

Hebrews 7:26–28 How Fitting!

Do you *know* Christ? The answer to that is not cut and dry. What one means by the word “know” is paramount. The Jeopardy savant might breeze through the religious category column on “Jesus Christ” with precision. The first grader might make bold claims. The misguided mystic might make even brasher assertions of seeing Jesus in the living room. And yes, the brilliant scholar who has succeeded in convincing a host of others that the miracles in the New Testament could never hold water, those faithless studies have forced him/her to *know* Jesus. They all *know* Jesus, so they say. After all, since His arrival in Bethlehem, He’s been examined and judged more than He’s been experienced and loved.

Yet, God has made Himself knowable in the sending of His Son. This very letter begins with that assertion. The apostle Paul considered knowing Jesus his primary pursuit. Whatever advantages he acquired being an esteemed religious leader under the Mosaic Law he considered rubbish.¹ And if we distill down what we’ve considered through Hebrews thus far, the crux of the matter aligns with Paul’s: Looking to Jesus² and growing in the knowledge of Him by faith is the way back from the dangerous drift of unbelief.³ Paul would write to the Philippian church that keeping Christ’s sufficiency in view was the way to fend off the barking *dogs* devoted to law-works.⁴ In Ephesians 2, Jesus is the reference point for all that Paul prayed in “*having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.*” Our spiritual health and stamina are contingent upon our line of spiritual sight.

And when we see Him, we say things like “[The] comparison does not whiff close!”⁵ The weight and clarity that landed with those words last Sunday were made all the more so because of the shape and sequence of Hebrews’ argumentation. Our brother was enabled to digest and skillfully capture the sense of this mysterious character named Melchizedek and his unique place in the saving purposes of God. For the sustained argument of a superior Priest and all that we might substitute for Him, Melchizedek’s presence is absolutely crucial. But we’ve learned through chapter 7 that this great priest⁶ has a Superior who is in some sense both Predecessor and Successor.

We can attempt to get at the first twenty-five verses with a few questions: If our father Abraham offered this lightening-in-the-bottle-priest honor and costly gifts, what if someone greater arrives on the scene? Wouldn’t He be worthy of greater trust and deeper devotion? If a unique priest arose before the law was given at Sinai, couldn’t a unique Priest also arise after the law was established? If God revealed a unique priest before the Levitical lineage was established, could He not reveal another unique priest apart from that lineage once again? If the old priesthood was tainted with human sin, what would result in a sinless priest being appointed? And if a sinless priest offers himself as a payment for sin in death and rises from the dead as proof of Yahweh’s acceptance of that payment, what then of the Levitical priesthood and the law of Moses? Would not that *indestructible life* hold sway over everything that God has communicated and accomplished since creation?

¹ Paul’s word in Philippians 3:8 is a vulgar term that means something akin to human sewage, which conveys that all advantages afforded to him without Christ were worthless and filthy .

² A key phrase in Hebrews, found in 12:2

³ Hebrews 2:1, “...lest we drift away...”

⁴ Philippians 3:2, “Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.”

⁵ Dr. Matt Sliger, sermon on Hebrews 7:11-25, *Fully and Finally*, <https://southwoodsbcc.org/media/f2c234x/hebrews-7-11-25-fully-and-forever>

⁶ Hebrews 7:4, “See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!”

Like an arid riverbed aching with cracks, these questions find satisfaction in the showers of these last few verses under inspection today. In fact, what we considered in verses 22-25 were the first of the incoming, life-giving swells. Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant. With His shed blood He has secured an inheritance for us. And since the grave itself was the unsuspecting means to victory, verified by a bodily resurrection, Christ is able to save completely and forever all who draw near to God through Him. Today's text is simply the continued release of even more nourishing waters, able to rejuvenate flailing faith, even grant life where faith is missing altogether.

