

A Divine Upgrade

The Book of Hebrews

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Well, it is Hebrews 8 that we're looking at this evening and the title to go with our thoughts is this "A Divine Upgrade." A divine upgrade. As we see, the writer here pursuing the sustained argument, this really is kind of relentless piece of logic, application, hemming us into the only reasonable conclusion that we can come to and it is ultimately superiority of our Lord's ministry, priesthood, and therefore the need now to have eyes only for him, thought only of him, and to dispense now with the previous priesthood. It's no longer having a purpose, it's obsolete and growing old, and as the writer says, ready to vanish away and the people are beginning to turn towards it which will be a downgrade because they're clinging to something that in the purpose of God is about to vanish away rather than to hold to that which is permanent, enduring, and which is, indeed, at the end, the only high priest that they will ever need. That's what he was saying to them there in Hebrews 7, this high priest. Well, they have a high priest who meets all their specifications: holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens of every title, name that can be named not only in this age but in the age to come. And they don't need any other high priest and as he says as he begins chapter 8, this is the main point, "the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest," a high priest who can meet all your needs, the high priest who can satisfy the needs of the conscience, the needs of the soul. Why then, why then look to anybody else, particularly a system that God once had appointed and required and upheld but which was never meant to last beyond that dispensation and is meant now to be superseded by something greater? His ministry is superior in every regard to that that was established in the Levitical system, Aaron's priesthood.

Much of it, the argument that's used maybe a little lost on us for whom the temptation to begin to revert to animal sacrifices is perhaps not the strongest temptation that we face, that we're not finding that this might be a suitable way out, that if we're going to be persecuted, well, let's put a bronze altar in here and begin to bring in bulls and other sacrificial creatures and that will help us to escape persecution. We are straining rather tortuous bit of reasoning to come to that conclusion. So there isn't a clamor to have reestablished the Feast of Tabernacles or have the high priest and have such regalia reinstated, that was their problem, that for them there and then in that particular context, was what they thought one expedient and helpful way to avoid persecution but that prospect, still perhaps in measure remained while the temple still stood, but verse 13 hints

to us that the time is approaching when all of it will go, and even the building associated with it, and therefore the priesthood that could in some fashion still function according to the old covenant, well, that will soon be going because the temple is soon going not to be replaced, no requirement of any other temple being set up in Jerusalem or anywhere else or more sacrifices being offered.

That would seem to stand on its head the whole logic and the whole argument of Hebrews, and so that is where the writer is taking us, again and again pressing home this point that to do anything other than to be satisfied now fully and the conscience fully assured in the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ would be really blasphemous because it would be saying ill of Christ who died for us. It would be illogical because it would be foolish in light of what the priesthood is meant to do, to substitute Christ's priesthood for an inferior priesthood. It would be very unspiritual because as the writer is going to show, it has no comprehension of what the Old Testament itself was saying, that it was testifying there within the old covenant itself that the old covenant was going to expire in terms of its effectiveness and its duration. It was due to end and the word is there within the Old Testament itself.

We have, therefore, superior blessings and Melchizedek, that mysterious figure that we've been looking at and considering, we read there in Genesis 14, but where Psalm 110 lifts him from that seeming obscurity to make a very strong point that his priesthood points forward beyond Aaron's priesthood. So once again, buried there within the Old Testament showing that the old covenant priesthood is to be replaced by a new covenant priesthood, ordered differently, different family, different arrangements, and one that will last forever. Melchizedek is, as we've been seeing, a type of Christ.

