

2. Midweek 1: Hebrews 2:10-18

OT: Ps. 22 (=Ps. 21 in LXX), Isa. 8:17-18

The quotation in v. 12 is from the Septuagint's rendering of Ps. 22, which is Ps. 21 in LXX numbering. Christ's not being ashamed to call us brothers is set within the psalm He quoted at His crucifixion. His suffering and our brotherhood with Him are inseparable, and the shame of His cross is not for Him any occasion to be ashamed of us His brothers.

The writer then uses two successive verses in Isa. 8. The interjections between the three different OT citations indicate that the entire collection of books is about Christ. There is no indication that the writer is quoting different books, as if we might say, "I read this in Charles Dickens, and I found these things in George Eliot and Mark Twain." He says simply "And again," as if drawing from the same work because the entire Scripture has one Author.

In Isa. 8 the prophet is exhorted to trust in the Lord Whose ways are then hard to perceive. 8:17 is an affirmation of prophetic trust in God Who is currently hiding Himself from the house of Jacob. The people's way and their destiny is obscure, but the prophet will trust in the God Who has said that the prophet should keep himself apart from the people's terror and dread. Instead, God alone will be the prophet's Fear and Dread (8:13). 8:18 affirms that the children Isaiah has received (cf. 8:3) are a sign of what the Lord will do, evidence of His love and purposes in a dark time.

Textual notes

The words of David and the words of Isaiah are in Heb. 2 the words of Jesus, Who speaks without shame of us as His brothers and as His children. He is the One Who leads us to glory as sons and simultaneously the architect of our salvation (2:10a). His own way must go through sufferings, for He finds completion only in His sufferings (2:10b).

Sanctification comes from His action as Sanctifier (2:11), and we are sanctified, but the Sanctifier and the sanctified have a single source. This is true with respect to Christ's sharing a human nature with us, but the stress in 11-14 is not on His human nature so much as His shared suffering with us that results in our shared destiny with Him in life. He has no shame in calling us His brothers and His children because He shares flesh and blood with us (14a) and because of His work of destroying the devil's power (14b) we share heavenly life with Him.

The slavery to death and to fear under which we labored is removed from our lives because He delights to help not angels but the offspring of Abraham – pictured here as the father of the faithful, not as the father of Israelites and Ishmaelites. Jesus's incarnation is precisely for the sake of those faithful, so that He has become like His brothers in order to be a merciful and faithful High Priest to make propitiation for the sins of the people. The One who is tempted is able to help those who are tempted (v. 18).

Suggested loci: sanctification, propitiation, prayer

Suggested Catechism: 3rd Article

Title, theme, and major divisions: “No fear, no shame”

Theme: Because Jesus is our Great High Priest, we have no fear of the devil and no shame before God.

- I. Jesus is our Great High Priest.
- II. We have then no fear of the devil
- III. We have no shame before God

3. Midweek 2: Hebrews 7:1-28

OT: Gen. 14:18-24, Ps. 110

The direct quotations in Heb. 7 are mostly from Ps. 110, the most-quoted OT passage in the NT. The writer to the Hebrews quotes half of Ps. 110:4 in 7:17 before quoting it in its entirety in 7:21. He did something similar earlier in the same chapter when quoting Gen. 14:17-20 in its entirety and then focusing on the title of Melchizedek to Abram in Gen. 14:20. The exegesis of Gen. 14 goes from general to particular, and the exegesis of Ps. 110 goes from particular to general. The commonality of both readings is that the priesthood of Melchizedek in Gen. 14 and the divine oath in Ps. 110 to the Priest in the order of Melchizedek is their fulfillment in Jesus the Christ. The link between Genesis and Psalms is the figure and the priesthood of Christ. The writer to the Hebrews finds that the priesthood of Melchizedek is exercised according to the promise of Ps. 110 by One not having a Levitical priesthood but with an authority greater than the Aaronic priesthood bore. That greater authority is grounded in the divine oath and the eternity of priesthood promised in Ps. 110.

Textual notes

The writer summarizes Melchizedek's unexplained origins for their resemblance (v. 3) to the Son of God. The argument for the greatness of Christ will be built on the foundation of Abraham's tithe, which precedes the tithe given to the Levitical priesthood and includes the sons of Levi who through their father Abraham offer the tithe to Melchizedek. The complexity of this argument is only apparent. The simple assumption is that the superior blesses the inferior (v. 7), and the inferior offers tithes to the superior. The apparent complexity is resolved when we accept the biblical notion that one's forefathers' decisions and actions affect and include us. If the father of Levi offers a tithe, Levi also offers a tithe. If the father of Levi offers a tithe, then there is one greater than Levi and a priesthood greater than Levi's priesthood.

