

Hebrews 8:1-13

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[0 : 00] The singer-songwriter Jason Isbell, American kind of country rock, may not have heard of him. He wrote a song called Maybe It's Time. You might have come across that song if you're not a Jason Isbell fan in the film.

A Star is Born when Bradley Cooper sang it. Eddie Vedder, formerly of Pearl Jam, he does a nice version as well by the way. It's on YouTube. But this song, Maybe It's Time, reflects on how hard it is to change your life for the better in your own strength.

How difficult it is to actually make changes in your life so that things move in a more positive direction. Maybe it's time to let the old ways die. It takes a lot to change a man. It takes a lot to try. Maybe it's time to let the old ways die. The lyrics speak about how simplistic some people's view of life is. And it is actually especially dismissive of the Christian faith that I think probably Jason Isbell grew up with.

But that repeated line, Maybe it's time to let the old ways die, could be the theme tune of the book of Hebrews. Hebrews. The first hearers of the book were looking back to the old ways, to their old religion, their old forms of worship, their old covenant structures, and they wanted to go back.

[1 : 28] And the writer's message is, Maybe it's time to let the old ways die. Well, actually, more accurately, there's no maybe about it. But it's time to let the old ways die.

The old VHS religion, if you were here last week, has to die, he's saying. And the reason is, the reason why the old ways need to die is because Jesus is better.

Way better. And this evening of chapter 8, we move into a new section of the book where that word, better, is going to come up again and again. And chapter 8 tells us specifically that he is a better priest who mediates a better covenant.

That's what we're looking at this evening. He's a better priest who mediates a better covenant. Now, why is that relevant? Well, let's go to our first point. Jesus is a better priest, and the author tells us, because he works in heaven.

That's verses 1 to 5. Do you notice in those first five verses, the author is fixated on Jesus' location? Now, the point of what we're saying is this. We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.

[2 : 49] Now, we labored through chapter 7 through Melchizedek last week, and verse 1 tells us, here's the point of what we've just been saying. Here's the point.

You want to know what the point of the Melchizedek chapter is? For all of its kind of complexity and confusion, here's the point. We have the great high priest that we need who will fit us for God's presence.

Now, we've seen again and again in this section that the author keeps quoting Psalm 110 with the invitation there for the Lord to sit at my right hand.

The Lord says to the Lord, God the Father to God the Son, to take his seat in that position of authority and rule. And here in chapter 8, we're told that this has taken place.

He has done this. We have such a high priest, one who has taken his seat at the right hand of the majesty. And where is that majestic one? In heaven.

[3 : 48] Verse 2, Jesus and minister. Where? In the holy places. In the true tabernacle of God. Back in chapter 4, we're told we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens.

In chapter 6, we see Jesus as our forerunner who has entered the inner place behind the curtain as the high priest in the order of Melchizedek. And last week, we saw chapter 7, verse 25, he is exalted above the heavens, above the skies.

Where is Jesus now? Where is he now? As we gather here, he's in heaven. He is ministering as our priest in the very presence of God.

Earthly high priests. They were appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices on behalf of their people.

Verse 3, Jesus as our priest after Melchizedek. Has offered himself as our sacrifice.

We'll say more on that, Lord willing, next week. But this is why he sits down at the right hand of the Father. His sacrificial offering has dealt with every sin. His work of atonement has been completed.

[4 : 54] When he cried out, it is finished. From the cross, it was. And so he sits down. But his ministry is also one of intercession.

7.25 again. He ever lives to intercede for us. He is mediating between us and the Father. It's like he applies in heaven the ongoing effectiveness of his once-for-all sacrifice, day after day, before the Father.

When we sin, he steps in as our advocate. It's almost as if you can imagine he goes, Father, I have dealt with their sin.

When we call out to our Father, think of those times when you're confused, when you're trying to pray and you're confused, or you find yourself rambling, or you find yourself not really able to say the things that you need to say, or even not able to say anything.