I. The fitness of this Priest (Ways He is not like us)

Two centuries before the birth of Christ, a letter written by a Jewish man to his brother described in detail the experience of looking upon a high priest in action. This man, Aristeeas, elaborated on the stones attached to the outfit of the high priest. The bells he wore, he stated, gave forth a peculiar kind of melody when he walked. The colors interwoven into the fabric he donned transmitted a “conspicuous beauty.” Here is how Aristeeas summed up the experience of being in the high priest's presence,

Their appearance created such awe and confusion of mind as to make one feel that one had come into the presence of a man who belonged to a different world. I am convinced that anyone who takes part in the spectacle which I have described will be filled with astonishment and indescribable wonder and be profoundly affected in his mind at the thought of the sanctity which is attached to each detail.⁷

In other words, onlookers were mesmerized by high priests. The visual symbols packed with meaning, the vibrant colors, and the tasks before him performed on behalf of the people's sins—all accorded him an honor few people experienced. He moved about as a respected staple in the community. With a dignified life and a verified lineage, he operated at the center Jewish life. Honor came his way every day.

The author of Hebrews sets out to stir our own marveling. In fact, multiple scholars agree that this section is a “concluding rhapsody” of chapter 7's treatment of the priesthood.⁸ Hear what he writes, *[26] For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.*

The Holy Spirit superintending this sermon-letter long ago set the author on a course to show two central truths about Jesus in relation to us. One, that He is like us. He was born of a woman.⁹ He had human veins and joints, human emotions and susceptibilities.¹⁰ He wept. He slept. He suffered. He died. Without these realities, there would be no representing us before the Father. On the other hand, the content beginning in verse 26 will show the flip side of His qualifications. He alone possesses the kind of life necessary to save, a life we couldn't cultivate with an eternity of effort. Hebrews has argued how Christ is like us, but verse 26 states unequivocally something altogether different.

First, we read that to have this kind of high priest is *fitting*. It's the idea of being perfectly suited, or appropriate for the particular circumstances involved.¹¹ If Auto Zone hired me as their chief operating

⁷ *Letter of Aristeeas to Philocrates*, translated by Moses Hadas, 99.

⁸ Peter O'Brien, *PNTC: The Letter to the Hebrews*, 278.

⁹ Hebrews 1:6

¹⁰ Sin excepting—Hebrews 4:15.

¹¹ Sigurd Grindheim, *PNTC: The Letter to the Hebrews*, 371.

officer, they would have an immediate disaster on their hands. No matter how kind I might attempt to be, or fair, or trustworthy, the occupation of understanding the world of vehicles is beyond me in scores of ways. They would need more than character; they would need practical competence for the tasks at hand.¹² However, I know of some who would do relatively well within any given department at Auto Zone yet fumble in other respects. The work would be second nature—the world of car parts and part numbers, repair and maintenance, function and design. But taking instructions, being team oriented, gracious, dependable, and honest requires more than sharp minds and skillful hands.

The recipients of this letter needed to be reminded that through faith in this *high priest*, they've come home.¹³ And in coming, God was pleased.¹⁴ The destination, charted before the earth's foundations, was never meant to be a place earned, but a worthy Person. And this *high priest* is *fitting* because He possessed the competence and character to accomplish so great a salvation. He is *fitting* because He has all we lack. He is all we aren't. He is the One who fits our longings best. Jesus is *holy, innocent, and unstained*. The audience here would have understood what God required of the priests from the establishment of the law, extensive rituals with water and oil to consecrate themselves, with law after law on how to maintain *holy* status.¹⁵

The Gospels reveal to us the Jesus Hebrews presents. In Mark 1, a desperate leper cries out to Jesus to be cleansed. What happens is what none in Jesus' day would expect. Jesus turns and in a scandalous moment, He touches the leper, rendering Him unclean under the law. But catching leprosy was of no concern to Jesus because the true "contaminate" in that situation was His holiness. With that touch and with many others, His *holy* status was unphased.

