how ... This Hope is Better (verses 18-19). Jesus brings in a better hope than the law.

We have seen how ... An Oath is Better (verses 20-22). Jesus became a priest by the oath of God, which none of the other high priests achieved.

We have seen how ... Forever is Better (verses 23-25). Jesus holds His priesthood continually.

And now, we come this morning to look at two more characteristics of the priesthood of Jesus. Both of them make Jesus better than any of the high priests of the Old Testament. Let's look at my first point this morning: Jesus is ...

1. A Pure Priest (verses 26-27)

As you read verse 26 again, I want for you to listen to all of the words (and phrases) that describe Jesus as being a pure priest. I want for you to count them.

Hebrews 7:26

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;

We have five words (and phrases) there: (1) Holy, (2) innocent, (3) undefiled, (4) separated from sinners and (5) exalted above the heavens. Let's take these words and phrases one by one and think about them.

1. Jesus is Holy.

This means that Jesus is perfectly clean. He is totally without sin. This is why Jesus shone on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:2). His purity was evident. This word obviously brings us back to think of the angels around the throne of God saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come" (Rev. 4:8). What is said of God is said of Jesus Christ. And, He's not holy because He is forgiven and cleansed. Rather, He is holy because that is what He is by nature.

2. Jesus is innocent.

You might easily translate this word, "blameless." It carries the idea of His pure life. There is nothing in Jesus that you could ever identify as sin. It's not that Jesus was forgiven as we are. Neither is it that Jesus was declared innocent in a court of law. No, Jesus never sinned, and therefore was completely blameless. Pilate, who investigated the charges against Him, asked His accusers, "What evil has He done?" (Matt. 27:23).

3. Jesus is undefiled.

One of the difficulties of living in the world is that those in the world can influence us toward evil. Priests were especially susceptible to this, as those around Jesus would easily defile them. By touching a dead body, a priest was defiled. When Jesus touched a dead body, it came to life! But, the sinful world had no effect upon Jesus. He was untouched by the world. One commentator compared Jesus to the physician, "who works among the sick at the time of an epidemic, but who is immune!" [1](#)

4. Jesus is separated from sinners.

To be sure, Jesus shared in our humanity. But, Jesus never participated in our sin. He was a friend of sinners (Matt. 11:19). But, He was never engaged in sin Himself. When it came to sin, Jesus kept His full distance from it. He is utterly distinct.

5. Jesus is exalted above the heavens.

This is mentioned several times in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 1:3, "He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." Hebrews 8:1, "[Jesus has] taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." Hebrews 12:2, "[Jesus] has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." There is no higher position to be offered, than the position that Jesus owns in the universe. Hebrews 1 tells us that all the angels worship Him!

Such is the picture of our high priest, king Jesus. He is pure, innocent, holy, righteous, altogether different than we are. I would encourage you to put this picture of Jesus into your mind. I encourage you to be ready to share this with others, should the need arise.

This past Monday, some Jehovah's witnesses came to our door. When I discerned who they were and what they wanted, I stepped outside to speak with them. The older gentleman came and said to me, "Good day. We are going around the neighborhood, sharing with folks about the kingdom of God. Today we are sharing from John 17:3. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." I do believe that this was God's Sovereign timing. What text did I preach on last week? John 17: the high priestly prayer of Jesus. And what verse did this man read for me? He read for me from John 17.

And, having meditated upon Jesus and His prayer last week, I said this, "You don't believe that Jesus is God, do you?" He was silent. I said, "Well, what about this very text which you are quoting with me. Have you considered verse 17? Father, the hour has come, glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You." Have you considered verse 5? Father, glorify Me together with Yourself with the glory which I had with You before the world was." Didn't Isaiah say, "My glory, I will give to no other" (Is. 42:8)? This text right here shows that Jesus is God."

