

Hebrews 8:1-6

The Principal Truth of Hebrews – We Have an High Priest

Heb 8:1 *Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*

On the surface of v. 1 it appears that Paul is going to give us a summary statement of what he's been saying up to this point in his epistle to the Hebrews. There is more to the term, *sum*, however, than just a summary statement. The word means literally *the chief or main point, the principal thing*. This definition brings to mind a verse in Proverbs – Prov. 4:7 *Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding*. Wisdom is the most important thing, Solomon is saying in that verse. You should make it your highest priority, therefore, to get wisdom.

So when we bring that kind of idea back into our text in Hebrews and understand the word *sum* to refer to the principal thing that Paul has been saying then we interpret the verse this way: Of all the things which have been spoken, Paul is saying, this is the thing that I want you to most definitely understand. Whatever else you understand or fail to understand make sure you understand this – We have an high priest – and not just an high priest but such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

This is really quite an impressive statement when you consider all that Paul has written up to this point. We have seen a lot of very rich and very important doctrines thus far in this epistle. We have learned of the deity of Christ back in chapter 1. You should remember the richness of Heb 1:3 which tells us that *Christ being the brightness of [his] glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*; We have also learned of the humanity of Christ – He is both God and man two natures in one person. He has been revealed as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and there has been an emphasis throughout this epistle on his superiority. He is above the angels. He is greater than all the prophets. He is greater than Moses and greater than the Levitical priests. He comes from a superior order of priests. And he is immutable or unchangeable.

The first chapter in Hebrews is certainly a key chapter in all the New Testament when it comes to the person of Christ. It's a good chapter to study often and even memorize in order to gain a fuller understanding and appreciation of Christ. But now when we come to this statement in 8:1 we're being told what the principle thing is in the midst of all this rich doctrine. And this statement – this sum, if you will, does not diminish in any way the importance of the other doctrines, it only underscores the fact that these other glorious truths about Christ are meant to shed light on this principle thing.

So again I ask – what is the sum? – or what is this principle thing? It's the glorious truth that we have an high priest in the person of Christ. Paul has been bringing out this truth all along up to this point.

- Heb 2:17 *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto [his] brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things [pertaining] to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.*
- Heb 3:1 *Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;*
- Heb 4:14 *Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast [our] profession.*
- Heb 4:15 *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as [we are, yet] without sin.*
- Heb 5:10 *Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.*

And Paul is not done with this subject yet. According to one commentary the focus shifts in chp. 8 from the person of the high priest to the activity of the high priest and this focus will carry us through chp. 8, chp. 9, and a portion of chp. 10. You begin to see, I trust, how strongly Paul wants his readers to understand this truth of Christ being our high priest. This has to be a key theme in this epistle to the Hebrews and the question I'd like to answer this morning is why? Why does this truth of Christ stand out from the other glorious truths of Christ that are revealed in this epistle? By answering that question I'll be demonstrating the theme I want you to consider with me this morning. The theme, simply stated is this:

The Principal Truth – Christ as Our High Priest

Why is this such an important truth to grasp? Consider with me first of all that the importance of this truth is seen:

I. Because of Our Need

I made the point a couple of studies back that without a priest there can be no salvation. Salvation is attributed to Christ's priestly ministry back in 7:24,25 *But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore* and underscore this word *wherefore* in v. 25. That word tells us that because Christ continues ever and has an unchangeable priesthood *he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.* There is a direct connection in those two verses between Christ's priesthood and salvation.

A priest, you see, is a mediator – one who can come between God and men. It was the cry of Job's heart for such a mediator or a daysman, an umpire so to speak. So we read in Job 9:32,33 *For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.* The word *daysman* is translated by the word *mediator* in the Greek version of the Old Testament. And doesn't this passage in Job give us a clear picture of a

mediator? He's one that can come between two conflicting parties and effect reconciliation between them.

This is, of course, a daunting task for a mediator who would come between God and man. How can sinful man be reconciled to a holy God? That's the challenge of the ages. That's the challenge that it took the genius of Divine wisdom to solve. How can justice be satisfied other than the penalty for the broken law being paid by sinners? How can man be saved and God be satisfied?

It wouldn't seem that even with an advocate to represent him to God that the sinner could have any case to plead. He's guilty and there's no getting around it. It would take the ministry of just the right kind of mediator to bring about peace between the sinner and God under such circumstances as the sinner's guilt. It would take a mediator who could represent man and could satisfy God. And Christ as God and as man could do both. He could represent men because He is a man and he could satisfy God because in the power of his deity he could offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins and thus satisfy the demands of justice. And because justice is satisfied he has grounds for a plea that can prevail with God. *He ever liveth to make intercession for us* – verse 25 teaches us. We have a mediator, then, that can plead with God and prevail. We have a mediator that is well pleasing to God and should be well pleasing to us.

