

# Jesus Saves to the Uttermost

Hebrew 7:20-28

*Halifax: 12 February 2023*

## **Introduction:**

Today, we are picking up at Hebrews 7:20-28 as we continue to go through this book that wonderfully sets forth the superior excellence of Jesus Christ.

- We have been looking in chapter 7 at what it means for Christ to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek.
- We have seen that Melchizedek was both a king and a priest who appeared to Abraham after Abraham had defeated four kings who had conquered five cities, including the one where his nephew Lot lived. These enemies had carried off their property and people—including Lot—to be their slaves.
  - After the victory, Melchizedek appeared and Abraham gave Him a tithe of all the spoils. Melchizedek blessed Abraham, showing that He was superior to Abraham and to the priestly line of Levi that would come from Abraham.
- Hebrews makes it clear that this Melchizedek was presented in the Bible as a priest like the Son of God—without father and mother—without beginning of life or end of days. He is also presented as the King of righteousness and the King of peace. As a priest-king, He is able to bring the blessing of righteousness and peace.
  - Besides His appearance in Genesis 14 when He blessed Abraham, He is mentioned in Psalm 110, verse 4, where we are told that David’s Son (the Messiah) was given a seat of divine power at God’s right hand—
    - and that the LORD declared to Him with a solemn oath, “You are priest after the order of Melchizedek.”
- Hebrews explains that this speaks of Jesus Christ who is the Son of God and the Son of David.
  - As such, He has a priesthood that is superior to that of the Levitical priesthood that God instituted through Moses in the Old Testament.
    - We have been told that it is superior because it is an eternal priesthood that entirely replaces the Levitical priesthood which was meant to pass away when Jesus, the better priest, came.
    - It had to be replaced because it was never intended to actually save anyone—it could not save because its purpose was to show what needed to be done and what Jesus Christ would do when He came to save His people from their sins.
    - We concluded with verse 19, where it says this priesthood after the order of Melchizedek brings in a better hope by which we draw near to God.

Today, we are going to learn still more about the excellence of Christ as our priest and His superiority to Levi—to give us even more confidence and hope to draw near to Him as our Saviour.

- I will begin reading in Hebrews 7:20 and read on to the end of the chapter.
- That is the portion of Hebrews that we will be looking at today.
- This is the word of God.

Hebrews 7:20-28: And inasmuch as *He* was not *made priest* without an oath <sup>21</sup> (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: “The LORD has sworn and will not relent, ‘You *are* a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’ ”), <sup>22</sup> by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. <sup>23</sup> Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. <sup>24</sup> But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. <sup>25</sup> Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through

Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. <sup>26</sup> For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; <sup>27</sup> who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. <sup>28</sup> For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, *appoints* the Son who has been perfected forever.

May the Lord bless His word to our hearing and understanding.

Thanks be to God for His precious word.

**I. We are presented here with the significance of God swearing with an oath to make Christ a priest.**

A. You see that a comparison is made with the way the Levites were made priests.

1. The difference that is highlighted was that they were made priests without an oath, but that Jesus was made a priest with an oath.

- Verse 21 says: **(for they [the Levites] have become priests without an oath, but He [Jesus Christ] with an oath by Him who said to Him: “The LORD has sworn and will not relent, ‘You *are* a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’ ”).**

2. This demonstrates that His priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood.

- No one takes an oath about something that is trivial.
  - In fact, it is condemned in scripture to take oaths about trivial things.
- It is all the more the case that God does not swear an oath about trivial things.

B. Several weeks ago, we looked that the significance of the oath that He took to confirm the promise He made to bless Abraham.

- Look back in Hebrews 6, verses 13 and 14.
  - Hebrews 6:13-14: **For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.”**

1. Do you remember why God did that?

- He does not have the reason to swear that we have—that we are unreliable—because He cannot lie. It is completely impossible for God to lie.
- Verse 17 & 18 tell us why He did it.
  - Hebrews 6:17-18: **“Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, <sup>18</sup> that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we**

**might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.”**

2. This was a tremendous kindness on God’s part.
  - He wanted to make the promise of His blessing certain to all who have fled to God for refuge—for the blessing of salvation to us as sinners!
  - He knew that His elect, who have been convicted of their sin, would find it hard to believe that God would bless them—to bless them would mean pardoning them and restoring them and accepting them—so He made it certain by swearing with an oath that He would do it.

