

Hebrews 8:1-6

Our High Priest in Heaven, Part III

- I. Hebrews 8:1-6: 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. 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.
- II. Over the past few weeks, we have looked at Christ’s high priesthood in heaven, especially as his work brings to consummation what was enacted each year in the Old Covenant on the day of atonement.

- A. Here, in summary form, is what we have seen in Leviticus 16.
- B. First, God dwells in the cloud of glory above the ark of the covenant in the most holy place in the earthly tabernacle.
 - 1. God is present there for one primary reason: to be worshiped and adored, to be glorified and enjoyed, in the midst of his people.
 - 2. When God comes to dwell in that Most Holy Place, it is the condescension of the one whose glory fills the highest heavens.
 - 3. The all glorious God who dwells in the highest heavens fills the earthly tabernacle with his glory.
 - 4. And that glory evokes worship from his people.
- C. Second, the Aaron was enabled to enter the most holy place as a high priest on behalf of Israel through two offerings:
 - 1. First, the scapegoat, who bore away the sin and judgment curse of God. The movement is away from God into the wilderness to die.
 - 2. Second, the sin offering is an offering of blood that opens the way into the most Holy Place.

- a. The blood of the sin offering is the means through which Aaron, himself a sinner, enters into the Most Holy place.
 - b. As he enters, he, and all he represents in Israel, are accepted in the sight of God.
 - c. Through this blood sacrifice, God delights in the worship of his covenant people through Aaron and a blood sacrifice, and through this same sacrifice, the covenant people of God delight in his saving presence.
- D. The entire point of the book of Hebrews is this: through offering his own blood once and for all, Jesus Christ has entered not into the earthly most holy place, but into heaven itself.
1. There, in heaven, he sits at the right hand of God, interceding for his church.
 2. There, in heaven, he presents himself in the virtue of his death and the power of his resurrection.
 3. There, in heaven, you find the one in whom God delights. And what is so beautiful is that if you are in Christ, the delight God has for him extends to you in your union with him.

4. You, in Christ, delight in your worship of God. God, in Christ, delights in your worship.
 - E. This means, then, that what the book of Hebrews is telling us turns our attention to heaven—the highest heavens—the presently veiled heaven is where the ascended Christ lives bodily right now, as a servant and high priest for the church.
- III. Now, what I want you to see, is that this heavenly tabernacle is not the invention of the author of Hebrews, but is rooted in the teaching of the Old Testament itself.
- A. Verse 4 is so important for us to understand: if Christ remained on earth, he would not be a priest at all.
 1. That is an absolute statement. As long as Christ is on earth, he has not entered into heaven, and he would not be a priest at all.
 2. What is the point? His priestly duties after his resurrection are in heaven—he is to ascend and serve in heaven, not to remain on earth.
 3. This is critical to appreciate: it would not be possible for Jesus to be our high priest if he were to remain on earth.

4. This follows from what Paul says in verse at the end of verse 4: 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.
 - a. The “law” here refers to the old covenant with Moses. It refers to what we have seen so beautiful associated with the day of atonement.
 - b. The work of the high priest under the Mosaic covenant has priests who offer sacrifices according to the law.
 - c. From the standpoint of Hebrews, it appears that such offerings are still occurring at the time the book is written.
 - d. Priests were offering gifts according to the law perhaps at the very time this letter, this word of exhortation, was written.
- B. But regardless of that, please look at what that activity in the Old Covenant truly was: they serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.
 1. Copy
 - a. The tabernacle on earth, and the sacrifices associated with it, are a copy

- of the heavenly things.
- b. That means two fundamental things must be remembered:
 - (1) First, the tabernacle on earth was a copy of the tabernacle dwelling of God in heaven.
 - (2) Second, the activity of the high priest on earth is a copy of the activity of the high priest in heaven.
 - c. Just as Aaron served as a high priest in the worship of the church while she was on earth in Canaan, so now the ascended Christ serves as a high priest in the worship of the church while she is in the wilderness.
 - d. The point, so critical to appreciate, is that the earthly tabernacle dwelling of God, as a mobile version of the earthly temple to come, is itself a replica of the glory of God in the highest heavens.
 - e. From the very outset, then, the author of Hebrews tells us that the significance the earthly is patterned after the heavenly temple dwelling of God.
 - f. And when we speak of the heavenly we

have in mind what Isaiah saw in Is. 6: the *living* God surrounded by *living* seraphim, praising and extolling the name of the one enthroned in glory.

- g. Christ serves in that heavenly original, and not in the earthly copy.
- h. This is a huge point—a point we should always return to over and over again: if he were a priest on earth, he would not be a priest at all, because he would be like those who serve the copy.
- i. Instead, he serves in heaven itself—thus, his priesthood is heavenly, not earthly. As goes his priesthood, goes the tabernacle he serves, and that tabernacle is heaven.
- j. Now, in addition to the tabernacle being a copy, we must also note that it is a shadow.

2. Shadow

- a. The concept of shadow can be understood in this way: a shadow, as used here in Hebrews 8:5, refers to the fact that the tabernacle itself is a shadow cast from heaven—the shadow is not

merely something coming in the future: the shadow is fundamentally an earthly shadow of a corresponding heavenly reality.

- b. You could even put it this strongly: the tabernacle not only copies, but simply is, an earthly shadow of the glory of heaven itself.
 - (1) Heaven is imaged, pictured, represented, in the earthly dwelling of God in the tabernacle.
 - (2) That tabernacle that is the earthly projection of heaven above.
 - (3) The earthly is the shadow; heaven is the thing shadowed.
- c. What does “shadow” add to “copy”? It is this: the tabernacle, along with all other forms of earthly dwelling, is a temporary earthly dwelling that prepares the way for the heavenly.
- d. And when the heavenly comes, or, better, when a high priest of a heavenly order arrives, what happens to the copy and shadow? It gives way to the heavenly reality itself.

