

No Tongue Can Bid Me Thence Depart

23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, *appoints* the Son who has been perfected forever. (Heb. 7:23-28)

When they built the Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco, at first they used no safety devices, and 23 men fell to their deaths. They then employed a net, which cost over \$100 000. At least ten men fell into it and were saved. But not only was human life saved, something else happened. Over 25 percent more work was accomplished when the men were assured of their safety. When they knew they could not perish, they probably took more calculated risks, they were bolder, more confident, and more was done.

By a perverse, reverse logic, some would say that scared men work better. Remove the net, and their fear of their lives will make them work more. But, in fact, fearful people might work, but they never excel. They work less, because fear never motivates like love and joy.

Some Christians think like those perverse thinkers. They think that the way to motivate Christians is to tell them that they can never be assured of their salvation. They think that if Christians are afraid of dropping off into the abyss of destruction at any time, they'll be more diligent, more devoted, more committed Christians. But in fact, like with the workers in San Francisco, you don't get more love and faith out of Christians that way, you get less. Christians who lack assurance of salvation live with perpetual anxiety, not with joy and confidence. They are not interested in drawing near to worship, they are concerned mostly with not falling into Hell. They don't become more devoted, only more cautious, more anxious, more suspicious. And in the greatest irony of all they are less likely to persevere and endure to the end. And those ones who learn to live this way often harden into those perverse people who live to make sure no one else has assurance of salvation, like the child who takes pleasure in announcing that the party has been cancelled.

If the Bible does not give anyone the right to have assurance of salvation, then no one should preach it or act like it is possible. But if the Bible teaches it, and describes how we can have it and calls on us to believe it, it is a grievous thing to try to deny it or explain it away or remove it from God's people. You may find yourself in for God's displeasure if you keep taking away from God's people what He intended them to have.

Assurance is a present-tense experience about the future. Assurance is an experience of confidence right now about something that has not yet happened. Yes, there are conditions on assurance. Yes, there are warnings about false assurance. But assurance is nevertheless one of God's best gifts to His children, one of the sweetest desserts they can enjoy in their pilgrimage. And assurance of salvation is the grand conclusion of Hebrews chapter 7.

His goal has been to tell us that we must not draw back to the old covenant, but draw near to God through Messiah Jesus. He has been showing us why Jesus is the superior, final, ultimate High Priest.

Like he has already done so effectively, he is going to compare two priesthoods: the priesthood of the past, and the priesthood of the present. Depending on whether you choose the Levitical priests of the past, or the Messianic Priest of the present, will determine your assurance of your future.

So what this portion of God's Word lays out for us is the imperfection of the past priests, the immaculate nature of our present priest, and then the implication for our future. Once again, we

must choose: will we go back to Levi and the Law, or will we draw near to God through Messiah Jesus?

Let's begin by comparing these two priesthoods.

I. The Priests of the Past Were Imperfect and Sinful

23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing.

He points out the first and most obvious weakness of the high priests of the old covenant. There were many of them! Why is that a weakness? It doesn't mean many in a contemporaneous sense, but in a consecutive sense. There were many, one after the other, replacing each other. You only have to replace something that can no longer work. Why did they need replacement? Because they kept dying!

A young Hebrew boy might have stood in awe as he watched the *cohen gadol* perform the rituals on the Day of Atonement, securing atonement for sin. He must have been quite awe-inspiring, in his full priestly robe, with the ephod and its twelve jewels on his chest. But one year, the young Hebrew would notice that the High Priest was different. The uniform was the same, but the man had changed. Looking to his parents, he would have asked why the High Priest was different. His parents would tell him, "The High Priest died last year. This is a new one".

But to the wondering eyes of that young Hebrew, immediately something would be wrong. He would know from Ezekiel 18:20, "The soul that sins, it shall die." He knew that death is the wages of sin, and therefore even that High Priest, as close as he came to holy things, was also a sinner.

Death prevented any one High priest from being a permanent High Priest. And so from the time of Aaron, some Jewish lists give around 83 high priests until the destruction of the Temple. Some of them died from old age, but some died as a result of divine judgement.

