

“Our Uttermost Salvation”
Hebrews 8:1-13
August 8, 2021

INTRODUCTION:

Hebrews 8 is an expansion of 7:25, where we read that Jesus “is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him.” These middle three chapters of Hebrews (7-9) are all about Jesus as our great high priest. We noted last week that we will never appreciate the work of Jesus as our priest until we accept the fact that sin is our biggest problem. Just as doctors deal with sickness and farmers deal with growing crops, priests deal with sin.

There is great hope and motivation in accepting the Bible’s view of sin as our main problem. As was mentioned last week, if you have some ailment for which you seek medical help, the best outcome is a clear diagnosis of a specific problem for which there is an effective treatment. What you don’t want is years of testing that never yield a diagnosis. Yet that is exactly where many are spiritually, going from one possible diagnosis with its appropriate treatment to another, but finding none of them effective in addressing the sense of emptiness, despair and hopelessness many live with. There is great hope in accepting the Bible’s diagnosis of our problem—sin. There is hope in that diagnosis for the simple reason that there is an answer to this problem in the priestly work of Jesus.

So these chapters devoted to the priestly work of Jesus are filled with good news. It is significant that the author seeks to deal with the problems his readers were having by motivating them with the good news of the gospel. Remember that they were drifting away from the faith (2:1), being tempted to harden their hearts (3:12) to the point that some were in danger of walking away from Christ (3:12; 6:4-8). He doesn’t respond by shaming them or scolding them, but by reminding them of the treasure they have in Christ. God doesn’t whip us with our obligations; he warms us with his mercy and grace. Today’s passage gives us more good news about Jesus’ priestly work by speaking of the place of that work and the promises secured by his work.

I. The Place of Jesus’ Priestly Work – v. 1-5

The main point of these verses is that Jesus has sat down in the heavenly tabernacle, referred to in verse 2 as **“the true tent that the Lord set up.”** He is offering a contrast between the Old Testament tabernacle and the ultimate heavenly tabernacle. He calls the heavenly tabernacle “the true tent.” The idea isn’t that the Old Testament tabernacle was false, but that it was **“a copy and shadow of the heavenly things”** (v. 5). That verse goes on to say that Moses was instructed by God concerning all the details of this earthly tabernacle. He was

told, **“See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain”** (v. 5).

When an architect is designing a building, she will produce detailed plans of every part of that building. There will be pages and pages of elaborate drawings. At times, the architect will produce a miniature model of the building. That is something like the earthly tabernacle, and that is why the heavenly tabernacle is called the “true tent.”

It is important to remember what the tabernacle was. It was the place where God lived with his people. When the tabernacle was first built, Israel was in the wilderness living in tents. God also had his tent. The Old Testament even prescribes the location of the tents of the twelve tribes. There were three tribes on each of four sides, with God’s tent being in the middle of them all. God was with his people. Many have noted how the Garden of Eden was a type of temple too. It was the original place where God lived with his people. After the sin of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from that garden temple, God didn’t give up on his great plan to live with his people. He directed the construction of the tabernacle in the Old Testament, and that’s where God lived. He no longer lives in that tabernacle, but in the true tent in heaven. The fact that Jesus is there is an Old Testament way of saying that we will be with him there as well, because a tabernacle is where God lives with his people. Matthew Henry said it like this. Jesus “will by his almighty power bring [all who belong to him] in their own order to the right hand of God in heaven, as members of his mystical body, that where he is they may be also.”

It is significant that verse 1 tells us that Jesus’ posture is one of being seated in this true tabernacle in heaven. There is a twofold significance in this. First, it signifies the completed work of Jesus. He sat down because his priestly work was done—sin was paid for. Second, it means that Jesus has taken his place as our rightful king. The Old Testament tabernacle didn’t have any seats except for one—the mercy seat in the holy of holies. But no Old Testament priest was ever allowed to sit there. It was the very throne of God. When Jesus sits there, he is taking his rightful place as the king of his people. As king, he rules. That means that he is fully able to bring us to himself. The COVID-19 pandemic has not threatened God’s plans at all. Nor will anything in all creation be able to do so, because Jesus rules. He is seated on the throne.

II. The Promises of Jesus’ Priestly Work – v. 6-13

We want to spend most of our time this morning exploring the second half of this chapter in which the point is made that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant. Priests are mediators between God and man, bringing man and God together. It is said here that he does so through a new covenant. Let me remind you what a covenant is. It is a binding agreement between two parties that

describes the terms of their relationship. The central description of all biblical covenants is the statement made in verse 10: **“I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”** In this way, a relationship is established between God and his people. There are terms of this relationship by which both parties are obligated. God promises to do numerous things for his people, and he obligates himself by these promises. His people are also obligated to obey the laws and regulations God gives to them. It is the failure of God’s people to keep their end of this covenant that gives rise to the second half of this chapter and what it says about a new covenant.

It is reported in verse 7 that **“if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.”** He then makes it clear that the fault was not with the old covenant itself, but with God’s people and their inability to keep the terms of the covenant. In the old covenant, God was willing to meet his people halfway, but they were unwilling to go that far. So God makes a new covenant that is more accommodating to our faults, one where he goes all the way himself. It is as if God in the old covenant has prepared a wonderful feast for his people. They can have him as their God and can be his people. But they refuse to come. There is nothing wrong with the feast, and there is nothing wrong with the old covenant. The fault lies with us. As long as our relationship with God depends on our performance, the benefits of the covenant will never be realized by us.