So my first heading: rest assured. Rest assured as the writer is saying. This is the main point of what we are saying, we have such a high priest, a high priest who meets our need, the only high priest we'll ever need and will forever do for eternity because he brings peace and comfort, brings peace and comfort. He brings superior things to the soul and some of this argument is going to continue into chapter 9 and the benefits to the conscience. So here we have in the detail of Scripture, this is the thing, isn't it, in the detail of Scripture a strong argument that becomes an unanswerable argument and it is the Bible itself because the Bible is wisdom, wisdom from heaven. And God foresaw all the trials and troubles the church would face and seeded all along the way arguments and points and verses that would be able to answer every case that might emerge, every false teaching that would occur, every heresy that would rear up its ugly head. Scripture can answer it just as the writer here is answering this peculiar and rather unique situation, different to our age as we've been saying, but one very real and potent then. But it supplies us in doing it with detail that is actually very helpful in establishing us in the present truth and giving to us help and arguments against contemporary heresies and arguments that are against the truth.

And it's already there and although the case that was being argued may have been trying to make a slightly different point, yet the principles of the argument and the detail of much of the argument leaves us with very helpful material good for the soul, and also

good for us to be able to answer those who have come to different conclusions, because in the end the Bible leaves us nowhere to hide. It leaves people nowhere to hide and people can come up with smart sounding books and new terminology and all the rest of it there, and they can persuade some people of the merit of their case, but actually when you search Scripture more carefully, the case is already answered and answered very exactly, very helpfully in different places. Sometimes unexpected places, that something is arising within the body of the text which answers a contemporary situation, for God wrote into Scripture what we will need for life and godliness. He wrote into it what we will need for all ages and to be able to speak truth to power in it, and to be able to answer heresy and false teaching, error, and everything else.

Sometimes, of course, people just want a single verse to answer the case and that's it, so just have a proof text which does completely and exactly answer something. Well, sometimes the case has to be built up more carefully and reasoned through from one principle of Scripture to another because the Bible is training us to think. God is training us to think, not to be spoon-fed in that way. People can often think that's what the ministry is about, to spoon-feed people. Well, no, it's to equip the saints, isn't it, for works of service. That work of equipping, part of it means is to be able to stand on our own two feet, to be able to think for ourselves spiritually. So if we're out on our own, well, if it is, this corona virus, you can't have services quite like this or the best advice is that you'd best stay home, well, that you'd be able to survive, you survive spiritually. Well, there's the internet out there, if you've got the internet, not all of us have but with books besides that but nevertheless that when we read the Bible for ourselves, it's not a blank page, a dead letter, that it's making sense to us. We're recalling, perhaps, some of the things that have been said in this pulpit and others but that we're also able to think for ourselves and apply truth carefully and wisely.

We were looking earlier in Hebrews 5 when it spoke about discernment and growing in maturity. Solid food, chapter 5, verse 14 says, "belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Well, that by reason of use, that's they've been thinking, their reason, their senses have been exercised and they're able now to discern, they're able to work some things out a little more comfortably. To see in something, that's too narrow or that's too broad, that is too much on that side, that is too much on that side, this is not the history of the Christian church, so often a history of erring too much that direction or erring too much on that direction or emphasizing something here or overemphasizing something there, or ending up getting in a muddle with this or ending up in a tangle with that. And we're then to learn from the mistakes of others, just as we're learning from the mistakes of these believers in this particular day when the writer was addressing them. And we can learn also in church history some of the mistakes that our forebears have made, the way they went about their case because so often it's not what we do but how we do it, not that we speak truth but how we speak truth. We wince, don't we, in some of the things we learn in history. Well, people might have had a right argument, they might have had a biblical case but the way they went about it was so unbiblical and so unchristian that they almost got defeated or lost the cause because of the way that they had gone about the thing they were doing.

Well, whatever we do, we should always, as the writer is aiming to do here, bring us to the place where we have a higher esteem of the Lord Jesus Christ, a higher appreciation of him, that we can see even more so how absolutely necessary it was that he should come and that he should die on the cross. And those things become more established to us and everything else seems totally unreasonable beside that, blasphemous, and we react more strongly against it because it detracts from the glory of the only one, the only King of kings, the only Lord of lords. And to try to introduce human works or to introduce religious ritual and to try and say that has a supplementary role to what he has done, as if the Son of God needs any help in the work that he had come to finish and to accomplish. So we prize him more and that should come through in our conversation, the way we pray and the way that we go about our work, preaching, whatever else that it might be.

