

Christ Superior Priesthood – Part 3

Hebrews 9:1-14

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Not only do we need to keep setting the context every week in the book of Hebrews, but the fact that we've been gone for a couple of weeks, so I want to give you a little background and setting of the context for the book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews is written to Jews who had accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, so they were Jewish Christians. By the way, the first Christians were all Jewish. In the early stages of the church they were actually having a difficult time believing that God could save Gentiles. These were common Jewish believers who had accepted Jesus as Messiah. They began to be discouraged as they came under persecution, and began to have doubts and second thoughts about following Christ. They were in danger—here's the key to the book of Hebrews—of turning back to Judaism. They were going to go back to Judaism, so the whole book of Hebrews is written to Hebrews to tell them not to be Hebrews. He does that by setting forth the superiority of the priesthood of Christ, the Person of Christ, and also the principle of faith.

Back in Hebrews 1-6, we saw the superiority of Christ's Person, that He's better than the prophets and the angels, Hebrews 1; He's better than Moses, Hebrews 3; He's better than Aaron, Hebrews 4; and then when you come to Hebrews 9:7-10, the section we have tonight, you find that He is a better Priest or a superior priesthood. Basically, the whole section is the heart of the book of Hebrews—Christ Superior Priesthood. The Jewish believers were going back to Judaism because they thought that they were without a priest—that they had no approach to God, no access to God—so they needed to understand that in Christ they had a High Priest, and He was superior to the Levitical priests of the old covenant.

We saw in Hebrews 7 that Christ is better than Melchizedek; we saw in Hebrews 8 that Christ is better than the old covenant, He has a new covenant; and tonight in Hebrews 9, He's better in that He has a sanctuary that is heavenly and not earthly. We saw the two covenants, the old and the new, contrasted in Hebrews 8, now we actually look at the sanctuaries—the inner sanctuary on earth versus the sanctuary that is in heaven. The two covenants move into the two sanctuaries. At the end of this section tonight, when we come to verse 14, beginning in verse 15 to the end of Hebrews 10, he deals with the fact that we have better blood or a better sacrifice on that altar in the new sanctuary.

I want to give you three main points tonight and outline this section, verses 1-14. I'll give them to you one at a time, if you're writing them down. In verses 1-5, we have the sanctuary examined. He looks at the old covenant, how it had its own sanctuary on earth and talks about the approach that they had to God, how it is inferior and inadequate compared to the new covenant and the new sanctuary which Christ has in heaven and not the one that is upon the earth.

Remember, as I said, in Hebrews 8 he was contrasting the two covenants. If you get a chance, in Hebrews 8:10-13 he actually explains the new covenant. Now, he's moving into the old

covenant once again and talking about that it had ordinances of divine service. He says, verse 1, "Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service," this is a reference to the Levitical sacrificial system set up by God, not to be permanent or to put away sins, but to foreshadow and to point to the Christ who would come and who would be the perfect sacrifice for man's sin. "...and a worldly sanctuary," the King James Bible has. The phrase "worldly" doesn't mean worldly in the sense of evil or wicked, but it just means earthly. It's just using that term to describe the earthly tabernacle, and we're going to talk about that in quite some detail tonight. This earthly tabernacle or tent that God pitched for them to approach God by the priest into the holy of holies was something that God had established, but it was on earth, verse 1, it was "worldly" or pertained to this earth.

The word "sanctuary" means a place that is set apart for God's service. We call this meeting room we're in tonight the sanctuary, and we use that word specifically because it means set apart and holy for God. This place that we're meeting in is set apart for what we're doing here tonight—to worship God, to study His Word, to fellowship, to draw near to God. It's a sanctuary. The words "saint," "sanctify," "sanctuary," and "holy" all come from the same root word. It means to be set apart as holy. This is just a building—it's just carpet and pews and so forth—but it is set apart for a purpose, that is, the worship of God and the study of God's Word. There's a worldly, earthly sanctuary.

Verse 2, "For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. 3 And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all," we're going to come back to all these phrases here. The "Holiest of all" is a reference to what is most commonly called the holy of holies in the inner sanctuary. Verse 4, "Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; 5 And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly," in other words, we can't go into detail; we can't talk about it in depth. He mentions them without going into detail or explaining them, but it's important for us to understand what he's talking about in this tabernacle.

