

Seated
Hebrews 10:11-18
March 31, 2024

I may be the only pastor to make this connection today, but generally the Easter season runs right alongside tax season. And *this* time of year—last year—we received some troubling news from the Internal Revenue Service. We were told that someone *else* had claimed one of *our* children as a dependent on *their* tax return.¹ So, to complete the filing of our taxes, the IRS sent us a form asking us to prove that this child of ours was in fact *ours*.

Personally, I would've been glad to gently say, "If you could, check *your* records and figure out which of the two families has claimed this particular child for a number of years now and which one hasn't. That would save us a good bit of hassle." But apparently that wasn't an option. So, we had to do something we didn't think we'd *ever* have to do, compile a bunch of evidence—make the case—that we weren't lying about this.

To make this case, the IRS requested specific information, a significant amount of it. So, we grabbed the birth certificate, our marriage certificate, medical records, report cards, mortgage payments to prove this child had a home *we* provided, as well as proof that we'd provided for this child in other ways. There was actually *much* more involved than this, but my "favorite" thing we submitted was a letter on South Woods' letterhead written by Chris that began, "This letter to the IRS is written to confirm that _____ is the biological child of Joseph Matthew Sliger and Julie Beth Sliger and has lived with them at their current residence, such and such address, for all of 2022." It went on to say that we provide 100% of this child's financial support; and then Chris wrote that he could verify the intact nature of this Sliger family because they attend church regularly.

Julie did the lion's share of this work. We submitted a large stack of documented evidence. However, though all this took a good bit of time, in the end, it *wasn't* all that hard to prove. The amount of evidence we had that this person belonged to us, and was dependent upon *us*, was overwhelming. The other person attempting to claim one of our children didn't stand a chance. They had no argument. It wasn't close.

Why bring that up? Because though Hebrews has a few chapters left, we're at the conclusion of the longest and primary argument Hebrews makes. Beginning at the end of chapter 4, running all the way to 10:18,² the author has slowly made *his* case concerning the person and work of Christ.

As we've noted, he's done so primarily by describing His priesthood. Why this particular imagery? Because those he wrote were largely Jewish Christians, those who'd been raised in an ecosystem of law, covenant, priest, and sacrifice. He uses *their* categories to make a point. But not only because they would've been familiar with that language, but because they were being tempted to abandon Christ and go *back* to it. The difficulties they faced kept mounting. Going *back* seemed to be a path of less resistance.

So, what does Hebrews do? It *doesn't* whitewash the difficulties; instead, it repeatedly and persuasively makes the case that going back would be to go back to something *lesser*, not merely in degree, but in kind. Further, to go back would be to leave that which is not only *better*, but also to leave that which actually enables perseverance.

Today's text is the conclusion—we might say the pinnacle—of that particular case. My hope is that the Spirit might help us see that there is *no* debate. It's not close. Even though you might *not* be tempted to run headlong into the safety of the Mosaic Covenant, you might feel the tug to walk away from Christ and into something else that *appears* to be more comfortable, more satisfying.

¹ How did this happen? We don't know.

² Peter O'Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, NSBT, 90.

Might the Spirit help us today to see the folly of such a mirage. Today's outline is simple: (1) What did Christ do? (2) What is Christ doing? (3) How might what He's done and what He's doing help us today?

1. What did Christ do? (vv. 11–12)

Verse 11: **Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices which can never take away sins.** Though most of chapter 9 seems to focus upon the work of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement—*one* priest on *one* day a year offering sacrifices—verse 11 shifts the focus, *expanding* it to include *all* the priests. Verse 11 begins: **every priest.**

It expands what we're to consider, from *one* priest on *one* day a year, because we're to have in our mind's eye a flurry of religious activity. That's what the present tense verbs picture, an ongoing, continual reality. What is it that **every priest** is doing? Verse 11: **Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices.** Every priest, every day, over and over and over again.

That's the religious world these Jewish Christians would've been familiar with, what they grew up around. You have categories for Easter Sunday. They had categories for this.

But the description of the priest's continual activity isn't intended to provoke positive notions of hard work or relentless determination. The author of Hebrews isn't patting them on the back, admiring their dogged diligence. He's setting up a contrast. And he does so by pointing out this continual activity's *futility*. Verse 11: **Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.**

This is *also* how chapter 10 began. The sacrifices were *only* a shadow of the good things to come, not the very form of things (10:1). They could *never* make perfect those that drew near. And if you want that conclusion said in starkly plain language, you could read verse 4: **for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.** So, there's a flurry of religious activity—priests offering and ministering time after time the same sacrifices. And yet their continued determination is repeatedly *marked* by vain repetition; those sacrifices can *never* take away sins.

