

Hebrews 9:1-11

The Good Things Have Come

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come... v. 11

In the course of our last two studies in chp. 8, we've seen that in comparison to the Old Testament dispensation we are living in better days. These are days in which the Lord puts his laws into the minds of his followers and writes them on their hearts (8:10). These are days in which God has pledged to be our God and we are acknowledged to be his people.

There are things that are known immediately in our day in the experience of every believer. These are things that are known and not taught. We know the Lord and our desire is to know him more. We bask in his grace and mercy. We enjoy open access into his presence. We enjoy in much fuller measure the truth of 8:12 *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*

The Hebrew believers, to whom this epistle was originally addressed, lived in a time of transition. And that transition added to their difficulties. We might well understand their reluctance to affirm that the practices of their Fathers and their Father's Fathers were being rendered obsolete. They had entered into a time of a better covenant established upon better promises. But in the midst of all their pressures and afflictions and persecutions these blessings were not foremost on their minds.

They were tempted, instead, to give up the better covenant and go back to the old ways which were being rendered obsolete. The historical setting of this epistle, therefore, explains why it is that Paul is laboring to establish the truth that they were living at the dawn of a new age. And so Paul continues this subject into chp. 9. And what we find in the first 10 verses of this chapter is a concise but somewhat comprehensive examination of Old Testament worship.

There was throughout much of the Old Testament period a worldly or an earthly sanctuary (v. 1). And within this sanctuary there was the candlestick and the table and the veil that divided the holy place from the holy of holies. In the innermost chamber was found the ark of the covenant which was covered by the mercy seat. This was a restricted room. Not just anyone could enter into it. In fact only one man could enter into it – the high priest. And he could only go into it once a year on the day of atonement.

Now when these thing were thus ordained we read in vv. 6, 7 the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people.

And following this description of Old Testament worship, Paul next states that there were two very limiting restrictions that applied to that time period. The first restriction had to do with access to God. When it came to the high priest entering the holy of holies only once a year this was to signify – indeed as v. 8 tells us *The Holy Ghost himself this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first*

tabernacle was yet standing. The free and open and even bold access to God that is referenced back in 4:16 was not yet emphasized in Old Testament days because the grounds for that access had not yet been accomplished by Christ. So there was a restriction with regard to access.

There was also a restriction with regard to assurance or with regard to a believer's conscience. Note the words of v. 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.* I wonder how many times in the course of Old Testament history a sincere worshipper would have wondered to himself – *why should my sins be forgiven because a lamb or an ox or a pair of turtle doves were slain and burnt on the altar? How does the merit of such animal sacrifices pave the way for my forgiveness?*

In another English translation v. 9 reads like this: *This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper.* And so fullness of assurance was not a common blessing until what is called in v. 10 *the time of reformation.*

That's an interesting phrase, isn't it? – *the time of reformation.* We generally think of the Reformation as that period in the 16th century when there was a recovery of the truth of the gospel but according to v. 10 the time that followed Christ's coming was designed by God to be a time of reformation.

And beginning in v. 11 we have another one of those contrasting statements in scripture that should fill and thrill the hearts of every believer in Christ. *But Christ* we read in v. 11 *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;*¹² *Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*

I want to focus this morning on the opening words of v. 11 which refer to Christ as *an high priest of good things to come.* Now it's important in this statement that it is not a prophetic statement from our vantage point. The author, in other words, is not speaking of something that is future to us but he's referring, rather, to that which would have been future to those who lived during the Old Testament period. These were future blessings to them but they are present blessings or good things to us.

Listen to the words of William Gouge on these good things. He writes in his commentary on this verse: *If it be demanded what these good things are, I answer, 1. In general, all the truths typified under the law. 2. In particular, Christ himself; his body and soul; the union of them with the divine nature; his doings, his sufferings, especially his death as a sacrifice; his resurrection, ascension, and intercession. The benefits also flowing from those, as, expiation of sin, reconciliation with God, justification, sanctification, salvation. In two words, grace and glory. These are styled good; - in their kind and quality; for they are good and perfect in themselves. – In their unity and excellency; they do good to such as partake of them.*

Christ being come an high priest of good things to come – isn't that a scripture statement that is so packed that you could spend much time unpacking and examining each good thing contained in it. I've been stressing over the course of the last couple of our studies the fact that we live in good days.

