

Hebrews 8:1-13 "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

As we've been studying the letter to these Hebrew Christians we've seen how our writer seems to labor over this idea of the priesthood of Jesus Christ and why it's important to understand how He is our High Priest.

Our writer also points out that, though other priesthoods were important in pointing to Christ as a way of foreshadowing the reality of our Lord, they were never intended to take precedence, because they could not claim to be the very substance of who Jesus is; the Son of the living God who took on flesh to personally die for you and me.

His death was part of His priestly duty in being a mediator between God and men and in His priestly duty He also brought a pleasing sacrifice to the Father which atoned for our sins, once for all. He was that sacrifice.

It would seem strange that this teaching would have to be repeated for these Hebrew Christians in such a way, and yet it was important to do so in light of their background with a priesthood which was still in existence, and was still a part of their Jewish experience.

There was the temptation for many to be influenced by other Jews who did not know Christ and who were trying to bring these "lost souls" back to the "true flock" of God under the Levitical system of worship.

But to suggest that only Jews of that day were affected, who had close proximity to the Temple worship and the priestly functions, is to miss the importance of how this portion of scripture is to speak to all of God's people in every age.

The Holy Spirit desires to draw our attention to the heavenly as we draw close to Christ who is our Prophet, Priest and King seated at the right hand of the Father. This world has a tendency to keep our attention only on the things happening around us at any given moment. God wants us to realize how wonderful our salvation is in this world as we keep our eyes on Him.

COL 3:1-3 "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right

hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

This doesn't exclude the importance of the things of this world in which we need to live, but it does show us what our priorities should be as we live in this world knowing that this is not our home. And if this is not our home, then we should be storing up treasure for our future home and not being so preoccupied with this world that our eyes are taken off of our prize who is Christ the Lord.

And so there really is a point to all of what our writer of Hebrews has been addressing and he's about to fill us in on some of it.

HEB 8:1-2 "The 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, 2 and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man."

Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, has sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.... unlike the Levitical priesthood in Israel who were never permitted to sit before the Lord but who were to stand. This is not some insignificant contrast.

In God's word there are terms which describe certain things for our instruction. Sitting and standing for example. To stand before God as a priest suggests that the work is never finished, but is continually active. The term "sit" suggests that there is a resting from one's labor's as Jesus did from His when He completed our redemption and then rose bodily from the dead to fulfill His plan with power and glory.

Our High Priest's work needs no more work done to it to make it effective. The priests in Israel, right up to the destruction of the temple in A.D.70, were continually offering sacrifices. Their work never seemed to be completed.

Our High Priest doesn't sit on an earthly throne, He sits at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,..." which speaks more of His royal and authoritative position rather than a particular posture we would usually associate with a person on a throne.

But, what our writer again wants to help us see is that our High Priest is not ministering in a sanctuary which is accessed only by the Levitical High Priests; in other words an earthly dwelling. This

sanctuary, where Jesus ministers, is the very place where God dwells.

But we need to be careful not to misunderstand Christ's present ministry on our behalf. F.F. Bruce makes this important comment: "In passing we may note that it is not implied that Jesus is continually or repeatedly presenting His offering; this is excluded by Heb.7:27, which contrasts the daily sacrifices of the Aaronic high priests with the offering which the Christians' high priest has already presented once for all."

Unfortunately, there are certain religious institutions which still teach that Jesus is presently offering Himself up in a sacrificial manner. In fact, this is the major premise in the Roman Catholic mass where Jesus is dying for our sins each time the mass takes place. This is the reason they have a crucifix instead of an empty cross in their churches. The crucifix still has Jesus affixed to the cross implying perpetual death for our sins.

This is also the reason they believe that the bread and wine in the mass is literally transformed into the actual physical Body and blood of Jesus, continually broken and spilled for our sins each time the mass takes place. This doctrine is known as transubstantiation.

But Jesus no longer needs to die daily for our sins. He dwells in the true tabernacle never having to repeat that sacrifice. And in dwelling there He holds all power and authority. After Christ's resurrection Jesus told His disciples in MAT 28:18"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

There is no one in this world we should ever place above our High Priest seated in the heavenly.

HEB 8:2 "and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man."

First notice that Jesus is now presently serving you and me in the sanctuary or the tabernacle. The imagery here is not of the temple but of the Holy of holies within the temple where the High Priests came into the presence of God. The word serve or as the NAS has "minister" carries the idea of unceasing activity. Christ is ever interceding on our behalf. But He intercedes in the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

And yet man wants to continually bring Christ down and place our Lord in their own sanctuary in a way which limits Him to their

desires and understanding. Many of the cults in this world have tried to achieve this by creating a Jesus in their own image and teaching others that they may only have access to Him through them.