Well, in resting assured, here is something perhaps that we hadn't seen coming that the writer uses by way of an argument, that the superiority of our Lord Jesus Christ's ministry is proved amongst other things from his absence, that he cannot be seen, that he is no longer among us but has, as we know here, gone to sit at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, verse 1, chapter 8. That's actually what we have right at the beginning in chapter 1, a ministry of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected and not man. What is this saying? And the argument actually proceeds from this point that he's establishing here, that the fact that we can't see him because he's actually sat at the right hand of the throne of God, is a very good sign to us. It's a sign that he is, indeed, the high priest that we need, for if he was not the high priest that we need, well, then he might still be on earth and therefore still offering sacrifices which would be telling us that the conclusion of the matter has not yet been reached and we're still in that sense of apprehension and waiting for fulfillment, and the fact that we don't see him, and the fact that actually he's at the right hand of God, is proof that he is precisely the high priest that we need. We don't want a visible one. We don't want one that we can see still doing sacrifices, still having to repeat them, because that would be, then, a reminder to us of sin, a reminder that there's something outstanding between God and us in that whole matter. Now that we don't see this great high priest because his ministry in respect of offering sacrifice has been so thoroughly and completely finished that he's now been received up into heaven is extraordinarily good news.

We sometimes feel, don't we, a little denied a blessing because the Lord Jesus Christ is not with us, that we're not that generation who saw him walk upon the face of the earth. Well, we're not going to miss out, let me assure you, because we'll see him in heaven and we'll have eternity to walk with him, which will be a very very pleasant thing indeed. But we have the Holy Spirit, the Comforter who has come alongside us, and he is assuring us of what we read here as being true and proper, attests to Scripture, attests to the glory of Christ and attests to the fact that we're not the losers by not having him with us because it shows that he is accepted, that he has been taken up to glory by rights, by entitlements, as a reward for his labor, as a recognition of the intrinsic excellence of his character, and there he now is at the right hand of God. And that is always a good place, isn't it? It means he's been given dignity, a place that God confers upon the one that he wants to give dignity to, whom he would share his glory with and shares his glory with none other

than himself. So there's a proof of the divinity of his Son, that it is a place of rule, authority. In that place, you exercise rule and authority, that is a place of reward, of sitting, a work completed. There's no sense of incompleteness. If you're sat there, your work, in many regards, is finished and it is a powerful rule that he exercises from that position.

Well, Aaron's ministry was then still visible, that you could go to the temple, it was still standing. You could watch the sacrificial system be conducted before your eyes and might, perhaps, have been impressed with it in the visibility of visual and seeing these things being conducted. But this was no help to the people of that day, weren't any help to the people of our day for this is still the offering of the sacrifice according to the law. And if our Lord Jesus Christ was still upon the earth in some way or other having to offer sacrifices, well, he would not be a true priest at all because, well, that was Aaron's function to be the priest on earth and to have that continuing work of offering sacrifice. So our Lord would not have been a sufficient minister if he was still upon earth because God has already put one earthly visible ministry and that was the ministry of Aaron.

Well, now our Lord is in a superior place. He's not visible, he is in heaven. And when we see the sanctuary in verse 2, the true tabernacle, well, commentators vary here. That's no help to you, is it, to know commentators differ in their view? You want something clear-cut, don't you there? Well, they don't quite do clear-cut when it comes to this and some learned people think the tabernacle speaks about the flesh of Christ, it speaks about divinity with his humanity, and that this is what the Lord erected. And they would argue, say, from Hebrews 10:5, the quotation from the psalmist, Psalm 40, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire but a body You have prepared for Me," and would say that's what it is speaking about, it is speaking about him where we encounter the presence of God and before whom we worship. But others would say, and these are the people I'm going to go with here, that it's actually heaven that it is talking about, that the tabernacle, the tent, that elaborate and beautiful construction which was, as we read it here, to be done according to the pattern shown you on the mountain, well, that's the earthly sanctuary, that is the earthly tabernacle and it was a type of heaven. It was patterning heaven in respect of its beauty, in respect to the fact that there is the presence of God.