Sometimes we're so heartbroken that we sit down to pray. Sometimes life is so complicated that we go to God and we can't say anything. Well, when we call out to our Father, or when we come into his presence in silence, the Lord Jesus perfects those prayers, the longings of our heart as they are directed to him, and those are heard in the very throne room of heaven.

[6 : 12] Through our union with Christ, that's what the New Testament tells us again and again. We put our faith in Christ, we are united to him.

And through that union, our communion with God has a heavenly aspect. We experience it here in the day-to-day, down here in the grit and the grime of life on earth, life in London, but it has a real expression in heaven.

Because our priest is in heaven representing us there. And we'll hear more on that, as I say, hopefully in coming weeks, but this also especially means that there is a sense in which, through the Spirit, we are gathered now in the presence of heaven.

As I say, we'll hear more of that later. But that heavenly aspect of our priest's work, it's so important. This is what he is developing here, the author, at the beginning. This is what Christ's priestly work means, here and now.

But why is that better? Why is that better than the old order of things? You're not asking that question? I'm asking that question. So he's in heaven.

[7 : 20] All right, so what? Well, it's better because the author tells us that Christ's ministry there in heaven is reality. Look at verse 5. The old priests, they serve a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things.

For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain. Moses, you remember, Moses was given the pattern for the tabernacle and for the priesthood, based on what God had shown him on the mountain.

He had been given, we're told, in Exodus 25 to 30, a pattern to follow. And the construction that was built, the priesthood that was instituted, were based on the heavenly reality.

The earthly priesthood, in one sense, you look around and the earthly priesthood looks very real. However, it was a copy. Think of it like an artist's sketch of a building.

That sketch is the building, in a sense. And depending on the artist's talent, it might look impressive. When you go to an art gallery and look at a drawing or a portrait, it could be stunningly good.

[8 : 30] But it's still only a copy of the real thing. The real thing is somewhere else. And the earthly priesthood was also a shadow. Now, we know there is no such thing as a shadow without the substance to create the shadow.

If I put my hand kind of here, I can see a shadow on the lectern. The light is there. But there's a reality that creates the shadow. The shadow isn't the real thing, but it is connected to the real thing. So the old priesthood, the old priesthood was not the real thing. But like a shadow points to the existence of the substance, its existence pointed to something real that cast the shadow.

And that reality is Christ and His priestly work in heaven. Now, with this, the implication is obvious. Now that we have the reality, there's no need for the copy.

When the building has been built, there's no need for the drawing. No one stands in a new building and pours over the architect's drawing. Don't worry about that. Look at the drawing. No one experiences the reality of something and says, Oh, I wish the shadow of that reality was still here. [9 : 48] That is why Christ is a better priest. In contrast to the limits of earthly priests, He ministers in the reality of heaven, in the true tabernacle, in the presence of God.

And this is why Jesus is the priest that we all need. Any form of religion or philosophy that is entirely focused in the here and now may have some temporal benefits.

There may be things that an earthly religion can do for you in terms of creating discipline in your life, in terms of creating a community that you can be part of.

And there are temporal benefits for that. But it is always going to have limits because it doesn't penetrate to the reality of heaven. We live in a world where there is a reality above us and that is the reality of heaven.

The phrase you sometimes hear, they're so heavenly minded that they're no earthly use. You've heard it. You may have even used it. It is something that people say to describe often a Christian who is usually a bit naive and a bit out of touch with the experiences of life down here in the real world where we live.

[11 : 07] The truth is, if you are genuinely heavenly minded, you are engaged in the real world. Because that's where real business is done with God and it is there and only there where the real issues of life, the universe, and everything are resolved.

Jesus is the better priest because he works in heaven. But it doesn't stop there. His ministry is linked to the covenant that God has made with his people.

So as the better priest, he also mediates, point number two, a better covenant. Because he works in us. It's our second point.