Even some "Christian" churches have attempted to do this with such false teachings which would elevate them as the only "true church" which has the keys to the kingdom; in essence, setting themselves up as the true priests who have access to God on your behalf.

There is only one true Priest and He is the one who does not dwell in an earthly tabernacle made by men.

HEB 9:11-12 "When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption."

ACT 7:47-50 "But it was Solomon who built the house for him. 48 "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: 49 "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? 50 Has not my hand made all these things?" (Isaiah 66:1,2)

Our writer tells us that everything our Lord revealed in the law which pointed to Jesus Christ was meant to be used as a tutor to lead us to Christ, not the means to our salvation. They were temporal guides which spoke of a heavenly reality found in our Lord who was the substance of those shadows.

HEB 8:3-5 "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. 4 If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. 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: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." (Exodus 25:40)

The pattern which Moses was to follow for the sanctuary was just that; a pattern. The word pattern in the Greek here in our text is *tupos* and it means the mark from a blow. In other words, if you

were to take a hammer which had a special design on the face of the head and you were to hit a piece of soft wood with it, the impression it left on the wood would be the pattern.

The pattern would not become the actual design on the hammer, but it would look similar to it. This is similar to what our text is showing us. The pattern Moses was given was not the actual tabernacle of God being represented on earth; it was simply a facsimile or a copy of the true one found only in the present heaven. It was meant to be a shadow.

I like the way Donald Guthrie puts it in his commentary on Hebrews: "A shadow cannot in fact exist unless there is an object to cast it." Jesus Christ is that object.

In verse three our writer points out that there were priests who served in this copy of the tabernacle and in this copy they had functions to offer both sacrifices and gifts. They were appointed by God to do this. But in verse four our writer points out that if this were the priesthood which was the original and not the copy, then Jesus should have served as priest in this earthly tabernacle.

And yet He didn't because He didn't come into this world to serve as a High Priest in the copy, rather He came to serve us in the original which is heavenly in nature, not earthly. F.F. Bruce makes the observation: "On earth Jesus was a layman, excluded by the law from all priestly functions." Remember, He was from the tribe of Judah, a priest had to be from the tribe of Levi.

Like the priests who served in the Tabernacle in this earthly copy, who had to bring sacrifices, so too Jesus brought a sacrifice which was pleasing to the Father. But He brought His sacrifice, which took place on earth, into the very presence of the Father on our behalf. A better sacrifice in an infinite way which never had to be repeated. This makes Him a better priest after an eternal order which was represented in the pattern or copy of Melchizedek.

The whole idea here is that if this priesthood and the earthly tabernacle, which were part of the covenant God made with Moses, was the true and final covenant and priesthood, there would be no reason to get rid of it. And this is where our writer is going in our text.

HEB 8:7-9 "For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. 8 But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares

the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 9 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers 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."

The first covenant was not sufficient. This does not mean that it wasn't a righteous and good covenant. After all God made the covenant, not man. All that God does is good. God allowed man to enter into that covenant with Him, whereby they would be His people and He would be there God.

The problem was not with the covenant. The problem was with sinful man trying to keep the covenant. That's why we read in verse 8, "But God found fault with the people..." And that's where the fault always lies. The first covenant was a covenant to point people to the one true God who had an eternal plan, which was revealed in the covenant God gave as far back as Adam and Eve, after they rebelled. It was a promise of reconciliation.

But reconciliation can never be brought about by anything man can do because it will always fall short. Is there anything man can do to earn his salvation and bring himself back into a right relationship with his God? Of course not. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death, Paul tells us.

So, do you think it would be possible to be reconciled to the living and eternal God by killing a lamb, a bull or goat and having its blood be able to cleanse you from your sins? We'll let God answer that.

When the prophet Samuel spoke to King Saul because of Saul's unfaithfulness to the Lord he said in 1SA 15:22-23 "But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."

The prophet Micah in MIC 6:6-8 "With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of

my body for the sin of my soul? 8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

It is not the act of bringing a physical sacrifice to God that pleases Him, it's a heart that seeks Him and trusts Him for all things, especially the sacrifice He provides for our sin; and it's not a lamb a year old, but the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Israel's sacrificial system didn't save. Their faith in God's promises did. Out of loving obedience many of them used the shadows God gave them to point to Christ as the true lamb.

The former covenant God made with Moses, in giving the law, pointed to another, and because it pointed to another who brings in a new covenant, the first covenant was never intended to be the answer to our sin problem. And yet that is precisely what the Jews did, and continue to do, in looking to a hope which is temporal in nature.

This is also precisely what the world at large tries to do. They create their own covenant by trying to approach a holy and righteous God with the unrighteous deeds of their own doing. But God tells us that such good works are as filthy rags before Him. No such unrighteousness can dwell with God. Only perfection will do.

