

## Majesty and Service – March 11, 2018

A couple of weeks ago we finished up Heb7. The Law that established Aaron's Priesthood was condemned as "**weak and useless**" There's a "**better hope- by which we draw near to God**" and a "**better covenant**" guaranteed by High Priest, Jesus.

Throughout Hebrews we've seen Jesus is **fully Human**. He is also **fully God**-maker and sustainer of all Creation. He is **Messiah**, the true King of Peace and Righteousness. He is our **Great High Priest** entering the Heavenly Holy of Holies- the throne room of God- for our sake. He is our **perfect sacrifice**. Jesus has been made "**perfect forever**" which means He contains, within himself, EVERYTHING necessary to bring about the salvation of the Kosmos and you and me.

This letter is written in the late 60's of the first century- just as **the first Jewish/Roman War begins in Jerusalem**. In **66** Rome's Governor over Palestine took money from the temple declaring it to be Caesars'. The Jews rebelled in a big way and they defeated Rome's local legions and took Jerusalem for themselves. In **67** the Roman war machine began to roll down through Galilee to the south, ultimately to lay siege to Jerusalem in **70** taking the city and utterly destroying the Temple.

So if you're a Jew in Rome in the late 60's. Your people- apparently by the power of God- have risen up against the pagan Romans and, against the odds, freed the Holy City and the Temple from their unclean hands. [Yay]

But if you're a Jew in Rome in the late 60's who's heard and accepted the Good News about Jesus of Nazareth: that He's *Messiah King and fully God and fully human* and our *Great High Priest* and the *once for all Sacrifice* offering unlimited access to "God's throne of Grace" for all who claim Him as Lord... you've got a problem. Because in embracing Jesus you agree that the Temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood, even the Law –all the central framework of Judaism- is **OBSOLETE**, outdated, soon to disappear.

This sort of thought would not be taken well by your Jewish neighbors who are celebrating over the "freeing" of the Holy City from Rome's pagan hands. They would mark you as both **apostate & traitor**.

Because to say *Jesus is superior to angels, to the law, to Abraham, to Moses; to Aaron's priesthood and the Temple and all it's God-ordained sacrifices* would be perceived as being disloyal and treasonous to the Nation of Israel. The persecution takes on a political, as well as a religious nature.

**So our congregation of Jewish Christians in Rome find themselves caught between suspicious pagans and the celebrating "faithful."**

And yet our author does not tell them to stay secret and safe, or to "*circle the wagons*."

In a masterful effort to bolster their resolve to follow Jesus fully, our author quotes their beloved scripture to show that Jesus and what he's bringing [a better Hope, covenant ch7] is BETTER than anything they've ever known. [The word "better" used more times in Heb than in all the rest of the NT put together]

What they've known is **the copy, not the reality**. It's mediated by **weak men rather than God**. The New and better covenant in Jesus based on "better promises" makes the first one obsolete, outdated and soon to disappear- which come 70 was truer than our author could possibly have known.

Heb 8 begins to flesh out for our Hebrews what the idea of **New Covenant** –as declared by the prophet Jeremiah- [ch31] would mean. In Heb 8 I see four pairs of opposites: **Old Covenant and New, Copy and Reality, God and Men, and Majesty and Service**. For the sake of time and, honestly, because this week was not exactly conducive to getting a message written, I'm going to focus on one of those pairs of opposites today and we'll try to gather up the rest next week.

Now, with all that religious, and political potential for persecution in mind...

let's consider **Majesty & Service**. Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,<sup>2</sup> and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

**This is a striking combination of ideas**. First following from the previous passage [ch7] Jesus is our High Priest, but we get- in quick succession- **two separate snapshots of Him**.

In the first He is the one... who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, In the second He is the one... who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord

Neither of these ideas is new to Hebrews. In ch 1 we read 1:3 ...After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. And just a few verses later our author quotes Ps 110:1 when he asks: 1:13 To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?"

"The Majesty in Heaven" is a respectful euphemism for God. To be seated at the right hand of the throne of God is to have the place of highest honor with God. And that He is "**seated**" means that His work is absolutely and perfectly **completed**. The task set before the Son by the Father [to restore Israel and take His salvation to the ends of the earth **Is 49:6** through his life, death, and resurrection] has been successfully and perfectly completed and so the Son of God sits enthroned at God's right hand.

**Phil. 2:9** Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Jesus is seated and enthroned as Lord and King to the glory of God the Father.**

**But simultaneously Jesus rises to serve in the Lord's True Tabernacle.** We've seen this idea before, as well. At the end of Heb6 where our Anchor of Hope, "19 ...enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain **20** where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf." The inner sanctuary behind the curtain is language for the innermost room of the tabernacle, the Holy of holies- the place where Heaven and Earth met, the footstool of the throne of God- the true sanctuary set up by the Lord. Jesus, entering "on our behalf" refers to His ascension into God's presence.

The shape of His service in the True Sanctuary is not explained but the critical point for us is this: He is **Lord of All** seated on the throne. AND He is **Servant of all** in the True Sanctuary.

The Greek here is **Leitourgos** [li-toorg-os]: **one who serves**. In Greek secular writings it refers to public service. In scripture it's typically in the context of service to God. It's used to describe angels [Heb1:7]. Paul uses it to describe his own work [Rom 15:16] and Ephphroditus of Philippi [Ph2:25] and it's used in reference to public officials [Rom 13:6].

Jesus is both enthroned and serving. **Jesus is both Lord of All and Servant of all.**

When God called Abraham he was called to vocation not superiority or celebrity. Israel was called to service not privilege. Yes, they were God's Chosen People, but they were chosen for a work to do. But, among other things, they let the idea of being God's Chosen go to their heads and forgot their calling while Idolizing their position with the Almighty. They blew it. They got it wrong.