He mediates a better covenant because he works in us. Verse six, for if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

[12 : 21] The Lord found fault with the old covenant. The old system had a flaw. Not that there was a problem with his law or what that law pointed to. The flaw wasn't in the covenant as such, but in the people.

Do you see? For he finds fault with them. Verse eight, the fault was on the people's side of the covenant because they were unable to keep its requirements. But the prophet Jeremiah promised many years earlier that the days were coming.

Days that when the author is writing this, that have now come in these last days. Chapter one, where the shadow covenant will give way to a real heavenly covenant which is founded on better promises.

And these are better because they are promises that actually deal with us. They're better because they take our sin into account. Indeed, they are promises that overcome our sinfulness.

How is that the case? Well, in the new covenant, God gets to work inside us. Verse 10, do you see? For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord.

[13 : 25] I will put my law into their minds and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Under the old covenant, the law was written on tablets of stone out there externally.

In the new, it is etched on hearts. It is etched on minds and written on hearts. It's common to hear people say that the old covenant was all about what a person did.

All ritual and external practices. Whereas in the new, it's all about the internal, what God does in you and how you respond. But the truth is that God has always cared more about the heart behind the actions of his people than he has the actions for their own sake.

Sincere faith has always been a matter of the heart. That's not a point of difference. But in the eyes of the author of Hebrews, the old covenant was unable to adequately accomplish this heart transformation.

Luke Timothy Johnson in his commentary says this, What is needed is the participation of God's Son on the side of humans as their anchor of hope and pledge of the covenant. What is different is not the desired end, but the divine agency to accomplish that end.

[14 : 35] What he's saying is this, the obedience from the heart which was expected under the old covenant is accomplished by God in the new. In the new covenant, we have the promise of God's work in us by his Spirit to transform our minds and hearts and to draw us into relationship with him.

I will be their God and they shall be my people. That is the covenantal pledge that God makes all the way through the Old Testament. But now, the ability for us to keep the terms of the covenant is granted through the new hearts and the transformed minds that God himself has given.

the relationship that we were created for is now possible because God gives us a new heart to love and serve him.

You cannot obey God apart from this internal work. But here's the thing. When you turn from your sin and put your faith in Christ, this is what he does for us.

He transforms us from the inside. Do you know that you can really know God? You can really know him. All of the striving and all of the effort of those who think that religion is a good idea is an attempt to connect with reality in some way.

[15 : 55] Everybody that you see that is devoted to religion in some way or other is trying to connect with reality in some way to find real answers to the problems of life. All of the rejection of God that came with secularism is just another way of searching for truth and meaning in this world that we live in.

People reject the idea of God because they think he is a fantasy or an irrelevance. But the promise of the new covenant is that you can know the God who created all that we have and see.

You can know the God who defines reality. You can really, and have a look, verse 11, personally know him. And they shall teach each one his neighbor and each one his brother saying, Know the Lord for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest.

Old Israel knew God in contrast to the other nations who were described as not following him, not knowing him. But this was a limited knowledge and it was a knowledge that they could lose in the sense that Hosea could say of the people in his day that, Hosea 4, verse 1, there was no knowledge of God in the land.

But to know God, we talk about knowing God, that is to recognize him, to trust him, and obey him. And the point here is that under the new covenant, God's people are enabled to do this by God himself.

[17 : 22] New covenant believers have a direct and personal knowledge of him. It's not just kings that have that access. It's not just judges that have that access. And it's not just for a time either as we saw under the old covenant, but from the least to the greatest, every man, woman, boy, or girl who puts their faith in Christ, the better priest, is drawn into this relationship.

Do you hear that, boys and girls, this evening? That applies to you. If you put your faith in Christ, the better priest, you're drawn into a relationship with the living God.

You can know him and you can know him personally. The question is, how is this possible? How can sinful, rebellious people become children of God?

How can we know and trust and be in relationship with a holy God? Well, it's because of what Jeremiah says in the climax of this promise. Look at verse 12.