Go back with me again to verse 1. "Then verily the first covenant," that is, the old covenant, the old Levitical system, the old approach to God by the priest in the holy place, "had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary." This is talking about the old covenant. He's explaining that it existed as God established it, but then he's going to go on to say that it pointed to something that would actually be the fulfillment of all that it was speaking of later on in the chapter. He says, verse 2, "For there was a tabernacle made," this tabernacle is a reference to the sanctuary. It's the same thing, but it's called the tabernacle because it was a tent. Now, we can't do an in-depth study on the tabernacle, but write down Exodus 25-31. It's in those chapters that you're going to read about God giving to Moses and to the Levites the very detailed instruction on this tent that they would pitch in the wilderness in which would be in the middle of the camp and all the tribes of Israel would actually be set up around it. God would actually meet them in this tent. God would dwell there in this tent. Once a year, in the holy of holies, the high priest would come in with blood, sprinkle it on the mercy seat, and that's how

they would actually come into fellowship with God, but it could not really wash away their sins or deal with the deep need of a guilty conscience.

I want to try to do something. I should've had one of our graphic artists set this up, but I don't usually use illustrations. (Let's put this on the screen.) If you've never seen any photo or picture...this is not actually a real photo, obviously, it's an artist's rendition of the tabernacle. Just quickly, it had a large outer courtyard made out of wood posts with the outer curtain all the way around the outside. The outer perimeter was actually a couple layers of different badger skins and the inside had linen. If you do an in-depth study of this tabernacle...by the way, it was given to the children of Israel while they were in the wilderness wandering in the Sinai desert for forty years waiting to go into the Promised Land. This is the tent that God instructed them to build by which they could approach Him, so Moses was given this instruction. It had a large outer courtyard with approximate measurements of 75 ft in length and 25 ft wide. It only has one door (bottom right-hand corner), you can see the entrance to go in. Again, every aspect of this is a picture of Jesus Christ. He is "...the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Even the outside badger skin and the inside linen spoke of His humanity and His deity, but the approach would be through that one door.

All of what I'm describing here we're going to read in this text. Go back to it in the Bible. The first thing you would encounter as the priest came in was a large brass altar for sacrifices called the brazen altar. There he would offer the sacrifice of the animals—the bullocks, the rams—for the sins of the people. After that, between that and the sanctuary, is a laver of brass, a washing place, where they would wash and cleanse. The other edifice (it's cut away so you can see inside) is what we're reading about in Hebrews. That's what's called the sanctuary or the tabernacle. It had two sections. The first it would enter in, and on the left side there would be the menorah, the seven-branched candlestick; on the right side is a table made out of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It had twelve loaves of bread on it representing the tribes of Israel. In front of the curtain (which is cut off so you can see into the holy place), the little curtain on the right side, there was a censer or an altar of incense where they would put fire and throw incense on the altar. The incense would rise up to God. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur, the high priest would enter through that second veil. We're going to see it in the book of Hebrews.

The first veil would enter into the holy place; the second veil would enter into the holy of holies. There was only one piece of furniture there, the Ark of the Covenant. He describes that "Ark of the Covenant" in our text. It was a box about 4 ft long, 2 ft wide, and 2 ft high. It was made out of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It had what's called the mercy seat—a gold plate on top of it that had two cherubim angels carved out of gold on either end, facing each other and touching their wings. It was over this Ark of the Covenant, and we're going to read about what was inside of it, that the presence of God dwelt; and they would meet with God there as they sprinkled the blood of atonement.

Let's go back to our passage in verse 2. "For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick," so this tabernacle in verse 2 is a reference to that sanctuary in the middle

of that courtyard which had two compartments. The first compartment is in verse 2. It's called the tabernacle, "...made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary," or more often known as the holy place. The priest would go in that first area every day. When they would go in, there would be the candlestick on the left side of the room. It had a central shaft with three branches coming out on each side having seven lights. They had little almond-shaped cups on top of that which would be filled with olive oil. They had a wick where they would light them. Every morning and evening they would go in making sure the light was burning.

On the right side of the table, they would go once a week on the Sabbath day and change out the bread. There were twelve loaves of bread there. They would take the bread and replace them with fresh loaves. (They would take the bread home and make toast with peanut butter and jelly on it, I guess, which is what I've been doing a lot lately.) This is that first area known as the sanctuary.