I do believe that he was shocked at what I said. I called him to worship Jesus, the true God. At this point, the man responded much like Jehovah's Witnesses often respond. He said, "Well, let's turn over to Colossians and look at this verse." I said, "No, let's stick on this verse and the glory of Jesus. It says in Revelation 5 that the hosts of the heavens will be worshipping Jesus. To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev. 5:13). I said, "That's Jesus, having been lifted up to the throne of the majesty in the heavens, is being worshiped by all in heaven as equal with God."

He said, "Well, in Colossians it says that He is the firstborn from the dead." In no way was this man prepared to interact with the Scripture. He and his companion left pretty quickly, without interest in what I was saying.

But, here's the point. I was sharing from the overflow of last Sunday. And you can do the same with this text here. A Jehovah's Witness comes to your door this week. And you can say, "This past Sunday I was in church. And my pastor was preaching from Hebrews 7. It says there in verse 26, "It was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens." This sounds far more than any angel that has ever walked the planet. It sounds like God, Himself in all of His purity." So let them deal with this text here in Hebrews 7. Jesus is a pure, holy, righteous priest! Meditate on these words so that they come quickly from your mouth. Jesus is holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens.

The implications of His purity come in verse 26, where we read, "It was fitting for us to have such a high priest." In other words, "Such a high priest fits our need exactly. Or, as the NIV says it, "Such a high priest meets our need." He is suitable to bring us to God.

When you go on vacation and visit the grand canyon, you want a suitable guide to take you to the bottom, safe and sound. When you go white water rafting, you want a suitable guide to work you through the treacherous waters. When you explore a cave, you want a suitable guide who has been there before. So also when you come to God. You want a suitable guide to bring you there. And Jesus Christ is such a One. He fits our need exactly.

We especially see how suitable He is in verse 27, which forms my second point. Not only is Jesus a pure priest (verses 26). He is unlike Nadab and Abihu. He is unlike Samuel's sons. He is unlike the priests of Jesus' day. Verse 27 pulls out the contrast between Jesus and the other human priests. He is also ...

2. A Final Priest (verse 27)

Hebrews 7:27

who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Jesus is far different than any priest that has ever walked upon the planet. They all had to offer up sacrifices for themselves before they would ever able to offer up sacrifices for others. But, Jesus was different than this. He didn't have to offer up any sacrifices for Himself because, he was "holy, innocent, undefiled, and separated from sinners" (verse 26).

Just imagine with me the experience that an Old Testament saint would have in bringing his sacrifice to the priest. He sins in some way. So, he goes to the temple with his lamb in hand. He brings the animal to the priest and explains the situation. "I have sinned. Here is my lamb. Please offer up my sacrifice for me."

The priest says, "Sure, no problem." Soon, he departs and takes a lamb of his own and walks toward the altar. He silts the lamb's throat and offers up the lamb upon the altar as a sacrifice. And you know what he's doing, right? He's offering up a sacrifice first for his own sins. Then, he'll be cleansed and qualified to offer up a sacrifice for your sins. Now, in actuality, it didn't really happen that way. There is nowhere in the Old Testament that required a priest to offer up a sacrifice for every sacrifice that he would offer on behalf of others. But, the principle of a priest needing a sacrifice first before he sacrificed for others is true.

Over in chapter 9, verse 7, we read of the day of atonement, when the high priest would offer up a sacrifice for the sins of the people. We read, "Into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance." Although this verse is speaking about what took place once a year, according to verse 27, this happened on a daily basis. There is some discussion as to what this means, as the Old Testament never demanded a daily sacrifice for the priests. It may well refer to the sacrifice made every morning.

At any rate, here's the point: the priest would offer up a sacrifice for Himself, and then he would be cleansed of his own sin so he is able and qualified to turn around and offer up sacrifice for your sin. At this point, something ought to bother you. You ought to object. "Wait a minute," you say, "He can't offer up my sacrifice, because he, too, is a sinner. Right? Then, what's to say that his first sacrifice was accepted? If he can't offer up a sacrifice for me, what makes him able to offer up a sacrifice for himself?" Do you see the problem? This was a problem for all sacrifices in the Old Testament. Those who offered up sacrifices for sin were sinful and in need of forgiveness themselves.

But not so the sacrifice of Christ. His life was a pure life. There was no sin in Him. There was no need for Him to offer up a sacrifice for Himself. In and of itself, this makes His sacrifice way better than any of the priestly sacrifices of the Old Covenant. It makes His sacrifice a fitting sacrifice. But, it gets even better. Jesus didn't merely offer up an animal in smoke upon the altar. Rather, He offered up Himself.

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who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

I hope that you see how great the sacrifice of Christ was. The priests in Israel all offered up animals, but Christ offered up Himself.

It's like the pig and the chicken, who were on their way to breakfast. Along the way, they were trying to decide what to have. The chicken said, "Let's have ham and eggs." The pig then replied, "That's fine for you, it's a small donation on your part, but it's a total sacrifice for me." For Jesus, it was a total sacrifice. He didn't sacrifice another animal. No, He sacrificed Himself.

Do you have any idea how great this sacrifice was? See, it's one thing to offer up a bug as a sacrifice. No big deal. Little boys with magnifying glasses offer up ants all summer long in smoke. "Eh? I ain't around to complain about the killing of bugs. But, it's another thing to offer up an animal, like a sheep or a bull. There are those who believe that such things are immoral and wrong. It's yet another thing to offer up another human being as a sacrifice. Almost all agree that such actions are wrong. We read in horror as we read about the human sacrifice that took place in the Aztec culture, or think about the activities of the Moloch worshippers. Yet, in the abortion industry, we see children sacrificed for the sake of our lifestyle.

But, it's yet another thing for God to be sacrificed! But that's what took place on the cross. Jesus Christ--the holy, innocent, undefiled one--was sacrificed upon the cross. God was sacrificed upon the cross in Jerusalem, some two thousand years ago. This sacrifice was far better than any animal could ever have been. It makes the worth of His sacrifice far greater than any sacrifice that was every offered! 1 Peter 1:19 says, "precious blood as of a lamb, unblemished and spotless" is the blood of Christ. And this is why it was Jesus only needed to be offered up once. He is the final priest. Look again at verse 27. ...

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who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was so great that it only needed to be offered once! There was no need to repeat the sacrifices. This will be a large theme in chapter 10. Look over at Hebrews 10:10. ...

Hebrews 10:10-14

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins, but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ never needs to be repeated. This is the abomination that takes place in the Roman Catholic Church in the Mass. They claim that Jesus Christ is being offered up in every Mass, as the communion wafer is transubstantiated into His body and blood. Consider the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

What is the Mass? The sacrifice of the Cross, the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, offered in an unbloody manner under the appearances of bread and wine.

Is the Mass a true sacrifice? Yes, it contains all the elements of a true sacrifice, priest and victim-gift and offering. By the separate consecration of the bread and wine which symbolizes His death, Jesus, the Victim of the Calvary Sacrifice, becomes truly present on the altar. [\[2\]](#)

But, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was once for all. This makes Him a final priest (verse 27). If you have one sacrifice, which is sufficient for all time, there is no other need for another priest; there is no other need for another sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to atone for the sins that took place before the cross. Hebrews 9:15 says, "For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." In other words, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ paid for the sins of David, who lived 1,000 years before Christ did. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ paid for the sins of Moses, who lived 1,400 years before Christ did. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ paid for the sins of Abraham, who lived 2,000 years before Christ did.

But, not only did the sacrifice of Jesus pay for the sins that took place before the cross. His sacrifice was sufficient to atone for the sins that took place after the cross. Think about it: When were your sins committed? Last week? Last year? 10 years ago? 30 years ago? 70 years ago? If your sins are ever to be forgiven, they must have been forgiven through a sacrifice that took place 2,000 years ago.