The supremacy of Christ is that His priesthood is according to the "likeness of Melchizedek" (v. 15) and is bestowed according to His life, not according to His tribe, which is Judah, not Levi. That ordination is in the divine oath of Ps. 110, which abrogates the law and the priesthood appointed from Sinai "for the law made nothing perfect" (v. 19) and proved "its weakness and uselessness" (v. 18). The new covenant or "better covenant" (v. 22) is founded upon the greater priesthood of Jesus Who became a priest by oath, something the Levitical priesthood never enjoyed. Appointed without an oath, the Levitical priests are also numerous because they must necessarily die and be succeeded. Jesus was appointed by an oath and lives forever so that no one need call on another priest for salvation. He lives forever to make intercession for His people, none taking office after Him, none necessary for our salvation besides Him. As there is only One Great High Priest, only a single sacrifice was necessary, and having made that sacrifice once for all, the Son in His strength (not weak like the high priests of the Sinai covenant, cf. v. 28) is now perfect forever.

Suggested loci: Jesus the forerunner of salvation, likeness of Melchizedek, nature of priesthood

Suggested Catechism: 2nd Article

Title, theme, and major divisions: “Perfect forever”

Theme: Jesus our Great High Priest is perfect forever:

- I. Perfect in His priesthood like Melchizedek’s
- II. Perfect in His sacrifice for sin
- III. Perfect in His intercession for you, His people.

4. Midweek 3: Hebrews 8:1-13

OT: Ex. 25:40, Jer. 31:31-34

Ex. 25:40 comes at the end of descriptions of the ark of the covenant, the table for showbread, and the golden lampstand of the Holy Place, all of which should be made in exact accordance with the divine pattern shown to Moses on Sinai. The transference of a divine pattern that is *seen* into a humanly made tabernacle means that the humanly made tabernacle, faithful to its pattern, is thus merely a copy of something divine. The presumption of a divine tabernacle then affords a place for Christ to officiate as High Priest, just as the heavenly Jerusalem serves as a greater city and a mother to the faithful, of which the earthly Jerusalem is a mere echo (Gal. 4:25).

The extended quotation from Jer. 31:31-34 means that a sermon on Heb. 8 is in large measure also a sermon on Jer. 31. Mention of a new covenant requires the prior existence of an old covenant, now broken and useless to its trespassers. That broken covenant at Sinai with the generation saved from Egypt (Jer. 31:32) will be replaced by a new covenant wherein the Law is inscribed on the heart of God's people instead of on the stone tablets deposited in the ark of the covenant. The holy place and the tabernacle of God's Law will be within His people. All will thus know His Law (Jer. 31:34b), and all their iniquities will be forgiven (Jer. 31:34c).

Textual notes

This relatively briefer text is half-quotation, and the setting of Jeremiah 31 within the Book of Comfort (Jer. 30-33) cannot be forgotten as rich consolation to the exiled people of God. Those promises made by the prophet centuries earlier come to pass in the covenant founded upon the blood of Jesus, which nullifies the usefulness of the old covenant broken in Israel's sin.

The greater power of Christ's work over the work of the old covenant is because of the metaphysical presumptions of the writer. The Mosaic tabernacle is for him *a copy* with a greater, heavenly original. Jesus ministers as a priest in the original in the immediate presence of the Father, so of course Jesus's ministry and what that ministry offers to sinners is of far greater value in every way than the Mosaic covenant with its repeated offerings and oft-transgressed laws.

Suggested loci: Christ's session at the right hand of the Father, ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, the old covenant and the new covenant

Suggested Catechism: The Close of the Commandments

Title, theme, and major divisions: "What do you have to offer?"

Theme: What does Jesus have to offer?

- I. The blood of the new covenant to God
- II. A new life in the Spirit to His people

5. Midweek 4: Hebrews 9:11-28

OT: Ex. 24:8

This lightest of OT quotations or allusions among our pericopes is nonetheless heavy with meaning because its citation concerns the power of blood. The blood of calves and goats is described in ritual detail by the writer to the Hebrews, its application and its purpose. The purifying ashes of the red heifer are also acclaimed as sanctification for the purification of the flesh. But the goal of the application of the blood of Christ is the purification of consciences for rest from “dead works” to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14).