But the main verb in verse 11 is actually the verb I've yet to highlight, the verb **stands**.³ It too carries the idea of ongoing activity. If one was to serve as a priest in the way that's been described, standing was the necessary posture. Some of us might work sitting down. But it's a fairly recent development that so much labor is accomplished from a chair. The priests *stood*. And they continued to stand because their work was never completed.⁴

So, the picture verse 11 gives us is this: priests standing, ministering, and offering. Priests ministering and offering while standing. Offering, standing, ministering. And if it sounds like I'm being unnecessarily repetitive, I will respond by saying I'm not so sure it's unnecessary. In fact, that unceasing repetition is *absolutely* the point of verse 11. They just *kept* having to stand.

With that continual, ongoing, flurry of activity in mind—standing and ministering and offering—we can now read verse 12: **but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.** It's important that we note the sequence, the order. *After* He offered Himself, He sat down.⁵ We'll come back to that.

³ Ministering and offering are participles that modify that verb. See Dana Harris, *Hebrews*, EGGNT, 263.

⁴ Tom Schreiner, *Hebrews*, EBTC, 303.

⁵ Gareth Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 449. In fact, we ought not make a practice of driving a wedge between aspects of Christ's person or work. He's born that He might die. He dies that He might also rise. And He rises in order that He might ascend to the right hand of the Father.

From the very beginning of the book, one of the author's aims has been to fix our eyes on this exalted Son being seated at God's right hand.⁶ It's how the book began. **When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high** (Heb. 1:3). Then, after the detailed argument of chapters 5, 6, and 7 concerning Christ's priesthood, the author wrote, **Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens** (Heb. 8:1).

His being seated is, of course, a fulfillment of Psalm 110. In verse 1 of that Psalm, the Father invited One to sit at His right hand. The Lord said to my Lord. Psalm 110:1 is fulfilled. Some of the beauty of Hebrews' argument is that it's shown us *another* way that Psalm 110 has been fulfilled. Because in verse 4 of that same Psalm, David wrote that the One invited to sit would *also* be a priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

For a quick reminder, what was the primary significance of this Melchizedekian priesthood? What distinguished it from the Levitical one? Well like that mysterious priest in Genesis 14, it had neither beginning nor end (Heb. 7:3). The Levitical priests died, repeatedly. They were **prevented by death from continuing** (Heb. 7:23). And yet, a vital truth for an Easter Sunday, Hebrews 7:24, He, **because He continues forever, holds his priesthood permanently.**

Which leads us to one more clause in Hebrews 10:12. The author writes that **He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down.** Again, note the order, the sequence. We dare not separate Him being seated from His sacrifice. If you do, you might miss the contrast. Every priest stands and ministers and offers sacrifices again and again. And every one of those priests, again and again, died. Yet He, the One who is priest **according to the power of an indestructible life** (Heb. 7:16) offers one sacrifice for sins **for all time.**

Those priests kept standing. But after He offered, He sat down. And He sat down *forever*. That atoning sacrifice for us endures because *He* endures. Because He conquered what our sin earned.⁷

In one sense, the resurrection isn't mentioned often in the book of Hebrews.⁸ Yet, in another sense, it's on *every* page. The ascension of Christ—one of the backbone realities in this sermon-letter—actually *assumes* resurrection. He doesn't sit down if He's still in the tomb.

We see this connection even when Christ ascended in Acts 1. What did the angels say to the disciples staring into heaven? **Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven** (Acts 1:11). Why do the angels say **this Jesus**? Why does Luke record it? Because it's not some disembodied, ethereal, spiritualized Messiah that sat down at the right hand of the Father. It's resurrected Jesus of Nazareth—the One that conquered death, the One that restored humanity—He ascended to rule.

What did Christ do? He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time (10:12), having cried out to the One able to save Him from death (5:7), having been heard, having been made alive, He sat down at the right hand of God.

2. What is Christ doing? (v. 13)

It's actually from *that* place—seated at the right hand—that He upholds all things by the world of His power (Heb. 1:3). To be clear, He's not merely sitting; He's ruling. He's priest *and* king. Verse 13 goes on to nuance this somewhat, describing what He's doing *while* seated: **waiting from that time**

⁶ Cockerill, 446.

⁷ That's what Hebrews 2:14 said: **Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death.**

⁸ Though it is mentioned. See 5:7, 13:20-21, 7:15-16, etc.

onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. Though the ascension fulfills the first clause in Psalm 110:1, there is *still* a forward-looking aspect to it. The *ultimate* conquering that Psalm 110 references is in one sense *still* in a world to come.