- e. Here is the point: Christ has entered not into the provisional shadow of the earthly tabernacle. Instead, he has entered into heaven itself—the thing that was shadowed under Moses.
- f. This is so critical to grasp for all forms of dispensational theology that hold to some future purpose for an earthly temple or some future earthly purpose for the nation of Israel:
 - (1) The glory of God will never again longer dwell in an earthly tabernacle or temple, associated with the Israelite theocracy in Canaan.
 - (2) The glory of God is in Christ, and Christ is in heaven, and heaven is the reality that the earthly tabernacle copied and shadowed.
- g. Therefore, it is fundamentally wrong to reserve some future purpose to an earthly temple or some special purpose for an earthly people to occupy the land of Palestine.
 - (1) The glory of God is permanently

- where Christ is, seated at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.
- (2) That means that the glory has departed the Old Covenant tabernacle and temple, and it will never return again.
- h. God does not, and God will not, dwell ever again in a temple made with human hands.
- (1) The copy was an impermanent earthly tabernacle; the original is the heavenly.
 - (2) And Christ has entered heaven—not the copy or shadow.
3. Do you see the logic of the author of Hebrews?
- a. To any Jew (or Gentile for that matter) who looks to the Old Covenant—to the tabernacle, to the priesthood, to the sacrifices under Moses—you are looking at a provisional replica, and earthly sketch, of what has occurred in the crucifixion and ascension of Christ into heaven.
 - b. What has come in Christ once and for all

- fulfills and surpasses the copies and shadows of heaven under old covenant order associated with Moses and Aaron.
- c. To seek to return to the shadows is the concern of Hebrews 6: if you think that you have safety and salvation in the shadows, then you deny the substance is in Christ, and you are in great danger.
 - d. The author of Hebrews is saying: come out of the shadows; come to the ascended Christ in heaven.
 - e. This is one reason why we are so concerned to avoid any retrograde movement back to the Old Covenant—such as what you find in dispensationalism.
- C. Now, it is time to come to the thesis of the author of Hebrews: this is taught explicitly in the Old Testament Scriptures themselves, and the prooftext in the Old Testament for what the author of Hebrews has just said is found in Exodus 25:40: 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.”

1. The Old Testament proof that the tabernacle was a copy and shadow of heaven is grounded in Exodus 25:40.
 - a. In that text, God shows Moses a “pattern” after which the tabernacle was to be constructed.
 - b. According to the author of Hebrews, the “pattern” is nothing more and nothing less than heaven itself.
 - (1) Moses, on Mount Sinai, was given a glimpse into the glory of heaven itself—into the glory of the heavenly reality after which the tabernacle was to be patterned.
 - (2) Moses was given the pattern of the heavenly things on the mountain.
 - c. Put as simply as I know how to put it: that pattern God showed Moses was the heavenly temple itself—the place where God resides in glory.
 - (1) This is clear, because Exodus 25:40 is adduced as inerrant proof that the tabernacle copies and shadows heaven itself.
 - (2) Moses own understanding, then,

would correspond to what the author of Hebrews had just said.

- (3) As Moses came down from the mountain, he would tell of heaven—he would say that God showed him the heavenly pattern after which the tabernacle would be constructed.
 - (4) And Moses himself, on the basis of this revelation in advance of heaven, would tell the people of the greater, and more perfect tabernacle, in heaven.
 - (5) Moses would be teaching the same thing the author of Hebrews is teaching.
- d. Please grasp this, because it is critical, Moses was just as heavenly minded as the author of Hebrews!
- (1) That is the point!
 - (2) Moses would have said to the people: this tabernacle on earth is a copy and shadow of heaven itself.
 - (3) I just saw heaven—I saw the heavenly pattern of which this

tabernacle will be an earthly copy and shadow.

(4) And he would exhort the people to remember that the special presence of the Lord with his people while on earth is preparation for their future entrance into the glory of heaven itself.

(5) But, in the meantime, until that day comes, God will dwell with us in a provisional earthly form (mobile on earth if tabernacle; fixed on earth if temple).

2. The author of Hebrews is telling us that the day has come: heaven itself has been entered and opened by Christ himself.
 - a. Christ has entered into heaven, and his entrance is an entrance that opens heaven for us, the church.
 - b. Now, given his shed blood, his bodily resurrection and ascension into heaven, Christ is raised into the very heavenly place that supplied Moses with the “pattern” after which he was to build the most holy place on earth.

- c. So, what does this mean for us?
3. It means that we now live in an age that has once for all said goodbye to the earthly copies and shadows of the Old Covenant.
- a. It means, in the words of verse 6, we have better promises.
 - b. Promises that bring us not indirectly into the earthly most holy place in the Old Covenant.
 - c. Rather, we have promises that are fulfilled in Christ, and just as he belongs in heaven forever, seated at the right hand of God, so we belong there with him, and we are being brought, right now, into heaven.
 - d. Listen to Hebrews 12:22-24—this is the better promise: “22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new

covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

- e. We are being brought and will be brought into heaven itself, where we do and will worship the glory of the triune God as it is made known to us in the face of Jesus Christ.
 - f. You are being brought to a place where the glory will never depart, where Christ abides forever, and where you can see his glory and rejoice in his deliverance forever and forever.
4. But this means that you cannot turn back—you cannot look back—you cannot return to synagogues, tabernacles, and Old Covenant forms of worship—none at all—because such things were temporary replicas, copies and shadows, of what has dawned climactically in Christ. Embrace Christ, and embrace these better, heavenly, everlasting promises that in Christ are yes and amen!