It is significant that this promise of the new covenant is found in the book of Jeremiah. This prophet ministered during the darkest days of Israel, prophesying that the Babylonians would conquer the nation and take them into exile. The first 29 chapters of the book contain words of judgment upon Israel for their sin. Then right in the middle of the book are the words quoted in our passage. As bad as Israel’s sin has been, God’s grace is greater still. Contrary to all expectation, their sin has stirred in him a heart of compassion, leading to this new covenant. It would seem that the very sins of his people has led him to pity more than to anger. In this new covenant, he takes action not against his people, but against their sin. And in speaking of Jesus as our priest, it becomes clear from this middle section of Hebrews that his action of pity moves against Jesus instead of us. He becomes the sacrificial offering that satisfies divine justice.

Beginning in verse 10, God promises to do four things for his people in this new covenant. First, **“I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts”** (v. 10). There is nothing wrong with the law of God in the Old Testament. It expresses the kind of life we were designed to live. The fault lies with our hearts. There is a bug in our basic operating system by which we instinctively think that a life of obedience to God will diminish our happiness. So this promise provides to us what we need—a change of heart. God knows that if we are truly to flourish, the law of God must move from external to internal. It must be as much a part of us as our desire to drink cool water when thirsty and eat satisfying food when hungry. God promises here to put his law into our minds

and write it on our hearts. The mind addresses the understanding. In order to internalize God's word, we must start with the understanding. But we must not stop there. God's Spirit writes his law on our hearts. The heart speaks of the place of our affections, our emotions, desires and motivations. Imagine the significance of this. Won't it be wonderful when there is complete alignment between the things you most want to do on the one hand and the things that lead to the glory of God and human flourishing on the other hand? When this promise is fully realized, you will never again even have a desire to do that which you know you shouldn't do.

Like many of God's promises, this one is marked by that already-not yet tension. That is, we should expect this promise to be already present in a limited way, but not yet fully present until the coming age. Our growth as Christians is a growth in having God's law written on our hearts, even though it won't be fully written there during this age. But we should expect to see a growing desire for obedience even now.

The second promise is that central promise of all covenants. **"I will be their God, and they shall be my people."** This is essentially the plan of God from the beginning of the Bible to the end. It was his desire for the garden of Eden. It was the reason he called Abraham and formed a nation from his offspring. In his love, God wanted to include his glorious image bearers in deep fellowship with him. When Abraham's descendants failed, God didn't give up but inaugurated this new covenant through Jesus. And now we in the Church are the people of God (Acts 18:10; Rom. 9:25). It is also a description of our eternal state when God's original purpose with Eden is finally realized. **"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God'"** (Rev. 21:3).

The third promise is an instinctive knowledge of God. **"And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest"** (v. 11). In his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy One*, A. W. Tozer begins like this. "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." It is clear that this knowledge of God involves more than knowing facts about God. If I say, "I know my wife," it means far more than knowing facts about her. We could publish a list of facts about Wendy, including such things as her shoe size, her birthday, her hobbies, her personality type, and details about her personal history. If a person memorized all those facts, they would still not know my wife. That's because to really know her requires being in relationship with her. It means to have a sense of her heart and her values. It means to be personally affected by those things.

To know God is the same. It means to be in relationship with him to the point that we know his heart and are affected ourselves by his heart. And this is

something the new covenant promises will be instinctive for us. We won't need to take a class in theology in order to know God. We will know him relationally. We will know his beating heart. That brings us to the final promise of the new covenant.

“I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more” (v. 12). God is merciful. He has a heart of mercy. He is the “Father of mercies” (2 Cor. 1:3) and he is “rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4). The heart of God beats with mercy for us. In his book *Gentle and Lowly*, Dane Ortlund says it like this: “When you come to Christ for mercy and love and help in your anguish and perplexity and sinfulness, you are going with the flow of his own deepest wishes, not against them.” He also adds a quote from Benjamin Grosvenor in which he speaks with the voice of Jesus.

If you meet that poor wretch that thrust the spear into my side, tell him there is another way, a better way, of coming at my heart, if he will repent, and look upon whom he has pierced and will mourn. I will cherish him in that very bosom he has wounded; he shall find the blood he shed an ample atonement for the sin of shedding it. And tell him from me, he will put me to more pain and displeasure by refusing this offer of my blood, than when he drew it forth.

CONCLUSION:

The author of Hebrews seeks to move his struggling readers, who are in the process of drifting away from Christ, not through beating them up with their obligations but through warming their hearts with the love of Christ. We see in the new covenant Jeremiah prophesied about God's complete commitment to his people. Do you know this God?

I had the opportunity a couple of times this week to visit Russell and Diana Lloyd in the hospital. Among other things, I wanted to find out more about the story I heard of Russell walking from his ICU room in order to sing Happy Birthday to Diana on Thursday. I made that walk a couple of times this week, and it's not a short one for someone with Russell's injuries. But it was his love for his wife that drove him to make that walk. Jesus, our great high priest, has also made a walk of love, to Calvary, the mount of his crucifixion. He could have summoned legions of angels at any moment, and they would have ended that walk and rescued him. Love kept him from doing so. And on this side of the cross, resurrection and ascension, he sings over us and says, “I would put up with any pain to have you with me. And I will have you with me if you will but accept my love.”