There is nothing that you can do today to improve upon the work of Christ. There are no more sacrifices that are needed. You can't do anything to make up for your sins. Sadly, we often live like we can do something to make up for our sins. We think that reading the Bible more is going to resolve our sins. We think that praying more to God is going to finally resolve our sins. We think that feeling really badly about our sins is going to resolve them. He like to show to God how badly we feel about our sins or how committed we are to serving the Lord. And thus, in some measure, we think that our efforts will show God that we are worthy of having our sins forgiven.

But, none of these things can improve upon the sacrifice of Christ. And in actuality, they lessen the cross, because we think that by doing these things we can aid somehow in our justification. But, we can't. The work of Jesus Christ upon the cross is sufficient to atone for our sins.

David Dickson, a Scottish minister in the 1600's, said on his deathbed, "I have taken all my good deeds, and all my bad and cast them in a heap before the Lord, and fled from both, and betaken myself to the Lord Jesus Christ, and in him I have sweet peace." [\[3\]](#)

And this is the great reality of what we will celebrate in the Lord's Supper. We celebrate the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ, never needing to be repeated again. And we remember that time, when Jesus died for us. Jesus told us to remember His death through the bread and the cup.

Let's transition to my last point.

3. A Perfect Priest (verse 28).

Hebrews 7:28

For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

There is a contrast in verse 28. It's the contrast between the priests appointed by the law of God, and the priest appointed by the oath. First of all, there is a contrast in who was appointed to the office of priest. The law appointed men as high priests. Regular guys, like you and me, became priests. But, the oath of God appointed the Son of God as a priest.

Second, there is a contrast in their abilities. The priests appointed by the law were weak men. But, the priest appointed by the oath is the perfect Son. Now, those priests of the Old Covenant were weak, not in the sense that they lacked physical strength, but rather in the sense that they were sinful and flawed and in need of forgiveness. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, (as we have seen), was sinless and blameless and completely able to approach God on His own merits. In this way, we can say that Jesus Christ is a "strong." Or, we could say that He is "perfect." Verse 26 calls Him, "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens."

There is also a contrast in how they were appointed. The priests of the Old Testament were appointed by law. That is, they appealed to historical proclamation, historical precedent. They were appointed according to need. The Old Covenant needed priests to fulfill their function. Somebody had to do it.

But, Jesus, was appointed high priest by oath by the oath of God! Hebrews 7:21 quotes from Psalm 110:4 (which came 1,000 years after the law): "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever.'" And with such an oath comes honor.

There is a big difference between the policeman, and the head of the FBI. One comes to work in the force because of the need to fulfill a role in executing the law. The other comes to work as head over the agency, because of the selection of the president. Such is the difference between Jesus Christ and the priests of the Old Covenant. They were appointed to be priests from the law. Jesus was appointed by the oath of God!

In every way, the appointment of Jesus Christ as a high priest is better than any other priest. He is a perfect priest (verse 28).

This phrase at the end of verse 28 may throw you for a bit. It says that Jesus Christ was "made perfect forever." Don't think that this means that He was "imperfect" at one time, but now has come into perfection. Rather, think like Hebrews 2:10, which used the same terminology. "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings." Jesus Christ was made perfect through the testing of life. He was made perfect through His sufferings. He was made perfect through the experience of life.

As we wrap things up here this morning, I want for you to reflect upon our high priest. Jesus is a pure priest (verses 26), a final priest (verse 27), and a perfect priest (verse 28). There is no other way to God, but through Him. May we come to God through Him.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 2, 2010 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Simon Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Hebrews, p. 206

[2] William J. Cogan, A Catechism for Adults, pp. 73, 74.

[3] http://books.google.com/books?id=EYEAQAQAajpg&pg=PA348&pg=PA348&q=%22cast%22&as=+in+heap%22&Dickson&source=bl&ots=3LV19u0X9&sig=SjBa8t1M37u6SdmwFBfzaf64I&h=en&ei=Hvfc5SizB464NevGh4I&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CBIOAQEwBA&onepage&q=%22cast%20%20hem%20in%20a%20heap%22%20Dickson&f=false