That would remind any Hebrew that his High Priest, as much as he was supposed to be a mediator between God and man, as much as he was supposed to have equal sympathies with both sides, he was clearly lopsided towards sinful men, and more like a sinner than like God.

That's why we find out a second weakness, also to do with sin of those Old Testament High Priests in verse 27:

27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's,

The High Priests of Levi needed to offer up sacrifices, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people. The word *daily* has to do with the Lord Jesus' daily and continual intercession, not the High Priest's. In other words, the text is saying that Jesus does not, in his daily ministration as High priest, need to offer up sacrifices for Himself.

The High Priests of the old covenant had to do so once a year. When he did, there was first an elaborate ritual by which he had to offer sacrifice for himself.

He had to first wash in water, and then put on his priestly garments. Then he had to present a bull as a sacrifice for himself. He then brought incense in and put it before the veil. He would then take blood from the bull and sprinkle the blood on the altar seven times. Then he would go back out and kill the goat, and make atonement for the Tabernacle or Temple itself, because it was dwelling amidst a sinful people. Only after all that, could he symbolically lay his hands on the live goat, confess the sins of Israel, and send the goat away into the wilderness. And after that, he still had to wash again, change clothes, and come and offer the bull and the goat as a burnt offering.

Again, the Hebrew boy watching all this must have thought to himself, only one man gets to enter that holy place, for such a short time once a year, and all this must be done to him, to this place. Our highest priest must be cleansed three times over. This holy tabernacle or Temple must not be that holy if it needs a sacrifice to cleanse it from defilement.

The beginning of verse 28 sums it up:

28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness

The old covenant, the law, chose mortal, sinful men as mediators. They may have been the best we could do, but they were still weak. A chosen nation out of all nations. A chosen tribe out of the chosen nation: Levi. A chosen family out of the chosen tribe: Aaron. A chosen son out of the chosen family, the son of the High Priest. Consecrated by ceremony, a special uniform, tunic, robe, sash, turban, ephod. A special moment: once a year, Yom Kippur. A special ceremony. And for all this, it said loud and clear: these priests are sinners too. Mortal, weak, aging, sinful, defiled and therefore temporary, and able only to obtain covering atonement for one year at a time.

But now we turn from the priests of the past to the priest of the present. Compare those priests of the past to the Messianic Priest of the present.

II. The Priest of the Present is Immaculate and Successful

24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.

The final priest does not age and die. He does not have a successor. His is an unchangeable priesthood. This is a word in the original language that was used in legal agreements in the Graeco-Roman world. It means non-transferrable. It is a priesthood that cannot be passed on to another. It is unchanging, inviolable. It will never pass to another. Why? Because He continues forever.

Rev 1:18 "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

Only one occupant in the priesthood according to Melchizedek: Messiah, and He is that priest forever.

To look on the face of Jesus, is as one described it, to see a great king, where grace of his youth, and the valour of his manhood, and the wisdom and majesty of his age are blended together. To see this High Priest is to see one whose hair is white as one who is ancient, but whose body has the power and strength of the prime of youth, and whose face shines with all the power of manhood. Immortal, immutable, imperishable.

Whereas the young Hebrew boy would see all the flaws in the High Priest of old, all those flaws are remedied in the Final High Priest. He gives us seven descriptions of the perfection of Jesus.

26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

This is the kind of priest we need, this is the one fitting to us.

First, He is holy. The Levitical High Priests were sinners, as we so clearly see in Eli's toleration of sin in his two wicked sons Hophni and Phinehas. Many of them were greedy, corrupt, and in some cases, bloodthirsty. But Jesus is holy. This means morally perfect. He is positively perfect: loving God and neighbour in perfection. All the attributes that make you say someone is good and admirable is what Jesus is.