Jesus being holy meant He was intrinsically so. From His thinking to His affections to His motivations and to His acts of service, Jesus was and is *holy*. This holiness speaks to an inside out aspect of Jesus' character, but being *unstained* means that nothing could get in, or intrude upon His flawless purity. Judas Iscariot didn't move the needle, nor did the demoniac or his indwelling trespassers. Satan in the wilderness couldn't break through. The mass of human pride and greed and jealousy and hate—He caught nor caved under any of it, never sullied in the slightest. He is holy, unstained, and *innocent*. This innocence speaks to His way among humanity, where deceit and dark intent are found at every turn. Instead, Jesus is devoted to doing humanity good with impeccable motives.¹⁶ Together these three terms add up to being very much unlike those that Jesus, our superior high priest, would represent before God.

The summary form of these three words, *holy, innocent, and unstained* are marked by two participles, *separated and exalted*. We saw in chapter 4 how Jesus identifies with human weakness and struggle, showing Himself to be in solidarity with us. But He is also One who must be *separated from sinners*, out of their league, so to speak. The high priests throughout Jewish history couldn't make such a claim. They weren't born of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ They were guilty of transgressing the law and tarnished by the sin of others. And they certainly couldn't assert in any way to be *exalted above the heavens*. Christ, entirely holy, sustaining His perfection through the humiliation of the being crucified, and doing so for the sake of

¹² When I was a younger man, and when diesel fuel was cheaper than gas, I once put diesel in my car to save a few dollars. On that day, I didn't make it very far. And today, I'm not that much further down the road of understanding in this area.

¹³ John 14:23, "Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'"

¹⁴ Hebrews 11:6

¹⁵ See Numbers 19

¹⁶ Thomas Schreiner, *EBTC: Hebrews*, 237.

¹⁷ Matthew 1:18

others, He was and is *exalted above the heavens*. This exaltation is both a return to His rightful place as co-Creator and a proper reward for His redeeming work as re-Creator.

But the priests weren't alone in their ethical insufficiencies. The whole of Jesus' priestly ministry shows His fitness for *our* unfitness. It would be delusional to claim we could be all that verse 26 expresses in this life.¹⁸ But this Jesus—He touches and destroys what destroys us. He gives life and healing to the dead and the sick. He is wise and providential while we are foolish and careless. We are hostile vertically and horizontally while He brings sweeping peace, even to His enemies. Considering the depth of our need and the hopelessness we possess standing on our own two feet before God (who dwells in unapproachable light¹⁹), the King-Priest shining through these pages couldn't be more suitable?

II. The finality of His offering (But He is for us)

[27] He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

Yes, the writer of Hebrews is repeating himself.²⁰ And yes, the Holy Spirit has led him to such a practice. Why the repetition? If Sam stormed into this sanctuary to tell us of some imminent danger, I suspect that he would say the issue loud and clear, repeating the issue with force. If you told me that most warning systems are encoded with multiple attempts at communicating the emergency at hand, I would have to agree. The tornado siren repeats itself. The warning bulletin cycles the same message at the bottom of the television when the hurricane is bearing down. A people dull of hearing, blurry to see the primacy of greatest Priest of all, salivating for the poison of law-works, nearly nose-blind to the aroma of the Son of God, who is a fragrance from life to life, a people on the cusp of condemnation—those people need the siren on repeat!

So he reiterates: Those high priests that came before are flawed. The law that directed them could not commend them to God nor clear their consciences before Him. Abandon the very thought. Leave them all behind. Because this high priest after the order of Melchizedek *has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily.*

And the differences are fundamental and foundational. Look who is offering—a holy, innocent, and unstained High Priest. Look what is being offered—His own life to satisfy God's justice which could be satisfied no other way. Ponder the power and effectiveness of this offering by its frequency, or lack thereof—Christ is offering Himself *once for all*. For who? For all those whom He will save. For all who come to Him by repentance and faith. For all who lay down their pride and take up His glory as their source of confidence. For those in every nation who call upon His name for forgiveness. For the weak, the worn, the lonely, the outcast, Jesus Christ died *once for all* time.