To grasp this rightly, we have to hold certain truths in tension. We've mentioned this previously. All the way back in chapter 2, the author himself put forward two assertions that—when placed side by side—create a certain degree of tension. The first was this, in 2:8: **For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him.** Is that assertion true? Absolutely. He's *now* at the right hand of the Father, ruling over all. Yet, that verse goes on, **But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him** (Heb. 2:8). All things are subjected, yes; *but* we do not *yet* see all things subjected. Both assertions are true. We couldn't say otherwise.

This tension was more than mere theological abstraction. It had pastoral application, helping to explain the suffering, the persecution, and the difficulty these believers faced. It can do the same concerning the turmoil in our *own* day, in our own life.

Many call this tension the “now” and the “not yet” of the Kingdom of God. By “now,” they mean that the Kingdom is not *entirely* future. In *these* moments, the resurrected Christ rules and reigns by His Spirit in His people. What is the resurrected and ascended Christ doing *now*? He's doing that. However, have *all* His enemies bowed their knees and hearts? Did we wake up in Revelation 22 today? No, we did not. That's the *not yet* of the Kingdom.¹⁰

It's been common to illustrate these truths by referencing D-Day and V-Day.¹¹ That is, in many senses, on June 6, 1944—D-Day—the decisive victory in WWII occurred. On that day, defenses were breached that the Axis powers would never recover from. And yet, our enemies in Europe wouldn't fully surrender until May of 1945. So, between June of 1944 and May of 1945, victory might have been assured, but that *didn't* mean battles and skirmishes ceased.

To take that a step further, and to make it a bit more personal—at least to me—every couple years I get on a kick researching my own grandfather's efforts during that war. I think I've mentioned before that I interviewed him about it back in 1994. I still have the 10-minute-long recording. I listened to it just last week, for the 60th time. He fought in the Philippines in 1945, out in the jungle, in the infantry. He was actually *still* out there when the war ended, when the Axis powers surrendered. In fact, on the audio of that interview he says this, verbatim: “We were up there when the war was over. We didn't know anything about it. Been over a week. But it wasn't over up there.”

That's the nature of our *now*, isn't it? We do not *yet* see all things subjected to Him.

Yet, that does *not* mean that the death and resurrection of Christ don't provide us with unshakeable certainty. Further, His ascension—His present tense rule as King—assures us that history will be brought to its appointed end. Just as Psalm 110's promises were fulfilled in the person of Christ—a Melchizedekian Priest-King *did* put on flesh—Psalm 110's ultimate fulfillment *will* come about. Which is what we just read in Hebrews 9:28: **So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.** Which is precisely what the angels told the disciples at the ascension as well: **This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven** (Acts 1:11).

There's certainty in verse 13. His enemies *will* be made a footstool. Yet, the “not yet” tension remains, because He's **waiting from that time onward until** they are.

⁹ Or the “already.”

¹⁰ Another way we might say it is that the Kingdom has been inaugurated, but not yet fully realized/consummated.

¹¹ Oscar Cullman originally noted this, but see the discussion in Schreiner, 304.

Verse 14 rightly captures this same tension, but applies it to us. The NASB has a marginal reading that matches the ESV.¹² Hear verse 13's tension applied to us in verse 14: **For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.** Do you hear that “now” and “not yet”? Those who are *being* sanctified is our “now.” We do not *now* see all things subjected to Him. We're opposed by the world. Yet, that's some of what the Lord uses to conform us. Further, there's opposition *within* us. Why? Because we're *still* being made holy.

And yet, with theological tensions like these, we *must* keep *both* truths in mind. So, while we're being made holy *now*, there's an aspect of this work—a certain not yet—also emphasized in verse 14. That perfection that the shadows of the law and sacrifices couldn't bring about, He has brought about. It couldn't be more clearly said: **For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.** “*Being* sanctified,” yet “perfected for all time.” Both are true.

He's done both. How? By a single offering. What He did *both* perfected you *and* is sanctifying you. That's today's text. It's not *only* that the other option—offering after offering after offering—can't assure your future, it *also* can't aid you in the present. In fact, the resurrected and ascended Christ is the provision for your perseverance. Which are what verses 15–18 describe:

3. How might what He's done and what He's doing help us today? (vv. 15–18)

Before we read verse 15, what happened almost immediately after Christ ascended? He ascended in Acts 1. What happened in Acts 2?

With that in mind, verse 15: **And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us.** I continue to believe that Acts 2:32-33 are some of the most significant verses in all the New Testament. Luke writes, **This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.** Why are these verses so significant for us? For a number of reasons, but the one I point out today is the connection between Christ's resurrection, His ascension, and the pouring out of the Spirit upon His people.

Why it was to their advantage for Christ to go away (Jn. 16:7)? So that He might send the Spirit. Acts 2:33 shows us that fulfillment, when He, resurrected and exalted to the right hand of God, poured out that which God's people *needed*. And if you still don't see the connection between all this and our text in Hebrews 10, hear what Peter said next in Acts 2:34: **For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”**

The resurrected and ascended Christ sends His Spirit to us. He does so, so that God's revelation might be clear to us. Verse 15 again: **and the Holy Spirit also testifies to us.**

With that in mind, from these next four verses we'll briefly outline four applications. All of them are given in *this* context, meaning they have been made possible by Christ's self-offering, sacrificial death, triumphant resurrection, and ongoing session.

First, because of what Christ has *done*, and what He *is* doing, we can know what is true. Verse 15 says that the Holy Spirit—present tense—testifies to us. Which is what Jesus said He would do in John 16:13: **when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth.** Why is this so significant? We're surrounded by half-truths. We, like those hearing this letter, sometimes find the mirage appealing. We doubt. We struggle. Yet, Christ was resurrected and ascended *so that* He might send the Spirit, *so that* truth might be clear to us, *so that* we might not wander in darkness.

Secondly, because of what Christ has done, and what He is doing, we're empowered to live in light of what is true. That's verse 16: **This is the covenant that I will make with them after**

¹² “Sanctified” is a present passive verb, which is why I prefer the translation, “those who are being sanctified.”

those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them. This new covenant, already mentioned in Hebrews 8, had been promised long before in Jeremiah. And those new covenant promises *include* God putting His laws upon our minds and hearts. As we've noted, in the Mosaic covenant the law was in one sense *external*. Though commands might be known, or read, that did not *necessarily* give the inner inclination to *keep* that which God commanded.¹³

Yet the new covenant is concerned—not *primarily* with what's external—but with transformation. The perfection the priests couldn't accomplish, the Mediator of this covenant has. By His blood, He inaugurated the new covenant and its promises. He is the means by which Jeremiah's prophecy is fulfilled.¹⁴ So, if we're being sanctified, He's the One that made it possible. Further, He's the One that does it (Heb. 2:11) The death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ means we can *both* know what is true *and* be empowered to do it.

Will we? Not always. The author knew we were still *being* sanctified. So, there's a third application in verse 17. But let me read the context again; because the promises are interconnected. Verse 15b: **for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them," He then says, "And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."**

He empowers us to live according to truth. But when we fail, His forgiveness won't. Why? His atoning sacrifice for us endures. How do we know? Because *He* endures. He sat down. And He *continues* to be seated, ruling and reigning—upholding all things by the word of His power—including our cleansing. This is why Hebrews *keeps* pointing us to Christ at the Father's right hand. So that when we despair *again*, we might see Him *there* again.

And, fourth, *that* truth—which we know, imprinted on our minds and hearts—frees us from vain attempts of self-justification. Verse 18: **Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.** What's that mean? It means we can step off forever the treadmill to nowhere of works-righteousness.

So, how might what He's done and what He's doing help you today? The ascended Christ clarified God's revelation to you. He sent His Spirit, who continues to speak, pointing you to truth. The death of Christ inaugurated a new covenant, empowering you to believe and do that which is true. When you fail, because He offered a single sacrifice for sins for *all* time, there is no longer any offering for you to make. He remembers His people's sins no more. And because He conquered death, all these truths are truths *forever*. Risen and ascended, He sat down to rule for eternity.

Conclusion

These verses—these truths—are the close of the primary argument in the book of Hebrews. He's made the case. So, at this point we might ask: what's tugging at you? What "promises" are being made? Does it stand before the One who made you, coming to die for you, rising to conquer death for you, and living to make intercession for you, now and always?

¹³ Schreiner, 251.

¹⁴ Harris, 268.

I love history, but many of you in here far surpass me in knowledge. But when I get on these kicks about my grandfather's time in WWII, I can get fairly obsessed with it. And I think it's for quite the obvious reason. During that interview, he tells me that one time during a pause in the gunfire, he looks around and he's the only American soldier he can see. He said he prayed and then made it out. Then, later in the interview, he says that when the news finally reached the jungles that the war was over, over 20,000 of the enemy came out of their hiding places. And though I'm sure there's a degree of exaggeration here, on that recording he says, verbatim, "There were 40 of us up there . . . We didn't have a chance." Exaggerated or not, they were outnumbered. He goes on to say that of the 14 people in his squad, only 4 of them survived the war.

Why have I listened to this interview so many times, why might I obsessively study what happened in the Philippines in the summer of 1945? Because my father isn't born for another three years. So, when I read the history of that summer, and when I listen to that 30-year-old interview of my grandfather, I'm glued to every syllable. Why? This isn't mere history. It's not mere past, it's present. It's not far off. It's personal. If he lives, I live.