It's no wonder that Paul would lay such great stress on the truth of Christ's priesthood. This is indeed the principal thing. And once you recognize just what an extraordinary priest Christ was and is and how he alone could be the mediator between God and men then it also makes you realize just how ridiculous the notion becomes that we would find men in church offices today who call themselves priests. How could they function as mediators? – they're sinners just like you and I are sinners. How could they effect reconciliation? They can't atone for their own sins never mind the sins of others.

Priests today are faced with the same problems that the priests of the Old Testament faced. They're ineffective because they can't possibly qualify to act as mediators between God and men. The fact that they're sinners disqualifies them and the fact that they have no power makes them unable to atone for sins. All the Old Testament priests could do was serve as shadows that would point us to the greater priest that was to come. We certainly don't need shadow priests today when the light of the glory of God has shone forth in the face of Jesus Christ.

So we stand in need of a great high priest and Christ is that great high priest. Because he is that great high priest salvation can come to us to the uttermost. Salvation in all its fullness can flow freely to those who receive it by faith. You've heard me say it on many occasions that when it comes to the mediatorial offices of Christ his priesthood is foundational to his other offices. He is our prophet, priest and king. As our prophet he declares to us what he is and what he's accomplished by his priestly ministry. And he won his office as our king by successfully accomplishing our redemption.

Do you begin to see how Christ's priesthood is the principal thing? If we would know the joy of salvation and would bask in the peace of God then we must lay hold of this principal truth that we have such an high priest.

There is another reason why this truth of the priesthood of Christ is the principal truth. It's the principal truth:

II. Because It Magnifies Christ

Notice from the words of v. 1 what it says regarding Christ's exaltation – *We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.* Our high priest is set on the right hand of the throne of God, the verse says. The language is figurative and underscores the truth that Christ rules and reigns.

If you remember the content of chp. 1 then you will know the connection between the words of our text and 1:3 which speaking of Christ says that *He being the brightness of [his] glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.* Do you see the connection? In both verses we discover Christ sitting at the right hand of God. In 8:1 he is referred to as our high priest who is set on the right hand of throne of the Majesty on high. In 1:3 we discover that he took his place at the right hand of God after the successful accomplishment of his priestly work which was to purge us from our sins. He won the right to rule, in other words, by virtue of his successful accomplishment of purging our sins.

And so we see an emphasis in these verses on his exaltation. He's earned his place to rule from the right hand of God his Father. It's interesting to note from Scripture that the right hand signifies the place of power. When the children of Israel celebrated their deliverance from slavery they sang unto the Lord in Exodus 15. And in the course of their song we note the words of Ex 15:6 *Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.*

I find it very encouraging to think on Christ ruling with power from the right hand of the Majesty on high. When rulers on earth disappoint us as they seem to do with great regularity and frequency it's good to know that there is one who rules and overrules from his throne above. And such is his power in comparison to the power of the kings of the earth that Isaiah can tell us in Isa 40:17 *All nations before him [are] as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. Behold,* Isaiah says two verses earlier in v. 15 *the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance.*

Later in that chapter the Lord answers a complaint that comes to him from his people. Isa 40:27 *Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?* The complaint in this verse is that the people of God are powerless and the cause of the Lord does not seem to be advancing.

The Lord's answer to this complaint is a well known passage that we have cause to appropriate to ourselves often: Listen to the words of Isaiah 40:28-31 *Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

Because Christ is in the place of power he is able to communicate his power to his followers. And we are enabled as his loyal subjects to draw from him strength above our own strength. Does not this wonderful provision from Christ magnify his exaltation in your mind and heart?

But let's note also that the right hand is not only the place of power but it's the place of acceptance. Christ was accepted by his Father and his atoning death for our sins was accepted of his Father. He took his place on the right hand of the Majesty on high after having purged our sins (1:3). And if Christ is accepted, then we too are accepted of God in him. It is those on Christ's right hand on the day of judgment in Mt. 25 that are accepted and not rejected. And so we have further grounds for magnifying Christ. We magnify him for his power that he's willing to communicate to us and we magnify him for the favor that we enjoy in being accepted of God in him.

