

Moving on to Something New

Hebrews 8

Our college years, roughly ages 19-22, are supposed to be the years when we grow from childhood to adulthood and learn to put childish ways behind us and take on the responsibilities of an adult. It's exciting to have some added freedom, but it can also be scary to leave the comfort and security of your parent's home to launch out and try to make it on your own. Some seem to make the transition quite well, while others have a difficult time. Some find themselves back home living with their parents and reverting to childhood patterns. And for most parents, that's ok for a while, but eventually it's time to move on because that's not where they want their kids to end up. They want them to function as adults.

There's a similar transition that needs to take place in our spiritual lives, where we grow from childhood to adulthood in our relationship with God. This transition can happen at any age, depending on when you become a Christian and how much spiritual nurture you receive. When you first become a Christian, you have some childlike qualities to your relationship with God. You are getting to know him and learning how he wants you to live. There are certain things you need to stop doing and other things you need to start doing, and you work on making those changes. You do them because "that's what good Christians are supposed to do." And when you do a good job, you feel good about your relationship with God, but when you screw up, you feel guilty and like he's disappointed and angry with you. So your relationship with God is based on your performance. And sometimes we can get stuck there.

But God doesn't want you to get stuck there. It's fine that you think that way at the beginning, but eventually he wants you to move on. He wants you to understand that your relationship with him isn't measured by your performance, but on something much more stable and secure. He wants you to transition from a childlike way of relating to him that focuses mostly on yourself to an adult way of relating to him that focuses on Christ. And that transition can be difficult for a lot of people to make.

This morning we are going to look at a similar transition the readers of Hebrews had to make, and what they needed to do will also give us a pattern to follow to help us transition into adulthood in our relationship with God.

In chapter 7 the author of Hebrews compared Jesus with the other high priests and showed several different things about his person that made him a superior high priest. Now in chapter 8 he begins by showing them things about his position that make him superior and the covenant he mediates superior as well.

Read Hebrews 8:1-3.

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. ³ For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.

So he begins by telling them about the position Christ is in as he serves as our high priest. He is “*seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,*” which means he is right now in the very presence of God the Father. He is where the Father is – in the “*holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.*”

Revelation 4:2-8 describes this in more detail: “*At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ³ And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. ⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, ⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second... like an ox, the third... with the face of a man, and the fourth... like an eagle in flight. ⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’”*

This is a real place, just as real as this sanctuary we’re sitting in, and Jesus is right there, right now, serving as our high priest in the very presence of God, having offered his very life on our behalf as a sacrifice for our sin.

He is in a position vastly different than the other high priests. They served in an earthly tent, which eventually became the temple. And they weren't allowed to minister in the presence of God, except for one day a year when the high priest went into the Holy of Holies to offer the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. So Christ's position in heaven, in the very presence of God was far superior to theirs. And the author goes on to explain that even further in the next few verses.

Read Hebrews 8:4-7.

⁴ Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. ⁵ They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." ⁶ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

Another reason Christ's position as priest is far superior to the others is that the purpose of their position was merely to be a "copy and shadow of the heavenly things." That means the earthly priests, sacrifices and temple were all just a preview and a model of Christ's awesome high priestly ministry in heaven. That's why, as the author says, if Jesus was on earth, he wouldn't be a priest like the others because they were only a preview of him! That's also why when God gave Moses the instructions about how to build the tent of meeting, he wanted him to follow a specific pattern, because that tent was a model of the heavenly one. Christ's position is far superior to the other priests because they were just the preview, and he was the real thing!

How many of you have seen the previews to the movie "Captain Marvel"? How excited were you to see those previews? I know my kids were very excited. About 3 months before a movie comes out, they start to show the previews or trailers, and these are a big deal. They are short snippets of the actual movie to give you a taste of what it's going to be like. And people love them, they go online to watch them and see all the different previews to get an idea of what the movie is going to be about. But what happens to the trailers after the movie has come out? They

start to disappear, and no one goes online to look for them anymore. Why? Because the whole movie is out, and people can go and watch it, so why go and watch the trailers? The full-length movie is far superior to the trailers. They used to be a big deal, but when the movie came out, they're no longer important.