That's why we need a perfect sacrifice. That's why the copies in this world given to Israel were not sufficient. They only pointed to the One who is perfect and can represent us before the Father in the true tabernacle.

But even in the giving of the covenant to Moses it was always meant to show that a better one was coming; better in the sense that it would be God who would fulfill all that the law foreshadowed by the Son of God becoming a man; something you and I could never do.

Hebrews 8:8-9 ⁸ For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; ⁹ NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY

DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD.

This promise that our writer is quoting comes from Jer.31:31 and it speaks of this better covenant. This covenant will not be based on a law which cannot bring life, it will be based on life itself which can change the heart of man because it will give new life and make them into new creatures in Christ who is the Giver of this life eternal. He is that life Himself.

This new covenant which He promised to the house of Israel was to be for the entire world as well. And what would characterize this new covenant was a work which the law could never accomplish and that was a work on the inside of man.

HEB 8:10 "This is the covenant I will make with the house 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."

This is what God always had in mind. He was never looking for people who are robots or who simply program themselves to follow a set of rules and regulations with the intent of earning favor with God. No the law was given to show us how short we fall from God's perfection. But there is a new law at work in the lives of people because it's a new life which only Christ can give.

This is precisely what Christ spoke of when He had the supper with His disciples in that upper room. He was proclaiming that the new covenant was upon them and they would no longer need to be limited to just shadows and copies. They now had the reality in their presence as each believer from this time forth would have.

1CO 11:23-26 "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

This should have been the greatest celebration in all of Israel. The New covenant was soon to be inaugurated. But it could only come about as the Old covenant had foreshadowed it. A sacrifice must

take place; a perfect lamb must be slain. The High Priest must bring this sacrifice into the tabernacle in God's very presence.

This is exactly what Jesus did as our High Priest and sacrifice at the same time. This new covenant would bring about a new life. A life where God would change the heart. "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."

The prophet Ezekiel had the same message given to him by God in EZE 11:19-20 "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. 20 Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God."

This new life in Christ is just that. God has given you and me, in Christ, an undivided heart. A heart which is one with Him. That heart of stone which was unable to be molded is now a heart of flesh that God and only God can create in a man which has a heartbeat that beats for our Lord and Savior.

He molds and shapes us in a way where His desires become ours. His truth is placed there and we walk after Him, not under compulsion or fear of following a particular law, but out of love which follows Him and pleases Him because He is our God and Father and we belong to Him.

This is what we see in HEB 8:11 "No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest."

It won't be a matter of finding the perfect instruction as to how you can earn favor with God through a set of rules. No, God says, 'all men everywhere will now be able to know Me personally, not simply know about Me. And that will come as I give them life through the death and resurrection of My Son according to that same law which could not bring life in and of itself.'

HEB 8:12-13 "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jer. 31:31 -34) 13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear."

You and I have a great promise given to us. God says to you and me, "I will forgive your wickedness and will remember your sins no more." Actually a better translation would be "For I will be

merciful to their iniquities." Mercy is what characterizes God's grace to you and me. Even in the Old Covenant mercy was at the heart of God's message.

It is God's mercy we fall upon because in His mercy we have forgiveness and our sins are remembered no more. Christ has fully paid the price. And because the penalty has been paid in full there is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That's what he means by "I will remember their sins no more."

It's not as though God has a lapse in memory. It's not as though God doesn't see our sin. If that were the case He would not be able to discipline those whom He loves. It would not be possible to grieve the Spirit if the Spirit of God were unable to know our sin.

But the promise is that our sin will not be put to our account. He no longer sees our unrighteousness as the basis for our fellowship with Himself, He sees His Son's perfect righteousness given to us as we receive Him by faith.

The promise is given to assure us that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. David knew of this love because he saw the promises from afar and embraced them by faith as did Abraham who believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

David could say with confidence in PSA 103:11-12 "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

For the Christian Jew it was vital to understand this so as not to be tempted to go back to the old ways.

HEB 8:13 "By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear."

We have new life in the new covenant which Jesus Himself gave us through His life, death and resurrection. The first covenant is made obsolete by the new one. It's obsolete and as far as the Jew was concerned in the first century it would soon disappear. This letter was written before the destruction of the temple. Though it was obsolete the remnant of the old remained. It would soon disappear taking away any hope which could be placed in it.

God destroyed the old to give us the new. This is what Paul meant in ROM 7:6 "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have

been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

2CO 3:6 "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2CO 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Let me close with an encouragement from Peter.

1PE 1:3-5 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade -kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."

It's a new day. May we walk in the new life we have in Christ as we depend on the power of the Spirit and may we rejoice in the fact that God say's to you and me today, "I will be merciful to your iniquities and I will remember your sins no more."

That's something to rejoice in.