

Hebrews 8 // The Heavenly Ministry of a Superior Covenant

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[0:00] Our reading this evening is Hebrews chapter 8, the whole chapter which can be found on page 1206. Hebrews chapter 8. Now the main point of what we are saying is this.

We do have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven and who serves in the sanctuary. The true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer gifts prescribed by the law.

They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and a shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned about when he was about to build the tabernacle.

See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain. But in fact, the ministry Jesus has received is superior to theirs, as the covenant of which he is mediator of is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

[1:29] For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said, The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.

I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbours or say to one another, Know the Lord, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more. By calling this covenant new, he has made the first one obsolete, and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.

[2:55] Thanks be to God for his word. Well, hello. That was loud. Sorry. I don't think I need to add too much from what Robbie said.

I will say that I'm from another ace church at St. Thomas' in Edinburgh, and actually this morning we were praying for you. So, yeah, maybe just be encouraged to know that people all the way in Edinburgh are praying for you.

So, look, we're in Hebrews 8. Please do keep your Bibles open at this text. Two questions to begin with. Where is Jesus?

And what is he doing? Where is Jesus right now, today? And what is he doing? So, some of you know my wife Fern.

If she was to text you right now and say, Where is Rob? And what is he doing? You could say, Well, he's here at St. Silas, and he's preaching. And she'd say, Well, Mother, dinner's on the table.

[4:04] No, she knows where I am. She knows where I am. But you can see me, can't you? You can see me. You can hear me. You know where I am. And you know what I'm doing. But what about Jesus?

Where is he? What is he doing? As Christians, we believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. When Jesus died on the cross for you to forgive your sin, God raised him from the dead.

But where is he now? What is he doing? Those questions can feel a little bit like academic or theoretical.

But there will come a time when your faith will be tested, when you'll feel under pressure in your Christian life. And you will need to know the answers to these questions.

Because however much work and study you've done to answer them up to that point, whatever you've got, that's what you're going to lean on. When your faith is being tested and times are hard, you're going to want to know, where is Jesus right now?

[5:15] What is he doing? Well, Hebrews chapter 8, as you'll see in the handout, Hebrews chapter 8 tells us that Jesus is in the heavenly sanctuary.

And as our high priest, he's doing new covenant ministry. But what does that mean? Well, that's our sermon. So let's pray, and then we'll get into it.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for being able to gather here under it right now. And we ask, Holy Spirit, that you would be at work, at work in each one of us and in us as your church.

We pray, Father, that you would help us to fall in love, maybe again, maybe for the first time, or to just more deeply fall in love with your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen. So a lot of Hebrews is about Jesus as a high priest. If you've been going through the series at St. Silas, you'll know that a lot is about Jesus as high priest.

[6:29] And chapter 7, which was last week, ends with this description of what a high priest needs to be. And a high priest needs to be perfect and live forever.

So I was thinking, if you're looking for a job right now, which maybe some of you are, how awful would that be on the job requirements? Must be perfect and live forever.

However arrogant or confident you are, I don't think you can stand up to those. But with Jesus, that's exactly who we have. And in chapter 8, that's what the writer says.

He says, look, that's exactly who we have in Jesus. Look to verse 1. Now, the main point of what we are saying is this. We do have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven.

So this is giving us where Jesus is, isn't it? He says, Jesus sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven.

[7:41] This is where Jesus is. And this is where God promised he would be. This is where God always promised that Jesus would be. In Psalm 110, God said, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

God promised that he would place his son at his right hand in heaven. Now, when it says sat down, it's not like going to Kelvin Grove Park on a sunny day, sitting on a bench, reading a book, having a nice time.

No, Jesus has sat down because the first part of his high priestly ministry has finished. So the great theologian, John Owen, if you don't know John Owen, you're welcome.

Look him up. He says that basically Jesus's priestly ministry has two parts. And that the first part of his ministry was offering himself as a sacrifice.

And Jesus says he's done that. That's what Jesus did at the cross, didn't he? And we read in one of the gospels where Jesus on the cross, he cries out, it is finished.