While the bulls, goats, doves, and sheep can't grasp the reprieve they received at the kind hand of this Great High Priest, we can glory in the finality of Christ's offering. His offering, borne out of love, was a final payment for our sin. It's that truth which reaches the deepest parts of us. Think about it. This offering settles the heart in peace, renews the mind, stabilizes the fears, corrals the darkest passions, enables relationships to grow with health; this offering creates boldness, smothers self-importance, opens the heart

¹⁸ 1 John 1:8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

¹⁹ 1 Timothy 6:16

²⁰ Hebrews 5:1-3

to operate in truth, kindles worship, and liberates a life for willing service. The believing, Jewish community had blurred their vision of Jesus and lost sight of the ramifications of these words—***he offered up himself.***

What about your own eyesight? Whatever might afford you an advantage in life, is knowing Christ and loving Him your chief aim? However people see you or whatever identity you possess either by your own understanding or the perceptions of others, does seeing Christ and growing to know Him describe you? Look again how great He is! Notice how He dwarfs angelic messengers, Moses, Melchizedek, and ministering priests in every way! In that place where we belonged—under a divine curse, engulfed by a calculated justice of fury that we rightly earned—right there, Christ hung in love and ***offered up himself.*** So powerful that in three days' time trillions of sins were completely wiped clean and a multitude of sinners that no one could number were graciously justified!²¹

III. The fortitude of His appointment (And that most-assuredly and eternally so)

[28] For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

One understanding of the word *fortitude* is possessing the capability to endure.²² Armies have been called upon to *hold the fort*, or to make sure it endures the day. We might express to someone else while leaving a place with the intent of returning “hold down the fort.” In other words, keep things as they are, ensure the preservation and endurance of the current situation or setting.

Maybe one of sneaking doubts that the Jews were exercising was that with Jesus, this newer change in allegiance and understanding was a step too far. Could it be that God had changed His mind, not enduring in the ways He promised in the old covenant? We could certainly envision opponents of the gospel making that very point to these new believers. But again, with no fresh information added in verse 28, the author is led to repeat himself.²³ Psalm 110 is a favorite of his. Matt and I have tried to note the simultaneous-identity of this heir of David. He is both Priest who exceeds all others and the King of kings. There is no legitimacy in turning back to Judaism. Why? Because he writes that no matter who is appointed as high priest, it's plagued with the double ***weakness*** of sin and death. And the ***law*** being administered by these priests, it only continued and continues to produce woefully inadequate results.

One commentator compared the priests appointed by the law as actors in a theater. The actor may perform a marriage ceremony or condemn someone to death with great gusto, but when it comes down to it, nobody is actually married, and nobody loses their life. It's all performance. He writes, “Actors lack the formal authority. All they can do is to illustrate what someone with the actual authority might do.”²⁴ The law appointed the shadow of a defective priesthood. The priesthood was always meant to bow out before the final Priest. Psalm 110:4, “*The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.'*”—this sworn oath appointed the substance and culmination of those shadows, this Priest ***made perfect forever.***

²¹ Revelation 7:9

²² <https://www.etymonline.com/word/fortitude>

²³ O'Brien, 283. “Every word and expression in 7:28 has already been mentioned in 5:1-7:28.”

²⁴ Grindheim, 376.

The appointment stands. These Jews were undoubtedly being ragged and persecuted by those who opposed the gospel. They needed to be washed over with the details of Christ's post as Sin-bearing High Priest and Sin-conquering King. The best that evil men and devils could launch in Jesus' direction failed and continues to fail. And if God's unchanging purpose at Golgotha and the empty tomb stood fast, what will come of every lesser onslaught of evil? What can man do to me²⁵ which could overturn what God has done for me?²⁶

Conclusion

Jesus—a fitting Savior. He is all that we could never be on our own—holy, innocent, unstained, different from sinners, exalted above the heavens. And He has done all that we could never do—offer Himself as the one-time payment for our acquittal before the Father. No other high priest would do. We qualify as those needing mercy and He qualifies as One who graciously gives it.

²⁵ Psalm 118:6

²⁶ Roman 8:31