

Pastor Chad 0:07

Have you ever been to a worship service and just felt like something was missing. I think most of us the last little while have experienced that. I mean, for me, worshipping at home, as good as it is to be able to do that, still feels really really weird and actually at the end of a service often feel with this, or leave with this kind of frustrated and weird and angry almost feeling because it's just there's something that's not right about that so there's just something that I don't think is appropriate and it doesn't it doesn't remind me of some of the things that I had growing up, or there's other issues and other things that have been going on in my life that are just missing in that. And, you know, bigger than that I remember as a kid, I used to have those kinds of concerns those kinds of issues as well I remember distinctly sitting in one of our worship services when I was a child, and thinking, What good is all of this? One of my first churches. One of the ladies there is a lady there they've been through a lot in her life she had a very difficult childhood she was going through a lot of different kinds of things and she was, she was being healed by God, thank goodness, but there are moments she says when she used to sit up in the balcony of the church and, and she would feel like just throw in the Bible down, you're getting so angry because there was something missing. She had this sense of these are just words that are being spoken. Were all these words blah blah blah. She wanted to feel it to experience it to see something real. In a lot of ways I think that's what the writer to the Hebrews is kind of dealing with, with these people or the to the readers are dealing with. If you remember this book is written to a bunch of Hebrew Christians so these are people who have been raised up within the Jewish tradition, they had understood all of the law and the prophets they had been to Jerusalem they had celebrated the festivals at the temple they understood what sacrifices meant and what that looked like for them they had been to these places and they had experienced that. And then someone came along and told them that Jesus had come as the Messiah and he fulfilled all of these things and they gave their life to Him, they said yes, Jesus is the Messiah he died and he rose again from the dead. But then after a while. It seemed as though they were tempted to move back towards Judaism. So the writer to the Hebrews writes this encouraging them to maintain their strength.

Says Hebrews was written to people going through a difficult time, as an encouragement to stay strong and to cling to Jesus, we talked about this right at the very beginning of this series that this was given to people who are going through a lot of difficulties they've been kind of cast out of their Jewish society, because they believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and they're looked upon by the Roman society as if they're atheists because they didn't believe in all the other so called gods that religions around that did and so they're stuck in this in between moment and he writes them to encourage this and the main message of Hebrews, is that Jesus is better than everything that came before anything that there is so then why would we move away from him. Why would we go back to these other things. It says in chapter one, verse three or chapter one of Hebrews. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets, many times and in various ways but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, who he appointed heir, of all things, and through whom he made the universe. He is the radiance of God's glory the exact representation of his being and sustaining all things by his powerful word after he provided purification for sins He sat down with the right hand of the Majesty and have it. So he became as much superior to the angels as the main. He is inherited is superior to theirs.

Jesus is superior to the prophets because now he's spoken, God spoke it through his son, he's superior to the angels because he brings a better message that comes directly from the word of God he's better than Moses he's better than Aaron he has a superior priesthood because it's from a better order from the order of Melchizidek, which is an order that never ends has no beginning it's from fulfillment of prophecies in the Psalms and other places. He has a better covenant because it is a new covenant that's not broken by the old and it's no longer subservient to some kind of behavior but it's now one which is given because a heart will be changed, it's a fulfillment of the prophecy in Jeremiah that a new covenant would be given not like the covenant of old because it was broken but this would be a new one where there would be a new heart and a new spirit would be given to his people because someone would come to fulfill what was said in the Old Covenant and then here in this section we have the promise that Jesus has a superior priesthood because he lives in a better or he serves in a

better sanctuary than just the temple. Verse 24 says, "for Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands there was only a copy of the true one. He entered heaven itself. Now to appear for us in God's presence.

Now this chapter opens by explaining some of this and it goes through and this is kind of a culmination of this is, as it says this is a better or a superior sanctuary that Jesus actually works his priesthood in the priests around here, but you can see how it will be difficult for the people of Israel, because they had grown up with the priesthood serving at the temple. They would have experienced things like the Feast of Tabernacles or these other kinds of feasts or the Day of Atonement. This day in which everyone was required to come and gather in Jerusalem so hundreds of thousands of new people would show up there in that city they gather with family, they would have feasts and they would engage in all kinds of fun things, there would be ceremonies going on and then they would go to the temple and they would witness the high priest walk into the holy place and they would know that he isn't going into the Holy of Holies with a goat that would be sacrificed for his sins and then escape goats and all of their sins would be confessed over and prayed on to, and then that goat would be led out of the city, and killed and left out to die and the symbolism in that would be that the sins all of the stuff, all of the bad things that had happened over that past year both that had been committed by them and whether they had done it unintentionally or unintentionally you would be taken away and then they would feast and they would celebrate, they would have a good time together they would enjoy this and they will be able to see and experience something.

And now. Now all we have is someone saying that Jesus has come and this is better. Seems like just words, feels like something is missing. He starts Hebrews chapter nine with this the first covenant has regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary a tabernacle was set up in the first room was the lampstand and at the table with its consecrated bread. This was called the holy place behind the second curtain was a room called the most holy place which had the golden altar of incense and the gold covered Ark of the Covenant the ark contains the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff,

and the stone tablets of the covenant, and before the ark [unintelligible] of the glory glory overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss all these things in detail now. And when everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the inner room, and that only once a year. Never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins of the people that they had committed in ignorance so there's this, there's this sense that something is actually done to make them right with God, something happens, that they can experience, that they can participate in.

And I know for a lot of us that's part of the difficulty right now in this season coming into worship here doesn't always feel like we're participating although it feels more like participating than you might think. If you don't show up, you don't really know that but that's, we encourage you to come if you feel like you're so led to do so. But there's also this sense in which something happens, away from us and all we're doing is remembering something which is actually kind of the point is here, he says, chapter nine verse eight, the Holy Spirit was showing by this that the priest would only go into that inner courtyard, once a year. He was showing that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed so that the way for the people to get connected with God was not made known yet. As long as the first tabernacle was still functioning and then he would say also, as long as the temple is still functioning. This is an illustration for the present time indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper so even though it seems like something happens there, it's something that has to be repeated over and over and over again this emotional experience that they had as they went into the temple, and they saw the sacrifice being given, it was something that you didn't actually make any difference in their life. They're only a matter of food and drink and very ceremonial washings. External regulations applying until the time of a new order.

But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now all ready here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made by human hands, that is to say, not a part of his creation. He did not enter by the means of all bloods, goats and calves but he entered the most holy place once and for all, by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal

redemption, or as he says chapter nine verse 24, for Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands. It was only a copy of the true one. He entered heaven itself now to appear for us in God's presence. now the theological term for this is ascension, this is Jesus went up he ascended into heaven and he is right there in the presence of God the Father said earlier as we looked at the very beginning of Hebrews he has not sat down at the right hand of the Father, that means his work has been completed, and he has now put in a place of rulership over the entire world. The Father has allowed Jesus, a human being, for sure a resurrected human being that was also fully God, but he is fully human. A human being is now sitting and administering God's kingdom from God's very presence. This is the doctrine of the ascension and of Jesus' continuing rule. Now, until he returned, which is the second piece of the Hebrews, the writer gets to verse 28. He says Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many. And he will appear a second time not to bear sin or not to deal with it because that's already been done, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. Jesus' ascension and his coming return from heaven, or his coming return to Earth to create a new heavens and a new earth to fulfill the plan of salvation and make all things new again these are the things that the writers the Hebrews says comes because Christ has triumphed. The Heidelberg catechism puts it this way. Now, there's oftentimes when I wonder what these things mean for us I often go to the Catechism because it asks these kinds of questions. So this is Question and Answer 49 How does Christ's ascension to heaven benefit us. So, what? Jesus is in heaven. Great. Good for him. How does that benefit us the answer is first, he is an advocate in heaven in the presence of his father so when things go wrong or when we do things wrong. He defends us and says, I've already paid for that. It's okay.

Second, we have our own flesh humanity is in heaven as a sure pledge that Christ, our head, will also take us his members, up to himself so there's this sure pledge we have this absolute confidence that because Jesus has been raised from the dead, and now still lives and rules in heaven that we will be with him because we are united with Him in our baptism and as we declare him Lord, the Spirit unites us with him and so we will be with him third. Now he sends his Spirit to us on Earth as a corresponding pledge

and so we see because the Spirit comes to us and we grow in love of joy true faithfulness all of these different kinds of fruits of the Spirit. We have the pledge as well, that the Spirit's power is here with us and we are united with Christ and by the Spirit's power. We seek not earthly things not the things that matter to us here on Earth, but the things above where Christ is sitting at God's right hand.

So the Catechism writer says that the Ascension benefits us. Because it takes us away from our focus on the stuff that matters to us here are the things that matter here. So, even in this time when we can't engage in worship the way that we want to or even in times when we wonder what this makes whether this makes any difference whether these things aren't just words, says no, because something has happened already the work has been done and it has been done in the place where it can actually make a difference in the temple when the sacrifices were given that doesn't make any difference in our worship services and these other kinds of things, it's not as though these are the magical moments that bring us into Christ, the work that has been done for us our salvation is secure because of Jesus, already. And now we remind ourselves and we gathered together the writer of the Hebrew says don't give up meeting together so you can spur on one another to continue to, to love and to good deeds so we can continue to grow in the understanding of what it means that Jesus is now ascended and is seated at the right hand of the Father and He rules over everything that there is not a single square inch in the total domain of human existence over which he does not cry "Mine".

So we gather together in order to remember that, to celebrate that. And to be reminded of what that means for us in our everyday lives. As we make dinner or as we wash the dishes or as we change the oil in our truck or as we try to cut hay and have it rain on us over and over and over again, or as we build houses and settle down, or as we do the accounting for others in our town or, as we run a business or as we look after our employees, as we take care of our parents, all of these things that we do. They're all things we do in service to the one who sits on a throne and administers God's kingdom. This one who will be coming again.

So, the question and answer 52, the Catechism asks, How does Christ's return to judge the living and the dead, comfort you? It's not normally how we think about judgment. Usually we think about judgment dies. This is something to scare you: God's coming back. Don't do wrong Don't be bad don't don't cause any problems because he'll, he'll get you. And sometimes that's how we relate to religion, but the Catechism says, No that's not the way we deal with this because God has already forgiven us in Christ, no need to fear the judgment. In fact, the fact that Jesus is coming back to judge us. That's should comfort us. Here's why. "In all my distress and persecution with an uplifted head I confidently await the very judge who has already offered himself to the judgment of God in my place, and it's removed the whole curse from me. Christ will cast all his enemies and mine into eternal eternal and everlasting condemnation but will take me and all his chosen ones to himself into the joy and glory of heaven."

I don't need to be afraid of the fact that Christ is returning me back. That gives me hope. And it gives me an amazing amount of joy, knowing that the work has already been done, and the one that is coming, and who will judge us is the one who has done that work he has gone into the heavens and he has purified that sanctuary to guarantee salvation for me and for you. So in this time now when we feel as though things aren't going well, or in this time, when you maybe have felt as though this Christianity thing doesn't make any sense, doesn't make any difference doesn't really apply to the here and now, in some ways, in some ways, that's because the work has already been done. And our experience of it is to remember. And to celebrate. What we have is better the writer says because in Jesus the real work has been done, and it has been done in the one place where it actually makes a difference.

There are many times when it feels like something is missing, like what we do here makes no difference, like it's just a bunch of words, words, words. But that's how we remember. And that's how we celebrate. And that's how we are reminded that what happened, makes it different for us today. That's how we remember that God has seen our tears and has come down to rescue us. Because it's for our tears He died. Amen.

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