[9:06] Okay, that's why Jesus has sat down, because the wrath of God has been taken. His body has been broken.

His blood has been given. His first part of his priestly ministry is finished. And when he finished this first part of his ministry, he ascended to heaven, to the right hand of God's throne.

And then it's in this place that Jesus begins the second part of his priestly work. Look to verse 2.

And Jesus serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

So this is where Jesus is. Jesus is in the heavenly sanctuary, and he's serving as our priest.

Now, with some jobs, the location doesn't really matter, does it? You can work from home. You can take your laptop to a coffee shop. But with some jobs, the location matters.

[10:24] I was trying to rack my brains. Which job does the location matter the most? First thing I thought of was a coast guard. You can't really be a coast guard unless you're on the coast, can you really?

Unless you're in the sea. And what the writer wants us to realize, what he wants us to see, is that for God's high priest, location really does matter.

And the way that he helps us to realize that is he sets out a contrast, a comparison. And he compares and he contrasts between the heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus is, the one high priest, and the earthly sanctuary, where the many priests are and working.

Look again to verse 5. So this is what our writer says about the earthly sanctuary and the many priests, the Jewish priests of the Old Testament system.

He says, verse 5, They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle.

[11:45] See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain. So what the writer says is that the Jewish priests who are serving in the earthly tabernacle, they're just serving in a copy and a shadow of the real thing.

The Old Testament system, the sacrificial system, was just a copy, a shadow, a picture of the real thing.

So just to illustrate this, when I was a boy, I was a very stereotypical boy, and I had posters on my bedroom wall, right? And one of those posters was of a red sports car.

What a cliché, right? It was a Ferrari. And I loved that Ferrari. It was so cool. And I, you know, now, if as a boy, someone had have drove in the yard with an actual real Ferrari, I mean, how amazing would that be?

All those times I've stared at that poster. Now the real thing has turned up. How wonderful that would be. But also, you would think, what a moron if I said, no, no, no, I don't want the real Ferrari because I've got a poster.

[13:15] What an idiot. It would be so strange, wouldn't it? But one of the things that we sense in this letter is that that dynamic, that's what's happening in the situation that the writer is speaking into.

There's a sense that these Christians of the early church, they've encountered the real thing in Jesus.

But actually, they seem to be preferring the poster. The thing that, the picture, the earthly tabernacle and the earthly system, those things were meant to be pointing to the real thing.

In fact, you know, one writer says that the whole Jewish, the whole Old Testament system was meant to be training people to recognize the real thing when it showed up.

And there's this sense that these Christians, they're actually not convinced that Jesus is better because they're falling back to the old way.

[14:29] But the writer is here to say, no, no, Jesus as our great high priest is better. And what he's doing is better.

So that leads us to the question, what is Jesus doing? Well, he's doing ministry. Part two of his priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is new covenant ministry.

And so the writer, he wants us to realize that it's not just the location which is better, which it is. He's in the heavenly sanctuary. But the ministry that he's doing from there is also better.

It's better because he's ministering the new covenant, which he describes as superior. Just look to verse 6 with me. But in fact, the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

So again, with that compare and contrast, you've got two sanctuaries, but you've also got two covenants of which is being ministered.

[15:56] And he says, look, the earthly priests, they are ministering from the old covenant. But Jesus, the one great high priest, is in the heavenly sanctuary and he is ministering the new covenant.

Now, if the language of covenants is totally new to you, the idea of covenant theology is totally, totally new, then what I would say is, I'm going to give a basic definition, but what I would say is, please do start building and developing a covenant theology.

Okay, now, I remember when I first went to a guy, to work for a guy in Edinburgh, and he said, what do you know about covenant theology?

And I was like, well, there's the old covenant, there's the new covenant, and that's about it, isn't it? I don't know. And he's like, no, no, no, no, no, no. You're going to do about five talks on the covenant, and I'm going to make you research covenants because it's so beautiful.

And I was like, nothing sounds more boring than covenants. Covenant theology, it's just got this all. But actually, there's so many wonderful things to discover.

[17:19] So the first thing I would say is, please do make an effort to develop your covenant theology. I have a couple of really good videos that I give out that are really helpful.

