

<sup>20</sup> And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, <sup>21</sup> but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever." <sup>22</sup> This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. <sup>23</sup> The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, <sup>24</sup> but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. <sup>25</sup> Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. <sup>26</sup> For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. <sup>27</sup> He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. <sup>28</sup> For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

## Introduction

We can get our bearings on our text for this morning (Heb. 7-20-28) by asking and answering two questions. 1) First, what is the theme or focus of this textual unit? We know that ideas continue regarding the priesthood of Christ ("and it" refers back to His priesthood that is different from **those who formerly became priests** under Moses. But should we concentrate on God's oath from Psalm 110 (7.21), the better covenant (7.22-24), our Lord's intercession (7.25), or His qualifications to be a high priest (7.26-28)? Well...the focus is on "**able to save to the uttermost**" (7.25a). Here is why we can make that claim: it is because 20-24 lead up to that point in 25a and 25b-28 point back to it ("Consequently" in 25a indicates that 20-24 leads to a conclusion in 25a, and "for" opening v. 26 indicates further support of that conclusion that comes in 26-28). 2) Second, we also need to ask: what does it mean to say that **he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him** (7.25a)? To save "to the uttermost" has, as Hughes puts it, an ambivalence that enriches the idea here because it combines the two ideas of "for all time" with "completeness" (*Hebrews*, 269). Thus, our Lord's saving ability is complete and total covering all time and all circumstances. These answers help us narrow down the theme to the perfect *saving ability* of our priest, but, more accurately, they direct us to Christ, the *one who has* this ability, to His perfection as a Savior. Thus, we come up with this title: "Jesus is Our Perfect Savior." In the outline, we will relate His perfection to His status as a priest in three ways: Jesus is a perfect Savior because He is a priest that lives forever, because He is sufficient for the priestly task, and because He is the priestly offering.

### 1A. Jesus is a perfect Savior because He is a priest that lives forever (20-25)

What is the connection indicated by the conjunction "and" that opens v. 20? He continues the thought of the superiority of Christ's priesthood to the Levitical priesthood. His is superior and introduces a better hope (7.19) because it was "with an oath" (7.21).

<sup>20</sup> And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, <sup>21</sup> but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever" (7.20-21).

Floating in the background of this oath is a relationship between the Lord and David's Lord (Ps. 110.1). This is a proclamation, an announcement, and even more, a promise from the Father to the Son. It is not the covenant with Adam reiterated, the Abrahamic covenant in a renewed form, or the Davidic covenant restated. These earthly covenants are ways that God's purposes are being worked out in history. What we have here is the eternal covenant of redemption in which the members of the trinity made covenant with one another regarding a saving plan. These earthly covenant administrations are realizations and outworkings of His eternal covenant. Through David, the Lord revealed His promise to David's Lord. The Holy Spirit gives us an amazing glimpse into the inter-trinitarian relationship. He tells us that the Lord added an oath to the promise. God did it this way and revealed that He did it this way so that we would have assurance regarding the immutability (the unchangeability; the unchanging character of) His

purpose: He **will not change his mind**. He adds oath to promise (and the Holy Spirit has it recorded) due to our weakness in order to doubly assure us of His grace and good will toward us.

What is the implication of this fact that Jesus has His priesthood by means of an oath? By this means, Jesus became the surety of something better: **This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant** (7.22). Now we have a contrast between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant as promise-oriented administrations of His saving purposes in salvation history that reflect His unchanging covenant plan. The agreement between the Father and the Son gives Jesus a role within history in which He is the very assurance of a movement forward in redemptive history from a lesser to a better covenant.

What makes it better (building on the fact that Jesus is the guarantor, the surety, the assurance of it)? It is better, precisely because His appointed role is to be a priest forever: **"The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever'"** (7.20). The author thus elaborates on the fact that His priesthood is permanent because it is based on the oath that it is forever. This opens up an important contrast: <sup>23</sup> **The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,** <sup>24</sup> **but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever** (7.23-24). He makes the point that Jesus holds office as a priest permanently, in contrast to the Levitical priests because death ended their office holding but not His (**they were prevented by death from continuing in office,** <sup>24</sup> **but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever**).