I think the question that needs to be raised and answered now is simply this: How good are these days in which we live? And the answer to such a question is to be found by considering the words of our text:

Christ being come an high priest of good things to come

The way I would like to approach this text this morning is to examine it, or unpack it, the way you would unpack a box of precious treasures, holding up each precious thing in the light. And the method that I will employ will be to examine these good things by comparing them to the Old Testament tabernacle furniture which foreshadowed them. What good things have come our way? Consider with me first of all:

I. A Good Society has Come to Us

Notice the words of v. 2 *For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick.* Many things could be said with regard to this candlestick. You could certainly say that as the candlestick gave off light, so the light of God's revelation has come to us in fuller measure. Indeed Christ Himself is the light of the world. Jn. 8:12 *Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

But I want to focus on that candlestick this morning as the emblem of Christ's church. *The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches* Christ says to the Apostle John on the isle of Patmos in Rev. 1:20. The candlestick, then, is an emblem of Christ's church. And as William Gouge points out in his commentary:

“The first particular noted about the candlestick is the matter thereof, which was pure gold (Exod. 35:21). Gold, of all metal, is the most pure and precious: pure, in that it is freest from dross, and least subject to rust. In this matter it shows that the church is the purest society in the world. It is the holy church for Christ cleanses it by his blood and sanctifies it by his Spirit and by his word.” What a tremendous description Gouge offers here of the church at its' best – the purest society in the world.

We know, of course, that the Church has had its problems throughout the course of this New Testament age. When it views itself as an end rather than a means to an end then it becomes easy for the church to compromise and conform itself to the world. And when it has lost sight of the gospel it has actually become a tyrannical institution on a world-wide scale. And when churches compete with each other in order to outdo each other in terms of growth, and buildings and programs then the church certainly brings reproach upon the name of Christ and becomes a heavy burden to bear.

All this is true and I don't deny any of it. What I do deny, however, is that the church is a man-made institution. If all it amounted to was an invention of man then it would be easy to take it or leave it so to speak. But in fact the church of Christ is one of the good things that has come into being as a result of his intercession. This is the very thing that Christ himself said he would build and when he said he would build it he also indicated very plainly that it belonged to him. *I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Mt. 16:18).

And so we have the enjoyment and the benefit of this society of believers. We have the enjoyment and the benefit of fellowship with those of like precious faith. We have the enjoyment and the benefit of a structured spiritual government that is designed to carry us forward in our journey toward heaven and is designed to bear our burdens with us and contribute to our spiritual well-being. And we have the benefit of a spiritual institution that is ordained to keep us in line when we get out of line. And we have the benefit of an institution that leads us into the most sublime practice we can know on earth which is the corporate worship of Christ.

It is here, especially, in the act of corporate worship, that the church comes to most resemble heaven. We wonder, don't we, what heaven will be like? We can hardly begin to imagine the wonder of being made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God forever. What sights will be there? What sounds will be there? What activities will be there? The closest we can come to answering such questions is coming to church with the purpose of being engaged in the corporate worship of Christ.

I hope you keep that primary purpose of church in mind each time you come to church. There's so many different ideas, you know, about what church ought to be, or about what a church ought to do. Some view it merely as a social gathering – some view it as an academic institution where you come to learn. Both of those functions have their place but let's not ever forget that our primary purpose for existence is to worship our Creator and Redeemer. It is here especially that we come to present ourselves to God.

So we have this good thing that has come – this good society of Christ's followers whose task it is, I might add, to reflect the light of Christ's glory by shining brightly in a world that is steeped in the darkness of sin. The candlestick of the Old Testament period foreshadowed this good thing that Christ has brought to pass. Consider with me next, another good thing to come that Christ has brought to pass – for not only do enjoy a good society but we find also that:

II. Good Communion has Come to Us

This good thing was foreshadowed by the table of showbread in Exod. 25:23. If I may quote the words of William Gouge again: "In general, the table typified a communion of saints with Christ. For one use of a table is for people to sit together familiarly, and to eat and drink together thereat."

Gouge then notes that there is a twofold communion of saints with Christ: One in this world by holy ordinances. The psalmist makes reference to this when he says in Psalm 23:5 *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.* And when we partake of the holy ordinance of communion how the psalmist's experience ought to be our own.

This is why we routinely remind the people of God a week before communion that the time of communion is coming. We sincerely believe that if the people of Christ will take the matter to heart and be thinking on Christ and take the time to prepare your hearts before Christ then the time of communion holds out the potential for being one of the richest and sweetest times of fellowship that a believer can enjoy with Christ. Our hearts ought to and will be filled to overflowing if we take the matter to heart.

There's another reference to a table made in Prov. 9:2. Here it is said that *Wisdom hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table.* And a few verses later in v. 5 *Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.*⁶ *Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.*

In Old Testament times it was regarded as the highest honor to be invited to a banquet. So Haman, in the book of Esther, thought himself to be singularly honored when he alone was invited to accompany the king to Esther's banquet. And so should the believer recognize the singular high honor that is bestowed upon him when he is invited to commune with his Redeemer and King.