I can maybe send them to Martin and Jonathan. There's books I know, but talk to Martin and Jonathan. They'll know. You know, they'll be really, really helpful with this.

But basically, a covenant, it's a relational bond. It's an agreement. It's a contract, a bit like a marriage. And in the Bible, we read about how God makes a covenant with his people.

Now, in our text, it says the old covenant. And what that's speaking about is the one that God made with Moses. And I'm sure you'll have heard of how Moses led God's people out of Egypt.

Well, God made a covenant with Moses and the people. And this covenant included God's law.

Okay. Think, which side is it?

[18:20] Think Ten Commandments. Okay. He made a covenant. He made the law. And the headline of the law is this. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

That's the headline of what it means to keep your covenant vows with God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Love. Love. If we love God, we love his law. If we love who God is, we love what he says.

We love his word. His law is an expression of his love. To obey God is to embrace his love.

And if you're new to being a Christian, this is something that you really have to wrestle with, I know. Like, okay, God exists. God is real.

[19:28] But God also has something to say. He has something to say about how I should live. But it's not just a case of just doing it. It's a case of loving it.

He is a father who loves you. And his words are for you. And from his love. And so you have to learn how to live within that.

That includes obedience. But not a sort of like, oh, I have to do it kind of obedience. You learn to love to do what he says. You learn to let his word be the compass that you live your whole life by.

But the problem is, the people who God made a covenant with, they didn't do this.

They didn't live this way. The people in the Old Testament, they never did this. They were never faithful to God's covenant. And this shows us, this is the thing that's wrong with the Old Covenant.

[20:40] It reveals what's wrong with us. But it doesn't heal what's wrong with us. The Old Covenant reveals our sin.

But it doesn't heal it. All it did was reveal how impossible it was for sinful people, by their own efforts, to live for God.

To keep his law. Now, the law itself, the law is good. If no one believed in God, but tried to live according to his law, what do you think would happen?

You didn't believe in God, but you obeyed the law. Well, I think the world would actually be a better place than it is today.

Because the law is good. But all it does is reveal our sin. It reveals how impossible it is to live the way that the law describes.

[21:54] The law reveals how fractured we are. Because the fault, the faultiness of the Old Covenant was the people.

That was the real fault with the Old Covenant. And so God promised to make a new one.

Just look to verse 7. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.

But God found fault with the people and said, The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant. And I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

[22:58] So what we have in speech marks there from verse 8 to 12 is actually a quote from Jeremiah in the Old Testament.

And it's important to know that when God makes this promise, the faultiness of the people were at its worst.

You know, they had disobeyed God for a very, very, very long time. They were just deep in their sin, and God sent them into exile.

He exiled them from the promised land because of their sin. It's in the context of this extreme faultiness, of their extreme disobedience and breaking of the covenant, that God, in his grace, makes a promise to make a new covenant.

If you think that the God in the Old Testament is just some bad, angry guy, well, either you've read it wrongly, or you've been taught by bad teachers.

[24:15] But either way, that's such an unhelpful thing to think. Because in one of their darkest moments, if not their darkest moments in the history of the Old Testament, God shows up and says, I will make a new covenant with you.

Such grace, such mercy. God is so good. And this is just an example of that. When people were at their worst, without hope, God said, verse 10, this is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel.

After that time, declares the Lord, I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Do you see what's different about the new covenant? God himself will do what the people never could.

The people were called and meant to put God's law in their hearts, to love his word so much that they stored it up in their hearts, in their minds.

[25:35] But they didn't. And so God says, all right, okay, fine. I will do it. I will put my law on your minds and in your hearts. You reject me?

Okay, I will make you my people. You see the grace of what God does in the new covenant. God says, I will do it. I will actively put my word in your life.

I will make you be the person I created you to be. God says, I will change you.

I will transform you. God says, verse 11, no longer will they teach their neighbors or say to one another, know the Lord, because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest.

God promises to reach out and reconcile this fractured, wandering humanity and bring them into relationship.

[26:48] God promises, you will know me. And then God promises something that just seems absolutely outrageous.