Second, He is harmless. This translates a word which means He does no spite or harm or evil to anyone. Caiaphas had Jesus put to death. Alexander Jannaeus had 6000 people massacred. The High priest Aristobulus put his mother in prison, where she starved to death. No one was ever treated with spite by Jesus. He could deal with tough Roman centurions, little children, aged widows, young millionaires, aged rabbis, Roman princes, and did not harm one. He told Pilate, "if my kingdom was of this world, then would my servants fight, but now my kingdom is not from here." No human can say that the Son of God sinfully harmed him. He ever wishes the good and blessedness of His creatures.

Third, He is undefiled. The High Priest Johanan murdered his own brother Jeshua in the Temple. The High Priest Jason bribed the ruler Antiochus to get his position and then began turning Jerusalem into a Greek city, defiling its high places.

Peter said that Jesus was like the lamb without blemish and without spot. Nothing that corrupts is present. The thoughts are completely pure. The words are without corruption. The deeds are perfectly upright. Nothing has spoilt Jesus in the least.

Fourth, He is separate from sinners. During the time of Nehemiah, the High priest Jehoida made an alliance with Sanballat and Tobias. During the first century, the High Priests were caught up in all kinds of intrigues with the Herodians and Romans.

Not Jesus. This is fascinating because the Pharisees thought Jesus did not separate from sinners. They thought separation entailed complete avoidance of sinners. And while there certainly were places and situations that Jesus did not attend, He welcomed tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners. But for all that, He never mingled in their sins, or joined them in evil, or partnered with iniquity. He could love and redeem without ever sharing in sin.

Fifth, for that reason, He is now ascended higher than the Heavens. His Father has given the God-Man a place which no man ever had: the place at His own right hand.

Sixth, He needs no personal atonement.

27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

When He died on the cross, He presented the once for all sacrifice. His sacrifice is perfect, and there is no need for it to be repeated. And when He died on the Cross, He was not presenting a sacrifice for His own sin, for He had none.

Seventh, He has been appointed by a oath that supersedes the Law.

but the word of the oath, which came after the law, *appoints* the Son who has been perfected forever.

Perfected forever. He is immaculate, and therefore perfectly successful. All this leads to an application. You are either still leaning on those priests of the past, or some other version of them, or you are going to come to God through Jesus. If you come to God through Jesus, then this is the grand conclusion of the chapter.

III. The People of This Priest Are Indestructibly Secure

25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them

Verse 25 gives us the result of Jesus being this Perfect Priest. Since He is immortal, unchanging, holy, and not under the wages of sin, He is able to do something amazing. Now the words 'He is

able' are not there to present a possibility or likelihood, that He is able, but maybe He will or maybe He won't. No, those words stress not the likelihood of His doing it, which is certain, but the ability or the power to do it. Can He do this? Yes, He is able to do it. He does something priceless, precious beyond words.

But notice for whom He does this. Not everyone. He does this for those who come to God through Him. Who is that? Anyone who believes the true God is reached and known and worshipped through His Son, His co-eternal, and co-equal Son, known to us through His Incarnation as Jesus the Messiah. Jesus said, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (Jn. 14:6)'" This is that special and repeated idea in Hebrews: drawing near. Coming boldly to the throne, 4:16, those who approach 10:1, let us draw near with a true heart 10:22, he who comes to God must believe that He is 11:6.

What does He do for them? He saves them to the uttermost. This is such an important phrase, you need to pay close attention to what it means. This word translated *uttermost* has two shades of meaning. The first has to do with quality. It means completely, fully, wholly, absolutely. He does not save His people partially, mostly, nearly. He saves them from every last sin they will ever commit. He saves them from the slightest infraction to the most grievous transgression. He leaves nothing undone, not a sin forgotten, not one thing without atonement.

The second meaning of this word has to do with time. He saves them forever, for all time. He does not save them for five or ten years. He does not save them but then release them to their own destruction. He does not save them temporarily. He saves them forever. When would saving someone forever begin? It would begin the day that person believes in Christ. When would saving someone forever end? It wouldn't end, because it is supposed to go into eternity. And what would saving them forever entail right now?

