

Hebrews

Dr. Charles “Buddy” Parrish
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Hebrews 8:1-6

Vss. 1-2

- Just in case you missed all that he said in Ch. 7, the preacher now just tells us, “here’s the main point of what I’m saying...”. He wants us to know that this perfect High Priest, who represents a “better covenant”, is one that can actually save us by fully opening the path to God, and is exactly what we have in Jesus Christ. He tells us first that our new High Priest has already taken His place in heaven at the right hand of God, which speaks to the glory God has bestowed upon Jesus. He tells us further that Jesus is “a minister in the true tabernacle”. He uses the word “minister” to show the proof of Jesus’ service, recalling that Jesus said of Himself that He came *to serve* and not to be served (Matthew 20:28).
- Of those who are at the top, in high positions of power, the poorest of these use their glory to both enrich themselves and isolate themselves from others. The best of these use their power and position in the service of others. For example, Andrew Carnegie, who made a fortune in the steel industry, built 2509 libraries between 1883 and 1929 worldwide, 1687, here in the US. During the last 18 years of his life he gave away approximately \$6 billion and called on the wealthy of the world to use their power and position in service to society. In the end he gave away roughly 90% of his fortune to charities, foundations, and universities. A reluctant Presbyterian, Carnegie’s views and priorities were strongly informed by the gospels. Looking at the glory of Jesus, he understood how to use his wealth in service.

Vs. 3

- You can’t give away what you do not have. The old high priests were given gifts and sacrifices which he was to use for the worshippers. But what does this new High Priest have to offer? Remember, religion for the preacher to the Hebrews was opening the path to God. Here, given who the new High Priest is, we see that more than opening the path to God, He is opening the path to the true reality.

Vss. 4-6

- Here the preacher is remembering his audience. His congregation is indeed a congregation of Hebrews, but these Hebrews are thoroughly Greek. They read their scriptures in Greek, they write in Greek, and their education is in Greek. What they all would commonly know is that Plato had taught, and thus virtually all other teachers after him, that when the world was created there were “forms” or “ideas”. They believed that somewhere there was a real world where there was an idea and a form of a dog or a chair, or a tree against which all the dogs, chairs, and trees we see and know in our world are but inadequate reflections, poor replicas, imperfect copies. Our world is a world of ghostly shadows where we never see clearly, but somewhere was a world of ideals that was bright and clear. Here the preacher makes us think of an idea that all his listeners understood, just as Paul did in Athens.
- He points to how God told Moses to make the tabernacle according to the pattern he was shown. So we are to understand that the Tabernacle of Moses was but a poor replica of the Tabernacle of God (Exodus 25:40). Following that thread, earthly worship is but a poor replica of worship in heaven, and the old priesthood of earth was always a poor copy of the priesthood of Heaven. The old earthly priesthood could never lead us to God in Heaven, but the heavenly priesthood of Jesus can. Jesus leads us into the presence of God and into the true reality.
- On our own in this world of shadows, left to our own devices, heaven is always beyond our reach. Elizabeth Barrett Browning once wrote, “A man’s reach *should* exceed his grasp, or else what’s a heaven for?”
- The preacher calls Jesus “the ‘*mediator*’ of a better covenant”. The word literally means “one who stands in the middle between two people and brings them together”. This is what makes Jesus the perfect High priest, for only Jesus can stand in the gap between God and humanity as mediator and reconciler. Only Jesus can lead us into reality and to God. Only Jesus can lead us to life.