

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Week 7 - Day 3: Our High Priest

Hebrews 1:3 NIV “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”

Hebrews 2:9-10 “But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

If Paul’s letters explain what Jesus has done for us, the book of Hebrews explains how Jesus’ work on the cross was able to accomplish what God had in mind!

Since the beginning of time, God has been making a way for us to be a part of what He is doing. God also knows that we are prone to put ourselves first, to act on our own fears instead of trusting His plan, and to pursue what seems best for us in the short term over what we could be doing to show who our world God is. So God made a way that wiped out our failures and allowed us to be reconnected with Him. God made a covenant with Abraham, extending to him a promise that if Abraham and his descendants followed certain rules that symbolized their commitment to God and symbolized a cleansing of their sins, they could be in close relationship with God, sharing in what God was doing as He ruled His kingdom.

As we saw way back in Leviticus, these rules involved sacrificing **animals**, which were extremely precious and valuable, and they required **consistent** offerings so that one could be symbolically cleansed from their inevitable sins. They also required a **priest** who knew all the specifics to help them thank God, ask something of God, or be cleansed by God. This was the old covenant, the set of rules that the ancient people sharing in God’s kingdom adhered to while they looked forward to the coming of someone who would be the ultimate, once-and-for-all champion over sin.

Jesus is that champion!

Hebrews lays out for us that Jesus’ life and death on earth fulfilled every requirement for sin to be completely defeated, and that his resurrection and ascension into heaven completes the permanent way for us to share in God’s kingdom!

The opening chapter of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is God, and the signs, miracles, and testimonies of people around him proved that to be true. Not only is Jesus God, and therefore in perfect alignment with God’s kingdom, we also know this means he was sinless. He came to earth and lived a completely perfect life. When he sacrificed his life, taking on the role that prized and valuable animals used to play in the old covenant, his eternally spotless body and blood had the power to wipe away sin permanently

Hebrews 10:10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

We do not need to live in mourning because of our failures, or in a ping-pong game of sin and sacrifice, or in fear of death and separation from God. Jesus' perfect and divinely valuable sacrifice fulfilled any fault in the old covenant and permanently paves our way to God!

Hebrews 9:12-14 “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, thus obtaining eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”

Christ fulfilled all the obligations of the Old Testament rituals and fulfilled them in abundance. Instead of using the blood of animals, he used his own blood. Instead of the temple holy place, he went into the presence of God in heaven. Instead of requiring a priesthood to understand details of how to connect a people with God, Jesus himself intercedes on our behalf in perpetuity. In doing this, Jesus ushered in a new way for us to be a part of God's kingdom.

In this way, Hebrews shows us the arc of humanity's relationship with God. God has been designing and creating His kingdom from the very beginning. He has always been in communication with us, speaking to His people specifically in their context and in their time, in ancient times and even today:

Hebrews 1:1-2 “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe”

Jesus is the ultimate mediator between God and humanity. He is wholly God, divine and eternal, and present both at the creation and in heaven. And yet Jesus came to earth as a human, enduring all the humiliations and defeats that we experience daily. Hebrews frequently reminds us that he experienced our struggles, temptations, and knows what it feels like to be betrayed, used, and tempted to take the easy way out:

Hebrews 4:15 “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin”

Hebrews 2:18 “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted”

He knows how hard it is to remain focused on God's kingdom, and he offers his hands of mercy and deliverance. It is such a relief to know that we serve a God who understands what we go

through, who can comfort us in our pain and bolster us in our courage, and who continues to call us into a place in His plan.

Jesus is victorious over sin, forever, and is the only way to enter the eternal kingdom of God. Yet He loves us so much that He brought His kingdom to earth in order to enter into relationship with us, give our lives new purpose, and help us as we struggle with the effects of sin.

What does this mean for our lives moving forward, then?

Hebrews tells us that “by faith” (Hebrews 11) in Jesus’ role as our high priest and his new covenant promises, we too can be saved! Then, we ought to “fix our thoughts on Jesus” (Hebrews 3:1), to “hold unswervingly” to our commitment to God’s kingdom (Hebrews 4:14, Hebrews 10:23) and to encourage each other every day, remembering to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 3:13, Hebrews 10:24) as we walk through life together.

The Old Testament and the old covenant aren’t just difficult things from a different culture that don’t really relate to us. They show us that God has always, since the very beginning, been making a way for us to be a part of His kingdom, and they point to the amazing, specific victory that Jesus won for us. Everything in the Old Testament that seems strange or confusing to our culture today (and to us sometimes!) paints a picture of the tension that exists between our own priorities and God’s priorities, and of the lengths to which God will go (and the amount that He will forgive) to bring us into His Kingdom space. Here, we experience God’s immense love for us as he rules us, guides us, and shapes our futures for His kingdom purposes.

Hebrews 10:19-24 “Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”

-Kelly Kaufman

Share the Gospel: If Leviticus explains the Old Covenant way we are brought back into the presence of God, Hebrews explains the New Covenant way paved by Jesus! Jesus, who so God in the flesh, sacrifices his eternally spotless body and blood so that our sins may be permanently covered and that we would have access to God to experience His loving kingdom rule in our lives!

Personal Observations, Reflections, and Prayers:

