

Sunday 16 October 2011

Hebrews 6:15-7:28 "What is Jesus doing in heaven now?"

Goal to keep the interest of the average 10 year old and to help them understand what Jesus is doing on our behalf in heaven now.

We have been going through the letter to a church of Hebrew Christians who were being tempted to go back to the old ways of living. The writer of the letter is telling them in no uncertain terms, don't go back; don't reject such a great salvation. For many people after they have been Christians for a little while they try to add into their lives with Christ and the very clear message about sin, forgiveness and salvation some of their old life. They think I would like Jesus and ... I would like to go back to a bit of night clubbing. I still want Jesus but I see nothing wrong with a serious drink every now and then. I still want Jesus but I would like to go back to my workaholic lifestyle. These Hebrews Christians were being warned not to go back to their traditional roots. Just keep it all about Jesus. What was their issue?

In the early church there was such a great and healthy expectation that Jesus would keep his promise to them and return to the earth soon. There would be the rapture and there would be the second coming. Everyone believed it and everyone expected it. They forgot that there had to be major changes in the world climatic state and the sea levels had to begin to rise and that earthquakes and floods and bizarre weather had to increase in ferocity and frequency first. They just believed that Jesus said He would be back soon and they expected that immediately after He left that He would keep His promise.

Now weeks and months had drifted by and years had turned into decades and where was He? He promised didn't He? They could see the temple. They could smell the incense. They could hear the trumpets blowing but ... no one could see Jesus.

They doubted that God would make good on His promises and this one in particular and so the writer to the Hebrews had reminded them that they need to have faith and be very patient like Father Abraham if they are to see the promises of God fulfilled. Don't turn your back on such a great salvation. Have faith and be very patient. Don't go back to the old life!

So often through the scriptures we are encouraged to be patient. It's a fantastic quality and God does some of His best work between the promise and the realization of that promise. The bible says be patient and so often we pray, yes Lord but make me patient, now. We begin looking at this letter again from where we finished last time Hebrews 6:16

¹⁶When anyone wants to settle an argument, they make a vow by using the name of someone or something greater than themselves.

The issue is can we trust God to come through on His promises. And God responds in the language that the people understand. To show that you were serious about something you would often make a vow or swear on something or someone greater than yourself. If I said to you; I am telling you the truth I swear it on my pet rabbit, or on my guinea pig you might be thinking, not sure about this statement. Is he serious or not? If I said to you I am telling you the truth I swear it on the bible or on my grandmother's grave, you would be thinking. Yes, he is serious; he really means what he says. I can trust him.

¹⁷So when God wanted to prove for certain that his promise to his people could not be broken, he made a vow. ¹⁸God cannot tell lies! And so his promises and vows are two things that can never be changed.

We have run to God for safety. Now his promises should greatly encourage us to take hold of the hope that is right in front of us.

We are about to see what the vow was that God made to people so that they knew that they could totally trust Him to make good on His promises, but added to that is the fact that God cannot tell lies. You can trust in the promises of God to you because he doesn't tell lies and He has made a vow. In other words He has stated that this is really serious more serious than swearing on a pile of bibles or one hundred grandmother's graves.

Now it says His promises should greatly encourage us to take hold of the hope that is right in front of us.

I want to invite you to guess what the three most common symbols of the early church were?

1. Fish because the first letters of the phrase "Jesus Christ God's Son, Saviour"
2. A fishing boat. Because Peter, James and John were fisherman and all the disciples were told to be fishers of men.
3. Third symbol which was etched on all the catacombs where the early Christians hid from persecution was a ... Anchor. That was the most popular symbol of faith in the early church. Because they would say no matter what storms come your way in life we are anchored on the word of God and in the promises of God.

Take hold of the hope that is right in front of us is a reference to that common imagery.

¹⁹This hope is like a firm and steady anchor for our souls. In fact, hope reaches behind the curtain and into the most holy place. ²⁰Jesus has gone there ahead of us, and he is our high priest forever, just like Melchizedek.

In the temple that they could see had been hung a monstrosity of a curtain. It is lucky Colleen you are not fixing this curtain for the church. It was 60 feet long and 30 feet high and 10 inches thick. When they hung it, it took 100 priests to lift it into place. This veil, this curtain separated sinful humanity from the Shekinah glory of God. Priests would come before the veil and minister from the table and the candles there but only the high priest could go behind the veil and it was utterly terrifying to them because they could see the glory of God and could easily die.

When Jesus died on the cross his last words were "it is finished and when he said those words that veil split from top to bottom.

Jesus has gone there ahead of us. The fact that he has gone ahead implies that we are now meant to follow him directly into the holy of holies.

Now when the Hebrew Christians hear that Jesus was a high priest they have some real issues.

Can you recall which tribe you had to be from to be a priest, let alone a high priest? Levites i.e. descendants of Aaron.

Which tribe was Jesus from? Judah. So how can He ever be a priest?

The writer to the Hebrews points out that there are two priesthoods. One follows Aaron's line and the other follows this other mysterious guy called Melchizedek.

Now the writer takes us back thousands of years to a story in Genesis 14 to remind us who Melchizedek is.

You might recall how in Genesis 14 four very powerful kings attacked the cities around Sodom and Gomorrah and captured 5 cities together with their 5 kings and a whole lot of goods. They were taken away into captivity. One of those captured people was Abraham's nephew Lot. Abraham trained up his 300 servants in warfare and led what was probably the most amazing covert operation in world history eventually rescuing all the people and all their treasures. One the way back from his victory he meets this mysterious amazing man called Melchizedek. Melchizedek was the king of Salem or Jerusalem whose name means peace, i.e. he was the king of peace coming from Jerusalem, the city of the great king. When Abraham sees him coming he notices that Melchizedek is carrying bread and wine, the elements of communion in his hands. Abraham bows down and worships him and gives him one tenth of all that he has won. Melchizedek who is both a king and a priest of the most high God accepts the worship and the tithe. Some 500 years before the Ten Commandments are given Abraham recognises that the first 10% of what he has belongs to God and not to him and he tithes. Jesus too expected people to tithe to the local fellowship and in Malachi God said it is the only area in which you are allowed to put God to the test. Test His faithfulness by giving the first 10% back to Him and see what He will do.

Hebrews 7:2-10

²Then Abraham gave him a tenth of everything he had.

The meaning of the name Melchizedek is "King of Justice." But since Salem means "peace," he is also "King of Peace." ³We are not told that he had a father or mother or ancestors or beginning or end. He is like the Son of God and will be a priest forever.⁴Notice how great Melchizedek is! Our famous ancestor Abraham gave him a tenth of what he had taken from his enemies. ⁵The Law teaches that even Abraham's descendants must give a tenth of what they possess. And they are to give this to their own relatives, who are the descendants of Levi and are priests. ⁶Although Melchizedek wasn't a descendant of Levi, Abraham gave him a tenth of what he had. Then Melchizedek blessed Abraham, who had been given God's promise. ⁷Everyone agrees that a person who gives a blessing is greater than the one who receives the blessing.

⁸Priests are given a tenth of what people earn. But all priests die, except Melchizedek, and the Scriptures teach that he is alive. ⁹Levi's descendants are now the ones who receive a tenth from people. We could even say that when Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth, Levi also gave him a tenth. ¹⁰This is because Levi was born later into the family of Abraham, who gave a tenth to Melchizedek.

Who is this person who had no mother or father nor beginning or end who receives worship and tithes and is known as the king of justice and the king of peace? I am convinced that it is Jesus. What we call a Christophany, an appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament.

There are two priesthoods:

Its true to be a normal priest you have to be born of the tribe of Levi a direct descendant of Aaron, you have to be chosen by the people and you have to offer sacrifices for yourself as well as the

people because this priesthood is not perfect and eventually all these priests will die and be replaced.