Here it is. How is it possible? For I will be merciful towards their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more. This pronouncement is repeated again in chapter 10, verse 17.

[18 : 35] It is the basis on which all that is held out to us, that is a new heart, a personal relationship with God, an immediate relationship with God, all of that is possible.

The mercy of God in forgiveness is the reason why. The mercy of God to you in forgiveness for your sins. He sees our sin and He covers it.

Again, forgiveness was present under the old covenant, but not like this. Not like this. In the new covenant, forgiveness is both personal and universal. That is, it is for every individual who knows the Lord and it covers every sin of those who receive the new heart that Christ's ministry gives.

Just look. Just look at the extent of this mercy. He remembers our sin no more. Think of even the last few sins that you've committed.

Even the last few, never mind everyone. Christ has taken them away and God has no recollection of them. Does this mean He has amnesia?

[19 : 51] Is God forgetful? No. So there is a plea that is repeated a number of places in the Old Testament. Psalm 25, 6 and 7. Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions according to your steadfast love. Remember me for the sake of your goodness, O Lord. That's the plea and Jeremiah's new covenant promises that God is going to grant that request.

God won't remember your sin but He will remember you. In Christ's new covenant it really is a case of God forgiving and forgetting.

He won't remember your sin but He will remember you. What a relief. What a relief.

How many of you are all twisted up out of shape, antsy, uncomfortable, describe it how you will, because of guilt? You feel guilt and shame about things that you've done and whatever you've tried to do, those things, that sense of guilt and shame clings to you the way food smells in a greasy cafe cling to you.

[21 : 10] You just can't seem to shake them off. I know for some of you it's almost like you can't remember what it feels like to enjoy yourself. You've forgotten what freedom feels like.

Well, here's the promise that will lift your burden. The mercy of God is for you. And just as He remembers your sin no more, so you must take Him at His word and leave it behind.

Sometimes I hear people say, look, I know God forgives me, I just can't forgive myself. And they remain stuck in their misery. Well, in that case, what that person is really saying is, I don't really believe that God can forgive me.

If that's you, can I say, it's time for you to take God at His word. If you have put your faith in Christ, your sin has been dealt with.

Every last one. All of it. And God is not like us. When we've been wronged, we love to hold it against others.

[22 : 21] We love to keep that thing in mind and hold it over them again. Gives us a bit of a power over them. When we've been wronged, we cannot let it go and we can hold it over others and we can tut and shake our heads and say, well, there you go again.

God is not like that. When God forgives us, the matter is finished and we are reconciled. He won't bring it up again. What a relief. What a relief.

Isn't that an astonishing thing? If you have put your faith in Christ, every single sin has been dealt with. But in closing, I want to be clear.

This liberty, this joy, this relief is only on offer to people who see their need. Every other religion or philosophy in the world tells us what we need to do in order to fix our lives ourselves.

Christianity is only for those who see that they can't fix their lives themselves. It is only for those who admit that we've made a mess of things and we have no plea before God except our great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 33] We've made a terrible mess of things and we do not have what it takes. We don't have the wisdom. We don't have the influence. We don't have the money. We don't have the ability. Whatever it is, we can't sort our lives out ourselves.

If you think that you're okay, there is nothing for you here. But if you know you need the mercy of God, come on in. Jesus Christ flings wide the doors of His mercy for you.

He has died and been raised to deal with all of your sin and He will take it off your shoulders. He will take it off your conscience. He will take it off your record before God and He'll welcome you into His family.

So can you see? Can you see why it's better? Why we need to let the old ways die. Whether it is old forms of religion or it is any other kind of thing that might be drawing us away from Christ, there is nothing else because nothing else can penetrate to the reality of heaven, can do business with the living God on our behalf.

and nothing else gets to work inside us but the high priestly ministry of Jesus by His Holy Spirit.

Leave your sin at the foot of the cross.

[24 : 55] Leave it there and don't think about it again. Let the old ways die. Come and welcome to Christ. Let's pray.

Let's pray.