Verse 12, for I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more. The old covenant revealed the depth of sin, the total depravity of humanity and God says, yeah, do you know what? I will forgive you. I will forgive your wickedness. I know how sinful you've been. I know how disobedient you've been.

I know how much you've rejected me and I'll forgive you. And I'll not just forgive you, but I will forget your sin. I will never hold it against you.

I will remember your sin no more. But how is that possible? How is that possible? Because Jesus is our great high priest.

[28:05] Because, I mean, it was made possible because of part one of his earthly, his ministry on earth, at the cross. It was made possible when he gave his body and his blood.

You know what Jesus says in Matthew 26, verse 28? If you've done Holy Communion, then you should. You probably do. At the Last Supper, Jesus gets up and he takes the bread and he says, this is my body.

Then he took a cup and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, drink from it, all of you. And then he says, verse 28, this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

It's because of his part, part one of his priestly ministry that this whole thing is possible. This whole forgiveness thing, this relationship thing with God is possible.

But it's because of part two that we can actually receive the blessings and the benefits of that covenant. It's because of part two that a sinner like me could actually know who God is, be forgiven by God.

[29:29] Is that true for you? Is that really true for you? Is that something you really want? Because Jesus died to make it possible.

And right now, he is in the heavenly sanctuary ministering so that if tonight, let's just say you've turned up hating God and for some reason you've come here tonight.

Because of where Jesus is and what he's doing, tonight, you can turn to God. And after you turn to God with all of your sin, all the things that you've done, God is not going to say, well, okay, this is going to be a bit tricky to transform this person.

God is not going to say, oh, I don't know, that was really bad what you did a few days ago. God is going to say, I forgive you and I will remember your sins no more.

Totally gone. But then again, we get reminded of the people that this writer is speaking to.

[30:48] Verse 13. It's almost like he takes a step back, isn't it? Verse 13, by calling this covenant new, he has made the first one obsolete.

And what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear. Again, there's this sense that people are just not convinced that Jesus is better.

again, there's this sense that they want to fall back. And I was thinking, well, let's just imagine then that we are in the early church.

We're born Jews. We're raised in the Jewish system. We've seen the priests doing their priestly work. We've seen the sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice.

We've smelt it. We've experienced it. But then we've heard the gospel. Then we realize Jesus is the one high priest.

[31:55] What is going to make us turn back and give up on him? Well, I think it's got to be if you've been raised in a certain way, your family, suddenly, you're going to realize your family got it wrong.

The people that you've loved and trusted were lying to you. The people who taught you got it wrong. In fact, if you were born into this system, the Jewish teachers were the very people who murdered Jesus, right?

So suddenly, you're living in this very difficult tension and pressure. Your friends, your family, your teachers, the people you trust, they believe a completely different thing.

But I think one of the great encouragements from Hebrews is to just tell us don't give up.

[33:09] Don't give up. And what Hebrew 8 reminds us is that Jesus will not give up on us. The thing about knowing where Jesus is and what he's doing, I mean, it makes all the differences.

Difference. when your faith is being tested, when you are under pressure, it makes such a difference to know that Jesus hasn't abandoned you.

It makes such a difference to know that Jesus is actually before the throne of God praying for you to know that he is speaking your name to God the Father before the throne.

because of him you can draw near to God. Because of him God will not remember your sin.

So please, please, if it's a temptation for you tonight to give up, please don't. Please be encouraged to know where Jesus is and what he's doing.

[34:21] And if tonight for you it just seems like an academic exercise, trust me, there will come a time when it won't be. There will become a time when sin will feel so real, pain will feel so painful.

And in those moments you really need to know where Jesus is and what he's doing. let's pray.

Father God, we thank you so much that you loved us enough to send your son Jesus.

We thank you for the grace of being able to make a covenant with us that was not dependent upon our efforts. and we do thank you, Father, for this superior covenant to the old one.

We thank you for your grace. We thank you that you would forgive people like us and that you would not hold it against us, all our sin. We pray, Father, that we would know your love in the person of Jesus Christ and that we would always be remembering where he is and what he's doing.

We thank you for him. In his name we pray. Amen.