C. Well, now the LORD is at it again! He is being kind in the same way.

1. He has a matter so wonderful, so unbelievably kind and remarkable, that He once again wants to make it sure to us by swearing with an oath.
  - In Psalm 110 when He tells us about the oath He made to Christ, He is revealing to us that the Messiah—His Son—is to be our priest!
  - He is telling us that Christ, the Son of David, should be made a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.
    - That is the oath that is spoken of in today’s passage—in Hebrews 7:20-21.
    - It is the oath from Psalm 110:4 to David’s Son, **“You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”**
  - Already in Psalm 110, it has been shown it would be given to David’s Son to exercise Divine authority at Yahweh’s right hand—a man born of David’s line would be given divine authority to rule...
    - And then God swears that He will be priest, not just for a time, but forever, after the order of Melchizedek—the priestly order for one who is the eternal Son of God without father or mother—yet was also born of David’s line.
  - As God did when He swore to Abraham, He not only swears for Abraham’s sake, but He tells us about it to make the promise sure to us.
    - He tells us there in Psalm 110:4 and then again in Hebrews that He confirmed Christ’s priesthood with an oath. He wants us to be sure of it.
  - There is something very sublime here.
    - We are told what was spoken between the Father and the Son in the councils of eternity—of God’s promise and oath to His Son.
    - This is not what the LORD said to our Lord after He was born of Mary—this is what He said from eternity... you are a priest forever.
      - It is the reason He came to be born and dwell among us.
2. Hebrews 7:22 tells us that Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.
  - He is going to get into how the covenant is better later on, but for now he is simply stating the fact that the oath shows that it is better.
  - For now, let me explain what a surety is.

- A surety is someone who steps in to cover for you in a legal situation—we might think of someone who co-signs a loan, though it is actually much more than that.
  - A surety can even be someone who agrees to take your place when it comes to serving a sentence of imprisonment or even death for a crime.
- What God does here is remarkable.
  - He makes Christ a priest who commits to do whatever is required of us for the pardon of our sins.
  - He becomes a priest who is appointed to be our surety in the covenant that God made with us, knowing that we were sinners, when He promised that He would bless us! He comes to take responsibility for our sin!
    - This is inconceivable!
    - How could it be that God would promise a surety to represent those who are so guilty that they are justly sentenced to perish in hell forever?
      - He has confirmed it with an oath!
      - His Son is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek!

## II. Hebrews 7:23-25 contrasts the temporal nature of the Levitical priesthood with the permanent eternal nature of Christ's priesthood.

- A. It is explained that while the Levites had one priest after another, once Christ was made a priest, it was permanent.
1. First, look at what it says about the Levites.
    - It is pointed out to us that God appointed men who died and had to be replaced so that there were many who served over the years.
      - vs. 23: **Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing.**
    - But this was appropriate because of the nature of their ministry.
      - They offered sacrifices that ritually purified the people—they were mere pictures of purification that allowed them to come before God ritually.
      - They did not actually purify anyone.
    - So you were purified symbolically at the time of worship and then again the next time you worshipped.
      - If the purification had been actual, it would only have been done once.
      - Once it was done, it would be done forever.
      - You would not need do it over and over, the priest would only be needed to apply the sacrifice by interceding for the people.
    - But you see, that was not the purpose of the priests in the Old Covenant.
      - The purpose of the Old Covenant was to ritually purify the worshippers so they could engage in temporal worship at the temple.
      - Yes, the Old Covenant could ritually purify the worshippers with priests offering up the blood of bulls and goats as a surety... mere symbols of what God requires to atone for sin.

- Then, the next time the worshipper came to worship, there would be another sacrifice, and if the priest died, no matter—another could do it in his place just as well.
2. The ministry of Christ is contrasted with this because of its permanence.
- Yes, the old covenant could purify the flesh, but the better covenant provides eternal redemption through the priest that God appoints after the order of Melchizedek to be our surety—to take our place so that we might escape condemnation.
    - God the Father has confirmed it with an oath that His Son is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek for such people!
    - As verse 24 says, **But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.**
- B. The outcome of His unchangeable ministry is “salvation to the uttermost.”
1. The word *uttermost* refers to the duration of His saving work.
- a. The emphasis is on the fact that He continues forever.
    - There is no need to worry about Him retiring or losing His ability to save us from our sins.
    - He is not subject to death or replacement.
  - b. But the word *uttermost* also conveys another important idea.
    - It also means that He saves His people completely.
      - There is nothing partial about His saving work.
      - He does not bring you part way and then you have to do the rest.
        - There are a lot of people who struggle with such notions.
        - This passage assures you that such a struggle is not warranted.
2. But be well advised, His salvation is not of all people.
- Verse 25 tells who the people are that He saves—it is “those who come to God through Him.”
    - There are two things: first that you must come to God; second that you must come through Him.
  - a. He is not the Saviour of you if you have no interest in coming to God.
    - If for you, salvation is nothing more than avoiding punishment for your sin—something that devils would love to avoid—He is not your Saviour.
      - His purpose in saving people is to restore them to a right relationship with God.
      - He is ready to help you if you desire to be reconciled to God—to come to Him and live in His house, to serve Him, to do His will, to belong to Him, walk in joyful communion with Him forever.
  - b. He is also only the Saviour of those who come to God *through Him*.
    - He does not save you if you want to come to God on your own terms.