Noticeably, the writer does not state that Jesus did not die. He tells us that He is a priest forever, His priesthood is permanent, and He continues forever (7.21, 24). Jesus did face death, but it did not conquer Him; He conquered it. In the OT, the fact of death repeatedly ended the work of one high priest after another. According to Josephus (a 1<sup>st</sup> century historian), there were 83 high priests from Aaron (1500 BC) to the destruction of the temple in 70AD. That is a life work on average per high priest of approximately 18 years. There were many of them in succession because death defeated them and ended their work. Not so for Jesus. According to God's unchanging purpose (revealed to us by oath added to promise), Jesus has a priesthood that is better, far better because death does not stand in the way or interrupt His work. He is a high priest *forever* after the order of Melchizedek.

On this firm foundation, the author concludes that Jesus is able to save sinners for all time and through all circumstances: **Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him** (7.25a). He is *a perfect Savior* because He is a priest and mediator for sinners that lives forever, and does His work in the power of an indestructible life (7.16). As we have said, a priest is a kind of Jacob's ladder between earth and heaven to bridge the gap between God who is holy and man who is sinful. A major task of a priest is to intercede before God on behalf of needy sinners. Because Jesus is forever a priest living as He does in the power of an indestructible life, His intercession is constant: **he always lives to make intercession for them** (25b).

## 2A. Jesus is a perfect Savior because He is sufficient for the task (26)

He is the kind of priest that can do the job. Because of death, the former priests suffered and died holding office temporarily. No one could fix their hope on these priests, but Jesus is sufficient. Note the emphasis: He is sufficient because He is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners and exalted: **For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens** (7.26).

It fits what we need perfectly to have such a high priest as Jesus because of the moral attributes that apply to Him. The first four make this point clearly. He is holy, which means that He is set apart to God, devoted to God, for service. His innocence is such that no condemning word can be made to stick to His record. He remained unstained from all ceremonial defilements of the Law. Now when the writer tells us that He is **separated from sinners** we have an elevation of the points already made. This informs us that Jesus is not even in the same category with sinners. Therefore, His devotion, untainted-ness, and innocence are perfect. Moreover, His separation

from those who break God's law not only heightens the three moral qualities stated; it also tells us that He is free from anything and everything that makes man a sinner. "Separated from sinners" enforces (lengthens) the distance of Christ from man in his fallenness. It puts him outside the category of fallen sinners, altogether. Therefore, his holiness is perfect, his innocence is perfect, and untainted-ness is perfect. It also indicates that He is free from all other moral qualities or immoral qualities of sinners. He is morally perfect. But what about "exalted" in this connection? Does it fit or is it the odd man out? It fits because Jesus is exalted by His resurrection, ascension, and coronation. But to what status is he exalted in these ways? It is to the status of King. And more, it is to the status of King of righteousness and peace.

If Jesus lacked these qualities, then He would not be a fitting high priest. He would not "befit" what we need in a mediator. His intercession would not have acceptance with God. But indeed, He is perfect as a man among men, perfectly holy, untainted, and innocent as sovereign Lord and King of righteousness. Therefore, He is able to save sinners fully and completely in the totality of their existence for now and forevermore. He is the perfect Savior!

### 3A. Jesus is a perfect Savior because He is the priestly offering (27-28)

He is a priest that supplies what we need. Here are some words that leap off the page: **he offered up himself (7.27)**. It is fitting (needful; appropriate to our need) to have such a high priest who is **holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.** <sup>27</sup> **He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself (7.26-27).**

To appreciate this point we have to make the necessary adjustments in thought without losing the awesome power of the good news that leaps us at us from the written word: <sup>2</sup> **He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.** <sup>3</sup> **Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people (5.2-3)**. What applies to OT high priests applies to Jesus *mutatis mutandis*. There is ground for sympathy in the priests of old because they knew their own sins and had to make offerings for their own sins before they came on the Day of Atonement to make the special offering for the people (Lev. 16). How can we apply this to Christ? We can hear that it does apply to Him, for one, in the notion of sympathy from the previous chapter (4.15). Thus, we have to apply it boldly but thoughtfully because He faced temptation like we face it, but He was without sin (4.15).