Thus the single quotation from Ex. 24:8 is a liturgical formula used after the application of blood to the atonement seat on the ark of the covenant. With that atoning blood presented to God the priest could turn and apply the same atoning blood to God’s people. The throne of God and the people of God were thus simultaneously covered in the “blood of the covenant.” If that blood availed for fleshly purification, what will the blood of Christ avail for spiritual purification?

The rhetorical question about the impossibility of forgiveness without the shedding of blood in Heb. 9:22 is an OT question. It is an explanation of how the OT sacrificial system worked. The OT exegesis that the writer engages in down to v. 22 will drive his conclusions about the arena and the efficacy of Christ’s blood in vv. 23-28. The New Testament is greater than the Old Covenant or Testament and forgives even trespasses committed under the Old Covenant. It surpasses all other means, even those of the divine Law, of obtaining forgiveness and purification.

Textual notes

The contrast between the covenants made throughout this pericope rests upon a basic superiority in the new covenant, established with the death of a divine Man rather than the deaths of innumerable bulls and goats. The covenants do not differ in their means. There is in both a law, a mediator or mediators, sacrifice, the shedding of blood, and the proffering of purification. The contrast is between what is weak and purifies only the flesh and what is strong and can purify the conscience.

Indeed the covenants resemble each other sufficiently that the Mosaic liturgical formula of Ex. 24:8 and the principle that blood is required for forgiveness of sins are often misread as *directly* about the New Covenant, when they are directly about the Old Covenant and therefore by inference also about the New Covenant. Yet the metaphysical reality of the Old Covenant’s system and furnishings as a *copy* of prior, divine things means that what is offered in the heavenly tabernacle will be greater than what was offered on earth. Christ’s entrance into the nearer presence of God with His blood is thus greater and also substitutionary. For the high priest at Jerusalem appears on his own behalf as well as his people’s, but Christ appears before God proffering His blood solely on our behalf.

Suggested loci: the blood of Christ, the testament of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ’s sacrifice

Suggested Catechism: the Sacrament of the Altar

Title, theme, and major divisions: “Getting clean”

Theme: There is no way to get clean without the blood of Christ’s sacrifice for you.

- I. Other options in the Bible and outside the Bible over and over again
- II. Christ’s provision of purification through His blood once for all your sin

6. Midweek 5: Hebrews 10:1-25

OT: Ps. 40:6-8, Jer. 31:33-34

The repetition of parts of Jeremiah's new covenant promise will be richly catechetical for the hearers, who now hear the quotations from the prophet with a fresh sense of their significance. The Holy Spirit Himself speaks these words (Heb. 10:15, 17) to end the repetitive cycle of daily temple sacrifices and bring in a new covenant (Heb. 10:14) through the single sacrifice of our Priest Jesus.

The extended quotation from Ps. 40 prefigures the greater solemnity and sanctity of the body of Jesus over the Jerusalem temple in understanding the words of the Psalmist as the words of Jesus, who avers that offerings and sacrifices are as nothing compared to the glory of the body of the One who comes and does all things in accordance with God's will. If there is One is righteous in all things and offers Himself as a sacrifice for sin, the other sacrifices and the blood of animals is displayed as useless by comparison to the blood of Jesus.

Textual notes

The writer's habit of returning to a point from various perspectives will afford opportunity to repeat or reinforce things one may have already said in the series: the sole efficacy of the new covenant in Christ to take away sin forever, the supremacy of the new covenant to the old covenant and reliance on the law of Moses, the superiority of the body of Jesus as God's temple to the temple it took Herod nearly a half-century to refurbish. Some things new in this text are the specific mention that the source of our sanctification is in the offering of Christ's body so that holiness begins from the divine offering of Christ's body and blood, not the specific ethical decisions we make, important though those are in our vocations.

The great difference in this text is the shift from exegesis of the Old Testament and of the deeds of Christ's priesthood to exhortation between verses 18 and 19. The confidence we have is founded upon the surpassing greatness and sureness of Christ's priesthood. We can enter the holy places through His blood, and the division between what is holy and what is most holy, that is, the temple curtain, is Christ's flesh, of which we partake. Therefore we have full assurance and are cleansed. We see the writer's turn to exhortation, in which he will engage for the remaining chapters of the letter, because considering the sureness and greatness of the new covenant in which we live, how can we not persist in the faith and the confession of Christ despite every obstacle?

Suggested loci: perfection, sanctification, entrance into God's presence, conscience, the Divine Service

Suggested Catechism: 2nd and 3rd Parts of Baptism

Title, theme, and major divisions: "Do not neglect to meet"

Theme: Draw near to Christ in His body and blood

- I. That you may have full assurance of faith through sharing in His blood

II. That you may stir up one another to love and good works in His body