There is another priesthood from whom Jesus belongs. King David in Psalm 110:4 quotes God's description of Jesus by saying that

17... You are a priest forever, just like Melchizedek."

Hebrews 7:20-28

²⁰⁻²¹God himself made a promise when this priest was appointed. But he did not make a promise like this when the other priests were appointed. The promise he made is,

"I, the Lord, promise that you

will be a priest forever!

And I will never

change my mind!"

²²This means that Jesus guarantees us a better agreement with God. ²³There have been a lot of other priests, and all of them have died. ²⁴But Jesus will never die, and so he will be a priest forever! ²⁵He is forever able to save the people he leads to God, because he always lives to speak to God for them. ²⁶Jesus is the high priest we need. He is holy and innocent and faultless, and not at all like us sinners. Jesus is honoured above all beings in heaven, ²⁷and he is better than any other high priest. Jesus doesn't need to offer sacrifices each day for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. He offered a sacrifice once for all, when he gave himself. ²⁸The Law appoints priests who have weaknesses. But God's promise, which came later than the Law, appoints his Son. And he is the perfect high priest forever.

Normal priests are appointed through the Levi family, they offer sacrifices for themselves and the people because no one can keep the law and then they die and get replaced.

God has appointed Jesus a priest forever like Melchizedek, the sacrifice He offers is Himself. He will never die and never need replacing.

I struggle in some Christian movements where people call their leaders Father or Priest. I believe there is only One Father and there is only one mediator between God and man forever, that is God the Son Jesus Christ the final priest.

It is OK to say Pastor or teacher or under shepherd maybe or presbytery but Priest? There is only one that we need, Jesus who has an everlasting priesthood.

I want to demonstrate for you what our perfect high priest Jesus does for us in heaven because I think we often get confused about it. We know that satan accuses us before the Father (and his time is nearly over) and we know that Jesus intercedes for us as our perfect high priest. How does he do that. You might be surprised.

If you have watched the program the good wife or other programs where there are court scenes or maybe you have been to court or sat on a jury at some point. Normally in court the lawyers argue

back and forth in order to sway the jury their way and there is lots of movement, action, argument and emotion. Sometimes we think that Jesus does the same in heaven.

Jesus might say "Oh Father, Russell from Ranui he's blown it again, speeding down Swanson Road, not honouring the laws of the land. Father he has sinned but Father he's been good most of the day and he's trying really hard and because you love me Father please forgive Russell yet again. We sometimes imagine compassionate Jesus arguing our case before an angry Father. But that is not how He intercedes for us.

Picture this. I just arrive from Australia and I drop in to visit Pinetree (Colin) Meads in Meadsville. I knock on the door and I say, giddy mate, I hear you were a great rugby player once. I don't believe it. You don't look so great. (argue argue, argue). And if Pinetree is just standing at the door he might just argue right back.

But suppose that same person stepped into Pinetree's house and sat beside the cabinet full of rugby trophies and medallions and All Black shirts. If he accused Pinetree of not being a great rugby player, old Pinetree wouldn't have to say anything, why because the evidence speaks for itself.

The bible never says that Jesus is running around in heaven trying to placate an angry father, trying to bend him around to liking us. This is nonsense. The bible says that Jesus is sitting at the right hand side of the Father on His throne interceding for us.

What does that mean? It means that the mark on His head and hands and feet and in His side, who He is, is His intercession. Satan sure enough comes along and says Russell..... They are all rat bags, sinners, impatient, losers. And Jesus just sits there saying nothing. He is intercession. He has it all covered in who He is; our High priest forever. Satan says Loser; Jesus' presence, His body declared forgiven.

Will God keep his promises to you? Can you trust Him to keep His Word to you? He has made a vow, declared Jesus your one and only high priest forever and he will never tell a lie. You trust him. You go straight in and speak to him. But I haven't been praying much, I haven't read the bible much, I was rude to my mum. Would He listen to me? Would He help me? He is seated. The deal is done, the matter is settled. You are forgiven, accepted, covered. Go right into the holy of holies.