Let's just develop this as we go. These articles or items inside the sanctuary all prefigure or picture Jesus Christ—the light of the world, the candlestick. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness." The only thing to illuminate the sanctuary was the candlestick, other than the presence of God in the holy of holies. The candlestick, known today as a candelabra or what the Jews call a menorah, is actually a picture of Jesus Christ the light of the world. We follow Jesus, the light of the world, and do not walk in darkness.

As I said, the table and the showbread is on the right-hand side. Again, the bread is a reminder of Jesus Christ, even though there were twelve loaves representing Israel, where Jesus said, "I am the bread of God which comes down from heaven. If a man eats of Me, he will never hunger, and he will never thirst." There's a story in the gospels where Jesus was walking with His disciples through a wheat field. They were grabbing heads of wheat, rubbing them in their hands, (blowing sound) blowing the chaff away, and popping the wheat kernels into their mouths. They were doing it on the Sabbath day, and the Jewish authorities got upset with them and said they were doing what was not lawful on the Sabbath day. That's when Jesus actually reminded them of a story in the Old Testament where David and his men were hungry and went to the tabernacle where Abiathar the priest gave the showbread for him to eat, even though it wasn't lawful for him to eat because he wasn't a priest, showing that actually the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Jesus used that bread as an example of meeting someone's needs. What a blessing in picture that is of Jesus Christ as well.

In verse 3, "And after the second veil," remember in the image that I showed you, you would go into the outer courtyard, you would come to the brass altar where they placed the sacrifices. That represented the cross. You would come to the laver where you'd wash and be cleansed, representing the washing of regeneration, the renewing of the Holy Spirit. You would enter into the first sanctuary, mentioned in verse 2, then there would be the veil that you would enter to go into the inner holy of holies. Only the high priest could go into that inner holy of holies where the Ark of the Covenant was. He could only go into that holy place once a year, and he would

have to go in with sacrifices for himself first and then take sacrifices for the sins of the people. Only the high priest could go into that area. It was the holy of holies, “the second veil.”

The reason it's called “the second veil,” is because the first veil is that one that enters into the holy place, and in verse 3, “...the Holiest of all,” is often called the holy of holies. Now, what we have there, verse 4, and this is where it throws you a little bit of a curve, “Which had the golden censer.” Actually, the golden censer technically pertains to the first sanctuary, not the second holy of holies. The reason it's placed here is that the incense would be carried in by the priest into the holy of holies, so it pertained to that but didn't sit there. It was set on the outside of that veil. Remember when Jesus died on the cross and the Bible says the veil of the temple was ripped in two? Well, they weren't in a tent anymore because Solomon had built the temple, the temple had been destroyed and they built another temple, and Herod built the temple. That veil is the one that separated the holy place from the holy of holies. It's the same veil that the priest would go through, but this reference to the golden censer is interesting because it actually pertains to verse 2, the first compartment known as the holy place or the sanctuary. It's the place where they had the golden censer where they would actually pour the hot coals, put incense on it, and the incense would arise to God as forms of prayer, symbolic of prayer. It's also Christ's High Priestly work of interceding for us through prayer.

Here we have it in verse 4, “...and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold,” it was made out of acacia wood overlaid with gold, “wherein was the golden pot that had manna,” was inside of the box, “and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; 5 And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.” The Ark of the Covenant, this box, and some of you saw Raiders of the Lost Ark years ago which is probably how you know more about it than anything else, which isn't quite scriptural. This box actually had these elements inside of it. First of all it said there was, “...the golden pot that had manna,” so they had a golden jar, and they put manna in it. This is pretty cool. God instructed them to take the manna.

You all know the story about the manna, right? When they were in the wilderness and in need of food, God brought manna on the ground that looked like beautiful little coriander seeds. They got up every morning and collected what they needed for the day. If they took more than what they needed for the day it would rot and get stench. They would get up every morning and would just go outside where all these heavenly wafers, these cookies, these manna things were hanging out. By the way, the word “manna” means what is it. They would see the manna and think, What is it? I don't know but it looks good. The manna reminded them—here's the point—of God's providential care and provision. God provides our needs. God meets our physical needs. The manna was from heaven. Again, it represents Jesus Christ, but it also speaks of God's provision for our physical needs. Remember when Jesus taught us to pray said, “Pray... Our Father which art in heaven,” and then He came to, “Give us this day our daily bread,” so He wants to keep us in daily dependence upon Him, that's why they gathered the manna daily.

