

Text: Heb 8.3-6a

Last week our topic was: *The True Priest in the True Tabernacle*

As F. F. Bruce opens his commentary on the next verse from last week's text, he asks:

“But if Jesus ministers as high priest in this authentic sanctuary, what is the nature of his ministry?”¹

That is the question, and the author of Hebrews wants to lay out for us how much more excellent the ministry of Jesus is than that of any OT priest.

The excellent ministry of Christ makes loyalty to him even more critical. The Hebrew Christians who first read this epistle were considering reverting to their old Judaism to make life easier for themselves.

We don't share their situation, but we also have temptations about going back on Jesus.

- Someone might think that the Christian life is too hard, and it would be easier to forget it and go back to the world.
- Someone might be confronted with time pressures, and decide to back off on his Christian activities, even if “just for a little while”
- Someone might find people in the world are hostile to the gospel message and hesitate to speak up.

There are many ways to back off from Jesus, some more serious than others.

My goal in preaching Hebrews is to build in you a fervent commitment to following Jesus no matter what it takes, no matter how hard it might become, no matter what price you must pay.

Today we are considering the topic,

A More Excellent Ministry

The more excellent ministry of Jesus ought to make you love him more and want to serve him more. That's our goal.

Proposition: Jesus' ministry is more excellent because it is the real ministry.

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 182.

I. The essence of priesthood (3)

A. Made a priest for a reason: to offer gifts and sacrifices

1. New Bible Dictionary:

“In the OT a dozen words are used of gifts of one kind or other. The sacrifices and other offerings were gifts to God (Ex. 28:38; Nu. 18:11, etc.).”²

2. Alfred Edersheim:

“Every unprejudiced reader of the Bible must feel that sacrifices constitute the centre of the Old Testament.”³

- a. Edersheim refers to modern more liberal Jews who insist that sacrifices not essential
- b. Even go so far as to say Moses only tolerated sacrifices and prophets labored against them

3. Concept of priesthood

a. Definition of a priest:

“one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God”⁴

b. Commentaries

“The concept of priesthood logically entails the concept of sacrifice.”⁵

“It is essential to the conception of a priest that he should have an offering”⁶

² L. L. Morris, “Gift,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 411.

³ Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1959), 106.

⁴ Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

⁵ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 206.

⁶ F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction.*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 106.

c. Why is sacrifice essential?

- 1) The priest stands between God and man
- 2) The priest offers something to God to effect reconciliation between God and man

This is true of all religions that have a priesthood

4. A key distinction among denominations

- a. Non-liturgical churches (Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists) have pastors not priests: there are no sacrifices
- b. Liturgical churches (Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox) have priests: the sacrifice of the mass (or eucharist)

B. If priests are made to offer, then the Lord must have something to offer

1. Our text doesn't spell it out here, but we know he is priest *and* sacrifice

Heb 7.27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Heb 9.14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

2. The emphasis of our text is on the “priestliness” of his ministry
 - a. Every high priest appointed to “offer” – a word of priestliness
 - b. So it is necessary that this one have something to “offer” – same word, but slight difference
 - c. Their offerings: “iterative present,” *i.e.* again and again and again – “many iterations”
 - d. His offering: once-for-all

The essence of priesthood is sacrifice; the essence of his priesthood is the One Sacrifice.

II. The ephemerality of earthly priesthood (5)

A. Why “ephemerality”?

1. For alliteration’s sake, of course, but also
2. An ephemera is “something of no lasting significance”⁷
3. Something that is “ephemeral” is something that lasts only one day or for a very short time
4. Ephemerality = “the quality or state of being ephemeral”⁸

B. The OT priesthood and the sacrifices lasted longer than just one day, but there is an ephemeral quality to them

1. The OT system is a “copy and shadow” of heavenly things
 - a. Copy = model, example
 - b. Shadow = “a reflected image” (def. no. 2)⁹
2. In the instructions to Moses, God told Moses to make the tabernacle (and its components) according to the pattern God gave

Ex 25.40 “See that you make *them* after the **pattern** for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.

Ex 25.9 “According to all that I am going to **show** you, *as* the **pattern** of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct *it*.”

Ex 26.30 “Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to its **plan** which you have been **shown** in the mountain.

Ex 27.8 “You shall make it hollow with planks; as it was **shown** to you in the mountain, so they shall make it.

“This ‘pattern’ (referred to also in Ex. 25:9; 26:30; 27:8) was something visible; it did not consist merely of the verbal directions of Ex. 25–30. It may have been a model for which the verbal directions served as a commentary; it may have

⁷ Mish, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*.

⁸ Mish.

⁹ Mish.

been the heavenly dwelling-place of God which Moses was permitted to see.”¹⁰

3. A quick comment on Platonism

- a. Philo, a Jew of Alexandria, famously tried to integrate the OT with Platonic ideas
- b. Many Christian leaders also attempted the same, for various reasons
- c. This verse is one of those used in such Christian attempts
- d. The problem is that Plato is a pagan, his views have similarities, but many incompatibilities
- e. Farrar’s dismissal:

“It is one of several narrow points on which were built huge inverted pyramids of inference, which even when it was *intrinsically* tenable, could still not be deduced from the passages quoted.”¹¹

4. Compare the description in Heb 8.2: “in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man”
 - a. There is a true sanctuary in heaven
 - b. The tabernacle/temple on earth were mere copies, mere shadows
 - c. As such, merely a shadow of the real
 - d. And that makes the offerings of the OT priesthood shadow offerings, not real

They represented something to come, but were not the same thing as what would come — this is “the ephemerality of the OT priesthood”

¹⁰ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 184.

¹¹ Farrar, *Hebrews*, 107.

III. The excellency of our Lord's priesthood (4, 6a)

A. He has no priesthood on earth (4)

1. Not only “not a high priest” but “not a priest”
2. The OT priesthood was in place, he had no place in it
3. The word “since” could be translated “there being” as in:

He would not be a priest at all, **there being** those who offer gifts

B. He has a more excellent ministry (6)

1. The contrast of the passage:
 - a. On the one hand, if he were on earth, he would be no priest (4)
 - b. On the other hand, he has obtained a more excellent ministry (6)
2. Perfect tense verb: he attained it in the past and now possesses a more excellent ministry
 - a. Basic meaning of “more excellent” — “differing”
 - b. But becomes a comparative of value — “surpassing”
3. Why is it more excellent?
 - a. His offering was brought to the true tabernacle and sanctuary, the very presence of God, not a shadow of the sanctuary
 - b. His offering was a once-for-all offering
 - c. He then sat down, ministry done, redemption accomplished forever

Conclusion:

Proposition: Jesus' ministry is more excellent because it is the real ministry.

The OT ministry, appointed by God, a true ministry, yet a shadow ministry.

The ministry of Jesus: the real ministry, the one that accomplished forever what it set out to do.

For that reason, you can put your whole trust in him.

Even more, you should put your whole heart into serving him forever.