Well, now the high priest, of course, would go into the sanctuary and into the Most Holy Place. Well, this great high priest has now gone into heaven, the Most Holy Place, that which is not made of human hands like the beautiful intricate fabrics of the tabernacle and the posts and the poles and the engravings and the gold that overlaid things, and the beautiful tapestries and all of the garments that Aaron wore. No, this is not anything of human kind of craft. None of that was involved in it. No human hand.

This is the tabernacle, the true tabernacle, what the earthly tabernacle was but an imitation, small imitation of, and our Lord has now gone into the true tabernacle. He's entered into heaven for our sakes, a ministry that is completed, proof of his success. If he hadn't been successful and was still on earth, then, well, I'm afraid he wouldn't be the high priest that we need. His invisibility, his absence from us, not a weakness but a strength. It is not a proof of something that we would rather wish was different, we rather

wish he was here still. No, if he was here still, there would be a problem. There would be a problem. His absence is actually a good sign, rest assured, the writer is saying.

So my second heading to finish as we look at the last part of chapter 8 in that regard is an upgrade, the divine upgrade, and, in fact, this really is where verse 6 establishes what will follow, that, "He has obtained a more excellent ministry," there seated now in heaven, "inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises." It's all more excellent and better. These are the words that spring out to us. This is all about upgrade. And he is the Mediator, we thought about that, the one who goes between, who represents both parties, who helps to bring into effect a covenant, an agreement, an arrangement that God has made in his own Son. He is the one who brings into effect the provisions of this agreement, of this covenant. And it is a covenant here that gets its beauty and its excellence because underlying it, establishing it are better promises and this is what the writer is going to show. These are the better promises that make actually what we have now a better covenant than the one that previously was in effect.

So an upgrade, as though we move, don't we, there and we're going to do much flying by the sounds of it, but if we were, you know, moving from economy class to business class, there is something extra by way of comfort and provision. There's something more convenient and in all ways better about where we now find ourselves, this more excellent ministry. And here is the thing, it's all in the Old Testament. The fact that the old covenant would never be able to achieve the final purposes of God, was never intended to, is actually there in the Old Testament. So within the writings that follow naturally from the old covenant, it is saying that the old covenant is going to expire one day and be replaced, it says, by the priesthood of Melchizedek, that is going to replace there the priesthood of Aaron. So a new covenant is going to replace the first covenant as it is called in verse 7, a covenant that was not so excellent, a covenant that was inferior because it was established on inferior promises. That's what the writer is telling us.

It's remarkable, isn't it, that if the first covenant had been faultless, no place would have been sought for a second because finding fault with them, God says, "Behold, the days are coming," and then the quotation from Jeremiah, that what was given, and this is Sinai. We're talking about Sinai here. That is the old covenant. There are various covenants in the Old Testament, covenants, well, we had it this morning, big event when God made promises to Abraham and promises to Abraham that had huge implications for us, for all the nations of the earth. But traveling on, though the grace was not absent from the covenant at Sinai.

So now we've got when the Hebrews had come out under Moses, that ties into Moses there in the cloud and coming through the Red Sea in that way under his leadership, come to Mount Sinai and there God had given his law. And that's the place where most particularly this gathered people became a nation and became a nation ruled by God with very particular, very special laws that they were given at the crowning point of which were the 10 Commandments. They were given a law unlike any other nation. They had it there laid out for them and codified. And besides that, the whole other workings out of

those laws and of sacrifice, what offerings were to be made, when, what feasts were to be observed, when, and everything that followed from it.

That was Sinai and that was the old covenant. That's the first covenant as the writer speaks about it here, and it gave a basis on which God related to people, that he would be their God, they would be his people, and this was the basis of it. Well, it was grace that surely was there but there was an element, a large element actually of works. A large element of works. Do these things and you will live. Well, they're the 10 Commandments for a start, and we know that our Lord when he developed them at the Sermon on the Mount, that those contained far more than people were willing to consider. What a searching set of commandments those were. Then because of that, because in effect none will be able to keep these commands. People would lapse into idolatry, people would have other gods beside the true God, people would not love their neighbor as themselves, you have the sacrifices for sin, for all the variety of those sacrifices, different types of sacrifice for different kinds of sin, or simply sacrifices of thanksgiving that you would bring, that you were there expressing your gratitude to God. But even in that, your approach always needed something to die in your place, that you had no approach to God without having a repeated sacrifice, blood needing to be shed on the bronze altar by the appointed priesthood, the Aaronic priesthood. And all of that had to continue in the prescribed manner and in the exact way, and the high priest was charged with the responsibility of ensuring that it was properly regulated. That's why Eli faced the censure because his sons behaved so abominably as representatives of the high priest at the sacrifices.

So this was established, it was the will of God, and yet it was not to be forever. It was not something God ever intended should be forever for he had something better in view. It says, doesn't it, he found fault with it. That's strong, isn't it? He found fault with it. It was not faultless and because what it could do was not sufficient to what God ultimately would do for sinners, what he would do by way of how they would relate to him, and the path that they would have. Now here is the thing, isn't it, and well we know this, that the law could not produce the obedience that it commanded. The law could not on its own though it was a good law and a holy law, it could not produce the obedience that it commanded. It showed the standard. It showed what was expected and what was required but the tablets of stone could not, as it were by the mere fact of their existence, have the power within them to confer upon a human the capacity then to obey them, to be able to follow it, to do it. It couldn't do that. It never was intended to be able to do that. It was, in that way, limited.

And similarly, the sacrificial system with the constant repetition of the shedding of blood, well, as the writer is going to develop it later in another chapter, could never cleanse the conscience. It couldn't fully do it because you were always conscious of sin, you were always being reminded of it, that there was an obstacle between your relating to God and God relating to you, that there was an awkwardness, there was something uncomfortable about it, something unfinished. And you could never rest assured and be still in your conscience for always, always there was the need for the shedding of blood and therefore God declared that this covenant was not the finished product, was not the final word, that

this was not the final and only way in which he was going to relate to sinners and have them approach him and be able to deal with them, and what he would actually do in them and for them, that he had something better in mind.

And he declared it very fully in that long quotation that fills up the body, really, of the last part of Hebrews 8, which if we were to read it in Jeremiah 31:31-34, we find that it is written thus for the writer, well, Jeremiah says, "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah--not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." Right there in the Old Testament, right there in the prophecy of Jeremiah, God is saying the old covenant is going to pass away. It is not sufficient. It never was meant to be. "It is not to be the thing that you think is My last word on this. I'm going to make a new covenant because that old covenant you could not keep." It was a good covenant and they are good words, a good law, that if you had the power to fulfill it, well, that would be something indeed. But the people failed in it, and though everything that God did, though there was the law, there was his generosity, there was the assurances of his mercy and kindness, well, the people didn't learn overmuch from that, instead made the law into a religious ritual that they thought fulfilled righteousness in and of itself. And so they completely misunderstood, many of them, what it was about.

But here is the promise of something better. Better promises which will make for a better covenant, and which were brought into being by the more excellent ministry of the greatest high priest and mediator that we'll ever need. And how is it better? Well, there are various things, aren't there, just to draw our attention to. Well, there is this where it says that, "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts," in verse 10. What a contrast is this, isn't it? They had tablets of stone with the 10 Commandments. There it is written what is to be done. Well, there's going to be something more powerful with the new covenant, that what the Lord Jesus Christ is going to bring is going to bring greater spiritual power. There is spiritual benefit because it is also a ministry now of greater depth and intensity of the Holy Spirit. The two go together, Christ's ministry and the Spirit's ministry. And what was to some extent more external and less available, less instinctive, if you like, within the heart is actually now going to become more instinctive. It is going to become something more available, less like something external speaking to us, but actually something that's already been made internal and is speaking within the depth of our soul, as if we have taken in the 10 Commandments more fully and embodied them because the Holy Spirit has given us in greater measure, and he will bring nothing that is contrary to the law. Certainly, it's not his teaching that the 10 Commandments are now abrogated, but rather that they are now more firmly embedded and internalized in us.