- He has said plainly that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that nobody can come to the Father but through Him.
  - If you try to come to God apart from this one that God appointed to be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, you bring dishonour to God.
    - The only way He can be glorified in your salvation is when you come to God through Him.
    - It is only then that the demands of redemption are met—the sacrifice of the Son of God and His intercession.
      - If He were to save people who do not come through Him, it would present God as a God who is easy with sin.
      - No, you must come to God through Him or you will not be accepted.
        - You must rely on His sacrifice and His intercession.
- C. We are told why it is necessary for Him to continue in His priesthood forever if sinners are to be saved...
- He continues that He might make intercession for us.
    - Verse 25 says that He is able to save us to uttermost if we come to God by Him **“since He ever lives to make intercession for us.”**
1. As our priest, the LORD Jesus is very busy.
    - Certainly, He is enjoying life in glory with the Father in His human nature.
    - But as our priest, He is also living to make intercession for us.
  2. It is not as though He offered Himself for our sins and then His ministry was over.
    - a. Indeed, His sacrifice was complete—
      - His suffering for our sins and bearing our shame on the cross is completely finished. He has shed His blood and need never shed it again.
    - b. Furthermore, His offering of His sacrifice is complete.
      - He offered Himself and cried out with vehement cries and tears and was heard for His godly praying.
      - His sacrifice was accepted for sinners forever and need never be repeated.
        - The Roman church and the Eastern Orthodox church are greatly mistaken in supposing that we are to have priests today to offer Christ at the table—as if the table was an altar instead of a communion table...
    - c. His sacrifice and the offering of His sacrifice was complete, but His intercession still goes on.
      - 1) His intercession involves the work that He does to apply His sacrifice to sinners in their time of need.
        - It is an essential, ongoing work.
      - 2) There is not a moment that goes by in which we could go on without His intercession.
        - He sustains the office of a prophet, priest, and king at God’s right hand.

- As a prophet, He gives us His Spirit and word so that we are convicted of our sin, so that we see our need of Him and continue believing, that we have gifts for ministry, that we go on learning of Him.
  - As our king, He makes us willing and able to come to Him and to go on obeying Him—and to repent when we have sinned.
  - As our priest, He intercedes on account of our sins—pointing to His offering that takes away our sins. He makes us acceptable to God by the application of His sacrifice—His blood cleanses us from all sin.
- 3) It is good for us to think about this priestly intercession. It is necessary to God's honour.
- We are yet sinners here, and that means that His sacrifice must constantly be applied for our forgiveness.
  - It is not that the Father is cranky and out to get us and the Son has to plead for mercy, but rather that both the Father and Son are pleased to accept us only because of the provision they have made for us in Christ. The point is that without it being actively applied to our case, we would be cast away as wretched sinners.
  - Christ's ongoing intercession is God's ongoing application of His sacrifice for our sins until we are at last perfected in glory.
    - We are saved to the uttermost because His intercession continues to the end.
  - No one else can do this work, but no one needs to because He ever lives to do it.
    - We fail, but He will not fail to intercede for all those who have come to God by Him!
3. Since He always lives to make intercession, you can always come to Him for help.
- a. 1 John 2:1 highlights how He is an advocate with the Father when we sin.
    - We can always find forgiveness when we confess our sin.
    - He ever lives to make intercession.
  - b. Likewise, when we are tempted—
    - We saw before in Hebrews 4:14-16 how He is a faithful and compassionate high priest who will help us in our time of need.
    - His throne at God's right hand is there called a throne of grace.
    - He will not just tolerate us, He will be delighted when we come.
  - c. So when we are discouraged in our walk—we may come. When we are doubting—we may come. When we are overwhelmed with life—we may come.
    - He may not always give us help in the way we want, but He will always give it to us in the way we need.
    - By neglecting to come, you cause yourself much grief.
      - It is not just that He can make intercession because He is still alive—it is much stronger than that—He lives so that He can make intercession.