I noted in my introduction that one of the limiting restrictions of the Old Testament period was the high priest only being allowed to enter into the holy of holies once a year on the day of atonement. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come – we are able to affirm that the way access to God through Christ is now thrown wide open. You may recall that when Christ died on Calvary's cross the veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom thus signifying that the way of access to the inner chamber of God's throne room was now made wide open.

Gouge again notes two cautions that need to be duly observed when it comes to communion with Christ. The first is that we put not off Christ's invitation, lest we provoke him to protest that none of those which were bidden shall taste of my supper. It pains me to think of those that will burn in hell and will be forever mindful of how close they came to heaven's blessings. Those blessings were within their grasp, so to speak, but still they refused. They were invited and even pleaded with to come but still they chose to cling to their sins instead.

And while others will enjoy the blessing of communion with Christ in fuller measure still at the wedding feast of the Lamb to the bride there will be those who were so close but will, instead, know the torments of hell. They'll undoubtedly feel sorry for themselves but they'll be isolated in their self-pity. No one else will feel sorry for them. Others in hell will be absorbed in their own self-pity and the saints will be too taken up with Christ to be

engaged in pity for those who could have but chose not to enter into communion with Christ.

The other caution with regard to communion with Christ is that we make sure that we come not without a wedding garment which I take to be a picture of Christ's imputed righteousness. Make sure you don't attempt to enter into communion with Christ in the filthy rags of your own righteousness especially when the robe of Christ's righteousness is freely offered to any and all who see their need for it.

So we have these good things that have come by Christ – good society and good communion. Would you consider yet another good thing which is:

III. Good Intercession

I call your attention now to v. 4 which makes reference to *the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant*.

I have to admit that this golden censer has for the longest time puzzled me because I mistook it for the altar of incense. And I use to go back and forth in my mind wondering where, exactly, the altar of incense was located within the tabernacle. Was it in the first sanctuary or the holy of holies?

In fact it was in the first sanctuary and it was a part of the daily ministry by the priests. Incense was to be offered on the altar of incense every morning and evening. The censer here referred to in Heb 9 is taken by some to be a particular golden censer which was taken into the holy of holies where it would be used to burn incense in such a way that a cloud from the burning incense would cover the mercy seat. And the reason for that covering was that God would appear in his glory on the mercy seat, so as the high priest could not endure the brightness thereof; but the cloud of incense so covered the mercy seat that the high priest would be able to stand before it.

Thus by the mediation of Christ are we made capable of appearing before the glorious throne of God's grace. Should we base, weak, wretched, sinful creatures, come before the glorious majesty of God without this cloud of Christ's mediation, we should be in a worse case than Moses, when he said, "I exceedingly fear and quake" (Heb. 12:21) or the Israelites who said "Let not God speak with us lest we die" (Exod. 20:29). When a cloud covers the sun we may look upon it, so we may look upon God through the mediation of Christ.

Again if I may draw from Gouge, he notes that this incense typified that sweetness of grace and goodness which was in Christ. The incense, he notes, was beaten small, and declared his passion and bitter agony. He also notes that the high priest would enter the holy of holies with the blood of the sacrifice which would typify the satisfaction made by Christ's passion.

What was typified, then, in Old Testament worship, was fulfilled by Christ. So we read of him in 9:11,12 *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; 12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

This is why we live in good days. We have one who has gone into glory before us who intercedes on our behalf. This is why we live in good days – because Christ pleads before his Father for all the benefits of redemption to be applied to his blood-bought people. This is good intercession indeed and what's more its intercession that will not be denied by God the Father.

Some Christians have the mistaken notion that there is somehow discord between the Father and the Son. It's as if Christ has to twist the arm, so to speak, of a reluctant heavenly Father to bestow favor and grace upon those Christ represents. That's a distorted picture of the Father and the Son.

What really takes place is that Christ pleads the covenant and he pleads what is called near the end of Hebrews *the blood of the everlasting covenant*. And since this is a covenant that was entered into by God the Father and God the Son, Christ's plea becomes an all-prevailing plea.

What good things, then, have come to us by Christ. He truly has become an high priest of good things to come. The sweetness of his grace has come. Full assurance of salvation has come. Expiation and propitiation by his atoning death has come. The hope of heaven being a sure hope has come.

Indeed we are able to say that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. And we say this because our high priest has once entered into the holy place of heaven, having obtained eternal redemption for us. May the Lord impress our hearts what good days belong to us. May the good things that Christ has secured for us and constantly ministers to our souls so fill and thrill our souls that the world loses its grip on our affections and our souls soar heavenward and refuse to be pulled down by the many things we find within this world that will pull us down if we lose sight of Christ.