But not only do we find Christ magnified by his exaltation but we find him magnified in our affections on account of his condescension. Note the words of v. 2 where Christ is designated as *A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.* A minister is a servant. Here is tremendous condescension on the part of Christ – he exercises his rule in such a way as to serve us. He ever liveth to make intercession for us we read earlier in 7:25. He works all things together for our good Paul tells us in Rom. 8.

He illustrated his service to his disciples when he took the part of a servant in Jn 13 and washed his disciples feet. *Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am* he says in Jn. 13:13. He doesn't set aside his Lordship, you see, but he uses his Lordship to serve his people. And he intends that his people follow his example in this. Listen to what he says in vv. 14,15 *If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.* The point being that we should serve one another in love.

And so Christ's priesthood is the principal thing. It's the principal thing because of our need and it's the principal thing because it magnifies Christ. I hope this morning that as we think on Christ he is magnified in your heart. I hope your faith in him is magnified and I hope your affection for him is magnified. The more we can apprehend by faith the truth of having such a high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high the more he will be magnified in our esteem.

There is one more aspect of the truth of Christ's priesthood that sets it forth as the principal thing. We've seen its importance because of our need and because it magnifies Christ. Consider with me finally that we see the importance of Christ's priesthood:

III. Because of What We Possess

Do you see the possessive form of the statement in v. 1? *We have such an high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*

We have – the verse says. This is something that we possess. We are, of course, the subjects of Christ's kingdom and children of the most high. But on the other hand our Savior is ours. Our high priest is ours. And all that his priestly ministry encompasses belongs to us. As our high priest he performs the function of his priesthood by interceding for us. And we can be sure that what he prays for he will not be denied. And he prays for all the benefits of the salvation that he's purchased for us to be applied to us.

This is why Paul could write to the Corinthians in 1Cor. 3:21-23 *Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.*

There's more, you see, to our relationship to Christ than our merely being the subjects of his kingdom. We are that and we glory in that but at the same time we recognize that there is a far greater intimacy than that to our relationship to our sovereign Lord. We are married to our high priest. His followers make up his bride and we are as close to him as a bride is to her husband. We are his purchased possession. He belongs to us and we belong to him.

This is why we sing:

Loved with everlasting love, Led by grace that love to know; Spirit, breathing from above, Thou hast taught me it is so! Oh, this full and perfect peace! Oh, this transport all divine! In a love which cannot cease, I am His, and He is mine.

It makes for an interesting study just to note the "we have" phrases that occur in the epistles of the New Testament.

- *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ – Rom. 5:1.*
- *By Christ also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God – Rom. 5:2*
- *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God – 1Cor. 2:12*
- *But we have the mind of Christ – 1Cor. 2:16*
- *We have liberty in Christ Jesus – Gal. 2:4*
- *We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace – Eph. 1:7*
- *In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him – Eph. 3:12*

These are some of the things that *we have* – the list could go on. The point I want to make, however, is that we have all of these wonderful blessings that pertain to salvation and life and heaven because *We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*

What a glorious truth to meditate upon in terms of all that it encompasses! The question that now needs to be considered by all who are under the sound of my voice is this – Do you have such an high priest to represent you? Do you have Christ? Can you say, as the hymnwriter does – *That Man of Calvary has won my heart from me, And died to set me free, Blest Man of Calvary!*

You certainly need such a high priest. We know in the realm of Civil Courts and even Criminal Courts how anyone going before a judge needs a lawyer – someone to represent him and be his advocate. How much more do you need an advocate and someone to represent you when it comes to standing before the judgment bar of God?

Christ is willing to be that advocate. He is qualified to be that advocate. No one else is so qualified and no one else can prevail with God but Christ can. He has fulfilled the law, you see, on behalf of those who have failed to fulfill it. And he has paid the debt to the broken law by the shedding of his blood. This was his priestly activity – he offered himself for our sins. All that's required on your part is that you see your need for him and go to him in prayer and beseech him to be your high priest to represent you.

To those that have gone to him who can say with other believers that *We have such an high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens* – I trust today that you find yourselves compelled to worship him and praise him and thank him for his provision.

Of the things which we have spoken this is the sum Paul says in v. 1. This is the essence of the matter. This is the principal thing and therefore the main thing that you need to grip your mind and heart – *We have such an high priest who is set on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.* May the Spirit of God take this all encompassing truth and stamp it deeply on our hearts so that our lives will be transformed by it. I dare say that if the truth of this text will find its way into your heart so that it becomes the ruling force of your life then you will know peace and joy and stability and blessing throughout your days in this world.