So we're needing to be less persuaded by them because that power of persuasion lies within as we have a greater measure of the Holy Spirit establishing principles of holiness. And how much more material there is to work upon and to use by way of illustration and example to us, and supremely an example of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Well, that example wasn't there to the believers of this day but it is now. It's there for us now to consider. Who is the greatest embodiment of the law? Who has lived the law and fulfilled all righteousness? Well, our Lord Jesus Christ and we have written pages showing us his life and ministry, describing what he did, how he did it for us to learn from and for the Spirit to take of that and to embed that more and more within our heart. That's what the 10 Commandments look like. That's what a true worshiper looks like. Do you want to know what it means to love God and love fellow man? There is your greatest example.

So it makes for greater obedience. It makes for more exact obedience. It makes for more joyful obedience. It makes for more roundedness of character, roundedness of personality. These are deeper things, the law now written in their minds and on their hearts. And greater knowledge too. This description of none saying to his brother, "'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." Well, what's that saying to us there? Well, that this need of a priest to be there to mediate for you, somebody from whom you needed to learn and without whom you'd be quite quite lost. Well, that too is changing. We don't need pastors, we don't need preachers and don't need good books and commentaries. We sure do and the place for those things, but we have more light. We have more available to us as new covenant believers. We refer back to the Holy Spirit and what he has brought by way of knowledge and richness into the soul.

So we are less empty and less ignorant and less at sea, as though we needed somebody to teach us all things, for now we can understand things a little better because we have that help from the Holy Spirit. In 1 John 2:26 and 27 give us something of this as well, "These things," John says, "I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him." So there's something more available, an instinct within us, an anointing, as it called here. Well, that's the Holy Spirit's help and when false teaching comes around and about, people trying to deceive us, there's a reaction. We react. We've got something to react with because of that extra dimension of spiritual light and knowledge. We shall all know the Lord, "You all shall know Me from the least of them to the greatest."

And finally this and we're going to belabor this point because really it's been the point that has been made again and again and we're going to see a bit more of it in chapter 9, but the Lord says that, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." By having continual sacrifices, it's saying, "Actually I do still remember them. I still remember your sins. There's still something that bears down upon My holy character, My sense of justice, that there still needs to be a sacrifice made for sin." But then when the Son comes and offers his precious blood, the Son of God, God-man, purchasing the church with his own blood, then the mercy to our

unrighteousness, our sins and lawless deeds, he says, "I will remember them no more. You'll not need another sacrifice. You won't need to come before Me and have to watch some creature die in pain and see its blood shed and think of what an awful and dreadful spectacle that that is, and what a dreadful thing that sin must be." And having this constant reminder. There will be no more reminder.

It's a finished work and you can rest assured in that. This new covenant is now abolished. The old covenant sacrificial system is obsolete, been rendered obsolete. And that's not to make dismissive comment about it or to say of it that it was absolutely no use at all. It was of very use in the time of the old covenant but now that time is gone, and as the writer suggests, soon with the temple about to go, it's growing old and it's ready to vanish away. So what promises we have and you'll notice there within Jeremiah it's the same covenant promise that, "I will be their God and they shall be My people." But it is our God in a way that has expanded beyond the hopes and joys and realization of the old covenant and we are his people in a deeper, more thorough, more spiritual way than ever they were in the old covenant.

So that is, my friends, I suggest, a divine upgrade that we should treasure and value very greatly.