We are told how He does this. He intercedes for the ones who come to God through Him. He prays for them. He intercedes. He asks the Father on our behalf. What does He ask? We see a glimpse of it in John 17:

"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. (Jn. 17:9)

"Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. (Jn. 17:11)

Protect them through your name, and give them unity. Let them remain in my Body. What are they to be protected from?

"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. (Jn. 17:15)

Protect them from the evil one. Protect them from Satan's temptations, his false teaching, his deception, his accusation. All the things that cause someone to abandon the faith.

"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. (Jn. 17:17)
Set them apart and make them holy through Your Word.

"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (Jn. 17:24)

Bring them home to glory.

Do you think the Father gives the Son these requests? The only reason why our requests are ever denied is that we do not perfectly know the mind of God, we don't know His perfect will, and we don't always ask in submissive faith. Jesus only asks for that which is the perfect will of God, and He asks in perfect faith, and is always heard. There is absolute unity between the advocacy of the Son and the response of the Father. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the

whole world. (1 Jn. 2:1-2)

Our complete salvation depends on successful perpetual intercession. Successful perpetual intercession depends on a perfect sacrifice and an endless life.

If so, what will be the result of Jesus' praying this prayer for an individual? The answer is that such a person will be saved completely, utterly, wholly. Not one sin will remain, nothing will be left undone. Such a person will be saved forever. If the process of Jesus praying for a person begins, it never ends.

How would it be possible for such a one to be lost? Answer: if Jesus stopped praying for Him. Will Jesus stop praying for him? No, his prayer life is connected with his life. He will pray for His people as long as He lives in Heaven. How long will He live in heaven?

since He always lives to make intercession for them

A mortal priest can atone for you only as long as He lives. But if you have an immortal priest, then He will pray for you as long as He lives. That's why the hymnwriter wrote:

Before the throne of God above,
I have a strong and perfect plea,
a great High Priest whose name is Love,
who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on his hands,
my name is written on his heart.
I know that while in heav'n he stands
no tongue can bid me thence depart.

What could make Jesus stop praying for someone? Perhaps someone suggests, if you denied Jesus. But there is an actual instance of this in Scripture connected with Jesus praying. Jesus told Peter the details of this: 31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. 32 "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren." (Lk. 22:31-32)

Do you know what that means? It means Jesus prayed for Peter, and that Jesus predicted that Peter's faith would wobble, and would require a return. Peter didn't know it, but Jesus was predicting that Peter would deny him. Now Jesus knows that. Does Jesus stop praying for Peter? Exactly the opposite. He is praying for Peter before, during and after the denial, knowing that Peter will return, repent, and then come back to a place of leadership.

The text doesn't say, He will pray for you as long as you are faithful. No, you will be faithful, as long as He is praying for you. How long does He live to pray for you?

The two sides of the faith coin are: Jesus is always praying for you , and therefore your faith, like Peter's will endure. A real union with the real Christ produces real faith. He is a living Person, and to join with Him in living faith is to enter into a two-way, permanent relationship: He ever lives to pray for you, and you endure to the end in your faith.

With that understanding, how could you believe this verse and still hold that you can lose your salvation? What sort of tampering would you have to do to take away the plain force and plain meaning of this text? Jesus is a permanent priest for His people. He will never stop praying for them. Our prayers may not be answered, but His prayers in Heaven will always be answered. If Jesus is praying for you that your faith not fail, that you be protected from the Evil One, that you remain one with the Body of Christ, that you be sanctified, and that you be brought safely home, and if Jesus is always praying this for you and will keep praying this for you, how is it possible for you to lose that salvation?

Believers are eternally secure. We are secure as long as we endure. But we will endure as long as He prays for us.

So wherein is my assurance? It is not in my faith, though I must be diligent to make sure I have real, biblical faith. It is not in my endurance, though I must know that endurance is part and parcel of true faith. My assurance is that I believe I am Christ's and He is mine, that He will ever pray for my faith, and pray for me to come home. My assurance is what Wesley wrote:

The Father hears Him pray,
His dear anointed One;
He cannot turn away
the presence of his Son;
His Spirit answers to the blood,
His Spirit answers to the blood,
and tells me I am born of God.