And the same was true for the other high priests after Jesus came on the scene. They were the preview; he was the real thing. His position is far superior and theirs is no longer necessary. (If you've ever been confused about the purpose behind the priests and laws and sacrifices and temple in the Old Testament, hopefully you can see it more clearly now.)

In verses 6-7 the author points out that not only is Christ's ministry far more excellent than theirs, but the covenant he mediates is as well. And that's what he directs his attention to for the rest of this chapter. Along with the inauguration of the superior high priestly ministry of Jesus comes the implementation of a superior covenant under which Christ ministers. The point he makes at the end of verse 7 is that if there hadn't been a problem with the old covenant that was made with Israel on Mt. Sinai and the former way of doing things, there would have been no reason to look for a new covenant. But because a new covenant has been introduced it demonstrates that the old one had fault.

What he writes next is really quite simple. He quotes a prophecy from Jeremiah 31:31-34 that God gave to Israel about 600-700 years earlier. And he's simply pointing out that because God spoke about a new covenant way back then, he made it clear that the old covenant was never to be permanent but would become obsolete.

Read Hebrews 8:8-13.

⁸ For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ⁹ not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

¹¹ And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother,

saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

¹³ In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

So not only did the appearance of Christ bring an end to the ministry of the high priests, but it brought an end to the entire old covenant as well. All those laws and practices that you read about in the Old Testament that have to do with the priests and sacrifices and temple – they're all now obsolete. They were a 1,500 year preview that God gave Israel to point them to the high priestly ministry of Jesus in heaven, but once Jesus came on the scene, they were all done. Their purpose was complete. The old covenant wasn't an initial attempt by God to save his people that didn't work that was then followed by a second attempt that proved to be more successful. That makes God look like he didn't really know what he was doing. The old covenant was successful in doing what it was supposed to do – but it was only a preview, it could never make anyone perfect before God, so it was replaced by the real thing. And now that it's been replaced, it's time to move on to something new.

I think that's what the author is trying to say: "It's time for you to move on. Move on to something new. Move on to the new covenant. Don't relate to God under the old covenant anymore – that was just a preview, but now you have the real thing. The preview couldn't do anything to make you perfect before God – it was never meant to. And if you depend on it to do that, it will utterly fail. It's obsolete, it's growing old and is ready to vanish away. Move on to Jesus. Make the transition. Trust in his high priestly ministry as he stands in the very presence of the Father, having offered his life for you to intercede on your behalf."

Now for us today, the application is different because we're not depending on a religious system to save us, but a transition still needs to happen. It's time to move on from thinking that your relationship with God depends on how well you perform and do the things that good Christians are supposed to do. That's not what it depends on. Your relationship with God depends on the high priestly ministry of Christ. And right now, at this very moment, he is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, in the heavenly throne room, having offered his life as a sacrifice for your sins, always interceding on your behalf.

If you are trusting in him and have committed your life to following him, you're all good when it comes to your relationship with God. God the Father doesn't keep tabs on everything you do, whether you think they're good or bad and relate to you based on that. He isn't impressed by the good (surprise!); and he isn't depressed by the bad. So don't live that way anymore. You don't need to relate to him like that. He sees you through the perfect high priestly ministry of Christ. And that never changes.

It took me a long time to see that. I used to measure my relationship with God based on how well I was keeping up with personal devotions and quiet time with God. That's how I felt I could earn or lose his favor. And as an adult I was doing pretty good. But then Caleb was born and our morning routine changed forever, and for about 18 months I felt guilty because I couldn't figure out how to have a consistent time with God. It felt like he was disappointed and that made it even harder for me to connect with him. But then God showed me what we've been looking at today. That Jesus didn't just intercede for me on the day I was saved from my sins – he intercedes for me as my high priest every day. And God feels the same way about me as he feels about Jesus. And that set me free from my bondage to guilt and a faulty understanding of my relationship with God based on my performance.

So when you screw up and sin, which all of us are bound to do at times because of the sin nature that is still part of us, rather than groveling in guilt for a few days and trying to earn back his favor for a few weeks by producing a more impressive track record, put that childlike pattern of thinking behind you and move forward with thankfulness for the forgiveness you have in Christ and the freedom to simply start fresh again under his grace and mercy that's new every day. Lift your heart in praise to him. Lift your voice in worship. Let your spirit soar with love and admiration for all that Christ has done and is doing right now for you in the heavenly places.