The second thing was, “...Aaron's rod that budded.” We read about that in Numbers 17. There was a rebellion against Aaron being the leader of the priesthood. Korah and his gang were

protesting that he shouldn't be the only one that could actually be a priest. God had Korah and the others take their rods (I think there were about twelve rods, one from each tribe) and they laid them in the tabernacle. The next morning, God caused Aaron's rod to bud. It actually budded a bud. It was a dead stick, but it had a bud on it. It was God saying that Aaron and the Levitical priests were the ones He had chosen to be in that office. I think that represents Jesus Christ as well in His resurrection. This dead rod brought forth life and budded, a picture reminder of Jesus' resurrection and also the fact that He is our High Priest, which is a marvelous truth.

Then, verse 4, there were, "...the tables of the covenant," a reference to the Ten Commandments. The first tables of stone, the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God, were destroyed because when Moses came down the mountain and saw them worshiping an idol in idolatrous worship, he broke the stones in anger and God had to make another set and write the Ten Commandments on them. Inside this Ark of the Covenant, this box, were this pot with manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of stone. You can see why it's something that would be so desirous to discover. Can you imagine if you could discover the Ark of the Covenant with these treasures in them? Again, it's a reminder of God's commandments. So, we have God's provision, we have God's power, and we have God's commandments or precepts, verse 4.

Verse 5, "And over it," the top of the Ark of the Covenant, "the cherubims," these are angels carved out of gold. If you get a Bible dictionary or go online and look these up, you'll get some more graphic pictures of these beautiful angels that were touching their wings over the top of the box, which were actually, "shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly." Take notice of that phrase, "the mercyseat." As I said, you can read about this in Exodus 25-31. The mercy seat is actually where God would meet and commune with them. They would sprinkle the blood of atonement there, that's where the presence of the Lord is. That mercy seat is actually also used in the New Testament for the term "propitiation." It's actually used that way in the book of Romans. This is where God would propitiate, or He would atone for the sins of the people, He would be satisfied, propitiation. It's a picture of the cross. Read Romans 3:24-25 where this mercy seat is actually known as God's propitiating work.

Now, we move from the sanctuary examined, verses 1-5, to verses 6-10 the sanctuary explained—the service of the sanctuary explained. Verse 6, "Now when these things were thus ordained," all that he just finished describing, "the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God." That's the first holy of holies where the candlestick, the showbread, and the censer were. They would go there every day, twice a day. They would go in the morning and in the afternoon. It was a priestly service that they would do every day.

Verse 7, "But into the second," that is, the holy of holies, "went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people." He would actually offer blood on the mercy seat twice—first for himself, then for the people for their sins. He was giving the blood in the holy of holies. As I said, he would do that once a year on the Day of Atonement, which is called Yom Kippur. Notice it says, "...for the errors of the people."

That word “errors” means no knowledge. They sinned in ignorance. These are sins of ignorance that they could be forgiven for.

In verse 8 we have the Spirit’s witness to what we read about. The Holy Spirit is signifying something, “...that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: 9 Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; 10 Which stood only in meats,”—which is dietary laws—“and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation,” until the time when Christ would come and fulfill all of these things that were pictured in the tabernacle.

In verses 6-7, he describes the priest’s work; then, verses 8-10, he describes the Spirit’s witness. Notice we have a reference to the Holy Spirit in verse 8. We talked about that Sunday morning. He’s called the “Ghost” here which is really an unfortunate translation. He’s not the Holy Ghost, He’s the Holy Spirit, the concept of Spirit being Ghost, and He’s signifying something. Here’s the point. As long as the tabernacle was intact and being used in the old covenant, it symbolized that the new covenant had not been established. It was signifying, verse 8, “...that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing.”

Let me point out some of the weaknesses of the old covenant and the earthly tabernacle. First, verse 8, there was no real access to God. Only the priest, and only the high priest, could go once a year. In the new covenant, any believer—any moment, at any time, in any day—can come boldly to the presence of God, and we have access to God. We don’t need to have an earthly priest, we have a heavenly Priest, Christ. We have Him in heaven, and you can come any time, day or night, into the presence of God. You don’t have to wait once a year for a priest to represent you and take the atoning sacrifice into the holy place.

Secondly, the old covenant with its tabernacle, and the blood of the bulls and the goats on the altar, was only a shadow, verse 9, “Which was a figure for the time then present.” The word “figure” literally means parable. Sometimes we think of it as a picture or a type, but it was a parable. It was a picture or a type, “...for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices,”—notice at the end of verse 9—“that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience.” It was only a ceremonial cleansing. It could not really deal with the conscience or the sense of guilt or sin. It didn’t go deep or internal. So, there was no access, it was only a shadow, and it could not bring true inner forgiveness in dealing with the inner conscience—only Jesus Christ can do that.