**III. Verse 26-28 shows us that He is the only one who is qualified to be our priest.**

- A. It says that it is fitting for Him to be our priest—one like Him.
1. It was not and is not fitting for anyone else to be our priest.
    - In the New Covenant, God has called Him, but He has not called anyone else.
    - God always makes it quite clear when He calls someone to be a priest—no one takes this honour to himself.
      - And now we have Christ who was made priest by the oath for the New Covenant.
  2. We do not need other priests today.
    - We do not need them to offer sacrifices on earth.
      - Some pretend to be priests who offer Him as the sacrifice.
      - But He is the only one who was fit to do that, and He has already done it.
      - The offering has already been accepted and need not be offered again.
    - Neither do we need priests in heaven to intercede for us.
      - We don't need anyone else because God appointed Him to do that.
      - Why would we need to come to saints and angels who are neither qualified nor appointed when He ever lives to make intercession?
    - Is His ministry deficient?
      - Do men look for saints to intercede because Christ is lacking in compassion? is busy? is derelict of duty? or incapable?
        - What kind of man could be qualified to do this?
- B. Jesus alone has the character that is required to be our priest.
- His unique character qualities are laid out for you in verse 26.
1. First, that He is holy.
    - To be holy is to be beautifully separated to God—to be completely free of sin, not only in conduct, but even in inclination.
    - It is to truly love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength.
  2. Second, it says that He is harmless.
    - John Brown describes this as having never violated the laws of either justice or mercy—in other words, never slighted anyone, never cheated any one of what you owe them or failed to render them the service and help you ought to have rendered. There has been no unjust anger or resentment, no neglect of any kind.
  3. Third, it says that He is undefiled...
    - Matthew Henry sees this as being accessory to other people's sins—such as causing someone to stumble. It also likely refers to the defilement that Jesus spoke of that arises from sinful hearts:
      - Mt 15:19-20: **For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.** <sup>20</sup> **These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.**
      - It was fitting for Him to be our priest because He is free of these.
  4. Fourth, it says that He is separate from sinners.
    - Not that He did not associate with them—He was unjustly accused of that.



- But that He is separate from them in that He has no original sin and no actual sin and perhaps that He is impeccable—incapable of sin.
    - In this way, He is beyond the holy angels who did not fall, but were capable of falling. Now the elect angels are confirmed and kept by God from sinning, but in their probation they might have fallen where Jesus could not.
    - If He were a priest who might yet sin, we could not be so sure of Him, but He is a priest who can never sin.
5. Finally, we are told that has “become higher than the heavens.”
- In Hebrews 4:14, He was described as a high priest who had passed through the heavens.
    - He is at the right hand of the majesty on high.
    - He is reigning as king and serving as intercessor there, and I saw, who else occupies that place to be fitting priest for us?
      - A Levite? A man on earth serving at an altar made with man’s hands? a saint in heaven?
    - No one else is able to serve as a priest for us. No one but Jesus!
      - It is fitting for Him—it is not fitting for anyone else.
- C. He does not need a sacrifice for His own sins.
- He is not a priest like that who is only fit for a temporal service.
    - He is rather the one who provides that priestly ministry of sacrifice to atone for the sins of others and that intercedes to apply it to them in their need.
  - Verse 27 says that He offered up His sacrifice “once for all when He offered up Himself.”
    - He was not a temporary priest, but appointed with an oath as a Son who has been perfected forever— (v. 28).
    - Not perfected as one who had sin that was corrected, but as we have seen—as a priest who completed the work that was given to Him of atoning for our sin.
      - He had not yet completed the work that was required until He came and offered Himself on the cross, but now it is done.
      - Now that He has done it, He is perfected forever as our priest and is therefore able to save us to the uttermost who come to God through Him.
  - What confidence you ought to have in Him if you have come to Him!
    - If you come to God by Him, you can never be lost or condemned.
    - With a priest like Him, it would be highly unjust for God to reject anyone that came to God through Him.
      - Likewise, it would dishonour God to save anyone who did not come by Him—who tries to come in some other way.
    - Our confidence in coming to Him is that it brings great honour and glory to God the Father and God the Son and God the Spirit to save all who do come through Christ.
      - He is the Son who has been perfected forever.
        - There is no one like Him.