And so Jesus, the God man, had to come and, representing Israel [as well as all humanity] do everything they were unable to do- to be God's chosen one and serve. It's all over the Gospels- this duality of Lord and servant.

In Matt 8 we have the story of **the Centurion**- a Roman, a gentile, coming to Jesus and asking him to heal his servant who is paralyzed and suffering. Shockingly, Jesus is immediately ready to go with this man to his home- regardless of any concerns about "unclean gentiles." But this Centurion more than anyone else in all Israel understands Jesus is both King and Priest. He IS BOTH LORD AND SERVANT. **And so the Pagan General says:**

**Matt. 8:8** ..."Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. **9** For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

Jesus is delightedly astonished by this gentiles understanding and declares to his Roman-hating Jewish audience:

**11** I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.... **13** Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be

done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that very hour. **Our centurion understood Jesus is Lord of all and Servant of all.**

Of course the most obvious example of this idea is in John 13. **The Passover dinner** – which was a joyous remembrance of Israel’s Independence from Egypt- was finished and all those present are lounging back and talking and laughing and Jesus gets up- they don’t pay much attention- and he takes off his outer tunic and wraps a towel round his waist. He looks like the household servant. He takes water in a basin and goes round to them all and washes their feet- the task reserved for the servant of lowest rank.

**John 13:12** So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? **13** “You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. **14** “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. **15** “**For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.** **16** “Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.

His greatest act of service is, of course, his **“once for all” willing sacrifice of himself on a Roman cross.** And the shocking thing is that the gospel writers portray his crucifixion- his greatest act of service- as his Coronation--- He is crowned [with thorns], He is robed [in mockery], The crowds line the streets as he parades to his “throne,” He is lifted up above the people [and hung on a tree] He is declared to be “King of the Jews” [by Caesar’s representative], And as the people watch him die they say: **Matt. 27:42** “...He is the **King** of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.

**In all of this he is simultaneously both Lord of All** –the majesty in Heaven- **and- as he dies- Servant of all** –who serves in the sanctuary.

**We are Sons and Daughters of God**, but our calling is not to power or privilege, but to service. *We are not called to comfort ourselves in our cozy sanctuary cloistered away from community.* We are called to go out and to be out loving and serving our world.

**We are truthfully, Princes and Princesses of the Kingdom-** and I long for the day when I will see you revealed for who you really are. But now we are called to swallow our pride, set ourselves aside, and consider others more important –those within the church and those without. As Paul says in Galatians: **Gal 6:10** ...while we have opportunity, let us do **good** to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

This is why **we finished a week serving at the Winter Shelter-** spending our own resources in care for the other – cooking and serving up hearty meals for the homeless, washing their dirty sheets and towels, brewing their coffee, keeping a watchful eye so every one of these beloved of God can sleep safe, sound and warm.

This calling is the reason for the last 15 years at least I have worked to get us out of this building on **Easter Sunday** and into the community.

We are called to serve our community, to give ourselves away- without concern about their response. It's our responsibility to be out in the world, among our neighbors, available and telling the story of Jesus Christ. While we want to be winsome and wise and personable, their interest level is not our responsibility. Our responsibility is to follow Jesus example and not let our royal identity hinder our serving. This is the reason for our presence outside at Rhody and worshipping publicly before our Summer Picnic, the Uptown Street Fair and why I give time and effort to the WAVE Food Drive. **We are Sons & daughters of the Living God, yes- but we are called to vocation, to service.**

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> year now we've attended **Emerald City Comicon-** It's all about science fiction and fantasy books and movies and comic books, super heroes and mythical creatures and. And lots of people like to dress up as their favorite characters from novels and comic books and movies.

I'm not big on costuming but I dressed up as **Michael Carpenter** from an Urban fantasy series about Harry Dresden who is a detective who also happens to be a wizard. Think Philip Marlowe meets Harry Potter.

**Michael Carpenter is a Knight of the Cross.** He bears one of three swords, each of which has one of the nails from The Cross embedded within its hilt. The knights of the Cross just "show up" when they are needed to vanquish demonic powers. Michael is devoted to God's service; his faith is powerful and he is Harry's very good friend. We talked during SS a couple weeks ago about the power of story to communicate. So I'm going to share a piece of a story about Michael and Harry that says something about our call to service.

Michael and Harry are working together in a dark and difficult situation, facing demonic forces. One of them attacks a helpless Harry trying to suffocate him with a swarm of evil insects. Harry is telling the story...

[Skin Game, by Jim Butcher p402-403- listen to the audio for this portion of the message]

It doesn't matter that Harry is broken. It doesn't matter that he's scarred and struggling and has made some terrible choices. It doesn't matter that Harry is ambivalent about God or suspicious of faith- **Michael Carpenter, Knight of the Cross, follows the path of Jesus, a servant ready to give himself to serve- reaching out and into the unclean to cleanse, without fear of what it might cost him.**

Considering who and where we are right now at First Baptist; numerically, financially, demographically it's easy to want to pull back, to play it safe.

Considering where we are right now, it would be a natural response to want to retreat inside and see to ourselves and let the world make its own way.

[In my opinion we've got enough Christian churches that do that already.]

My dears, we cannot circle the wagons. **Yes we should be wise but we should not be afraid.** Remember Jesus washing feet. Remember Jesus going to the cross. Remember Jesus ready to get up and go with the unclean Pagan- and then to commend him as a "good man!"

Yes we are Sons and Daughters of the King but in that we are called to vocation, to fearlessly serve- even those who are not a part of our "tribe." Jesus calls us to follow his Truly Human example, saying: **Mat 20:26** ...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, **27** and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— **28** just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."