However, in the case of our Lord, there is no difference between His own sins and the sins of His people, not when it comes to the supreme offering! Now we have the marvelous and unspeakable point: as high priest, the Lord Jesus, who was tempted in every respect as we are and yet without sin, *owned our sins as His own* so that He could make the final atonement. Accordingly, when Jesus was baptized by John, He repented of *His* sins, that is, of *the sins that He owned as His own* (Mat. 3.13-17). He could then sprinkle His blood as it were on the altar of a broken law before a holy God. He was made sin, He who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5.21). Every high priest is a sinner and Jesus is such *in a unique way*. That makes Him a perfect Savior. He offered Himself up to God as an offering for sin to bear the punishment for sin in our place. He owned our sins in order to endure the punishment that we should endure.

The law appointed men in their weakness, but God's oath (revealed through David, Ps. 110) appointed a Son who is made perfect forever. This locks us into the fact that Jesus learned obedience through suffering *including the suffering of death*. His obedience was covenantal obedience of a son to his father, yes, but more, of God the Son in obedience to His eternal covenant with God the Father. It is the perfection of covenantal obedience that makes Him the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him: <sup>7</sup> **In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.** <sup>8</sup> **Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.** <sup>9</sup> **And being made perfect, he**

became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, <sup>10</sup> being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5.7-10).

It is an outstanding fact that Jesus lives and is the perfect high priest who is sufficient to do the work of offering sacrifice well-pleasing to God. It is an even more outstanding fact that He offers Himself as the perfect substitute in our place. He intercedes as offerer and offering! Therefore, He is a perfect Savior because death not only could not interrupt His work as a priest; death also became part of His work as a priest. He learned obedience through the death that He suffered.

<sup>9</sup> But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. <sup>10</sup> For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering (Heb. 2.9-10).

That suffering was the punishment that belonged to us for our sins. He died for our sins and was raised from the dead for our justification. Therefore, He holds the power of life and death in His hands: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades (Rev. 1.17-18).

### Conclusion

We have the duty, yes, and the privilege to draw near to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. If you see Him, if you see His perfection, then you will desire Him and draw near to God through Him. This is a nearness of fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 1.3; 2 Cor. 13.14). It is the privilege of the communion of the Spirit and the communion of the saints. We have access, and more than that, we have fellowship, friendship, and conversation. We have the blessing of a personal relationship with God. Since He draws near to sinners then how much more ought we to draw near to God through Him!

It is through Christ that we have access to God. Therefore, it is so right and proper to end our prayers "in Jesus name." Every time we pray we have the privilege of entering into the inner place beyond the curtain. We draw near to God *through Him*. He opens a way to God; it is the way, the only way to the Father. As He said, "no man comes to the Father but by me" (Jn. 14.6). As Peter said, "there is no other name in heaven or on earth given among men whereby we must be saved than the name of Jesus our Lord" (Acts 4.12).

But it is not without cost. A way had to be prepared for us to enter. Jesus paved the way as a forerunner on our behalf. Our forerunner and Sabbath King is a perfect Savior:

...he offered up himself (7.27)...

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (7.25).

**Let us fall down before the majesty of God our Father who planned our redemption, God the Son who accomplished our redemption, and God the Holy Spirit who applies our redemption. May the Spirit give us the assurance of the Father's oath that made Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. May He assure us that death in no way prevents Jesus from continuing His effective intercession on our behalf, because He continues a priest forever in the power of an indestructible life. To the triune God be all glory, now and forevermore, amen.**