Thirdly, verse 10, it was only outward. “Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances,” which is ceremonialism and legalism. It’s dealing with diet, days, and legalistic standing before God, “Be careful you don’t eat that. Be careful you don’t drink that. Be careful you wash and do it through the washings, the rituals, and the outward ordinances.” Notice it was, “...imposed on them until the time of the reformation.” That word

“reformation” means setting things right. All of this was only until Jesus Christ would come and set things right. This is all Jewish stuff, and you may think, Well, I’m wondering why I came to church tonight because I’m not a Jew, and I’m not going to go back to Judaism. It’s a reminder to us that are believers that we have a new and living way through Jesus Christ—we do have access, and we do have the substance, it does bring forgiveness and deal with the conscience, it’s not just an outward cleansing that’s ceremonial or legalistic, and it’s not temporary, it is permanent and eternal.

Write down Colossians 2:16-17 where Paul says, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body,”—or the substance—“is of Christ.”

So, we have the tabernacle, we have its service explained, and now we have, in closing, the application. In verses 11-14, we have the Savior exalted. Finally, he comes back and wraps it up and says that Jesus is the One who answers all our needs. “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands,”—notice that—“that is to say, not of this building,” he’s contrasted the earthly tabernacle with all its limitations and disadvantages with the tabernacle in heaven which Christ went to when He ascended and went back into heaven, “But Christ being come an high priest.”

From verses 11-15, there are five superior things we find in Christ, if you’re taking notes. First, we find a superior priesthood in Christ, “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle,” so He is a better, greater High Priest. Secondly, we have a superior tabernacle, so we have a superior priesthood and superior tabernacle. By the way, this “But Christ,” verse 11, is intended to be a contrast. It can’t forgive you, it doesn’t deal with the conscience, you can’t really approach God, and it’s only temporary, “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building,” but His is heavenly.

Then, notice in verse 12, “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood,” which is the theme that will be developed after verse 14 to the end of the chapter, better blood. “...he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” First, He’s the superior Priest; secondly, He’s the superior tabernacle; thirdly, He has the superior blood; and fourthly, Christ’s eternal redemption, it is eternal not temporal. Every year the priest would go back again and have to offer sacrifice, but Christ did it once and for all and obtained eternal sacrifice for us forever.

Notice it’s not, “...by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood,” this is how He redeems us, He shed His blood on the cross, and “...he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us,” the precious blood of Christ, as Peter said, we have eternal redemption—Christ’s eternal redemption.

Here’s the question, verse 13, “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 14 How much more shall the

blood of Christ,”—which is a reference to His sacrificial death on the cross—“who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to,”—do what?—“serve the living God?” He closes by showing the superiority of Christ over the old covenant method of approaching through the tabernacle by the priest.

In closing, verse 14, you have a superior purging, “...purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Simply stated, and I know at this point in Hebrews it’s a little repetitious, but he’s basically saying, “Look, we have a better Priest, we have a better sanctuary, we have better blood, we have eternal redemption through Christ.” He purges not the outward flesh in ceremonialism or legalism, but He purges the conscience, cleansing the heart, and it goes deeper than any other thing; and Christ forgives us of our sins, we have eternal life, and we have access to God. He does this voluntarily, He offered Himself, and again a reference to the Holy Spirit being eternal, verse 14, “...the eternal Spirit offered himself,”—which is voluntarily —“without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” which indicates the purpose of His redemption, which means He buys us out of sin and sets us free so that we might serve Him.

You’ve been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. You’ve been purchased and bought by the blood, why? That you might serve Him. He can wash your sins, make your heart clean, purge your conscience, your guilt, and then gives you freedom, “...to serve the living God.” Put that alongside Ephesians 2:8-10, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is,”—what?—“the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.” And then he says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” So, we are saved by grace through faith, and we’re saved unto good works which we should walk in them that we might serve the living and true God.

Jesus answers man’s two great problems: alienation, He deals with our sin and brings us to God; and a guilty conscience, He purges us from a guilty conscience. Isaac Watts wrote:

Not all the blood of beasts,
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away its stain.
But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name,
And richer blood than they.

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Amen? Let's pray.