

# **Series: Christmas 2020**

## **Sermon #2: Jesus Is Your Great High Priest**

**Hebrews 6-10**

**Dr. Matt Cassidy --- December 13, 2020**

Well, good morning, Grace! I'm really glad you guys came today and are tuning in. This Christmas at Grace, my favorite season to be here, clearly—the music is amazing. I just love when we get to let the band show off their skill they've worked so hard with. And then we're trying to do as much as we can during this crazy COVID season to still make it a faith family event this year with our Christmas Eve service. We need you to register for the Christmas Eve service. We make a lot of decisions based on attendance and how many people we can put in here and how we can be super careful for that. So, make sure you're registered. And if you can't come, then de-register if you did that, because we need an accurate account.

Also, we need volunteers. So, if you would do that as well. And we're going to make volunteering as easy as possible.

In addition to that, we're also going to have a home-for-Christmas kit/care package. We're going to start giving these out a week from Monday, not this Monday and Tuesday, but a week from Monday and Tuesday in the courtyard. And it comes with a cocoa mix and a couple of cookies—you can't eat those until after the service—and a couple of candles. We'll do a candlelight service at your house—we'll have fake candles here because it's COVID and you can't do anything that's fun. So ... keep in tune how you can do that if you'll be staying at home and you can still join us, because we'll be broadcasting those two services.

Before I get going with the service, I want to tell you a couple of things that have come up, that being one of them. And one is that our end-of-year giving is really important to us, and this year, particularly. The accounting department got back to the leadership with the November giving and up until November our giving had been pretty consistent with what had happened previous years. In November it really fell off, which means that December needs to be a very strong month for us at Grace so that we can continue to reach out to the people that God has brought into our lives and help them become like Christ in all of life. The vision of our church

cannot be held back simply because of lack of resources, so could you please give generously to Grace? We're going to especially need it this coming year. Thanks.

Another thing I want to tell you about was that we had the first gathering of our staff—this is kind of like in-house stuff—the first gathering of all of our staff at Grace last week, the first time since March. It was a hoot. And we had a Christmas party, but we kind of rolled up all the parties into one day from 9:00 to 1:00 or something like that. And we had such a fun time. And the reason I want to tell you that is because, I think just seeing everyone together, I was just so proud of them. And I bet you are very proud of them as well. Because this crazy year where no one knew what was going on, just like in your workplace—this is their workplace—but gang, they were a team, every definition of a team. They did not turn on each other, they didn't thwart each other, they didn't play in silos and “that's your job, not my job.” Their job descriptions bled into each other, they served each other well. They were off-balance, but they grew together.

And I want to tell you—and I thank them—I put down on a sheet of paper the things that we did this year. This has been an amazing year. If you'll remember we were hoping when all this chaos started, and we said, “Let's thrive.” Here are some things that we did.

This is just internal logistics, and I'll talk ministry in a few minutes.

\*But the tech and the facilities and the operations teams all totally rebuilt everything inside this building, the worship center, so that we could continue to transmit live the services that we're doing with all new equipment.

\*They put in air conditioning purification systems in every single building. It's hospital grade.

\*We rebuilt and redesigned the Cornerstone building, the children's building there.

\*The tech people allowed us to continue almost every single ministry up to its potential using that Zoom thingy.

\*To come back to worship service at Grace is no small task. Here are the teams involved: the connections team, the production team, the facilities team, the communities worked together, the children's ministry, the youth ministry, and operations—all of that going on, thriving.

And there has not been a single transmission of the COVID virus on this campus. How about that? We've had two occasions where someone had it when they were here, but no one else got it from them. So, we've just been playing it safe and you guys are doing a great job of coming and playing by the rules as much as you can. And it's paying off.

Let me tell you about the ministries that have been thriving.

\*Operation Christmas Child—we had about 2,380 boxes that went out last week. But do you know what? That was just a few short of the year before. I didn't realize how close we got to a regular year.

\*We've had three trips to Louisiana to help people who are overcoming the hurricane. That's been a really hard thing. We would have had more except that there's no place to stay.

\*We had a trunk-or-treat thing this year that we've never done before. And wow, was that great, because the community got involved and really did an amazing, wonderful job.

\*The highlight of the year for me, and I'm sure for a lot of parents here, is the week that youth go to camp. The youth went to camp! Friends, there is no more sophisticated and complicated and demanding week in the church calendar than when the youth go to camp. And they went to camp and they had a great time and it was super safe—there was no transmission of the virus there. Kevin, Tammy Davenport, Melissa Butcher, Sarah Rinn, and Cole Ellerbrock—those are heroes, gang. And they're going to be down there at the bottom of the courtyard, because they're still meeting. They've been meeting first.

\*The Source, the ministry that we try to serve as much as we can because they're trying to help women that are in a difficult time in their lives with an unplanned pregnancy—this year we gave them over \$60,000. We've had two diaper drives for them that were hugely successful. Good times.

\*Last, we have bought dinner for every COVID worker on those COVID floors in two different hospitals here in Austin, Texas.



We've had a great ministry. So, here's a picture of our team, living life fun and safe, but mostly safe. Robert won the cornhole tournament again, so that was ... anyway ... everything else was great in that event. But I wanted you to see those guys and give these people a hand if you would. This was our team and they have done an amazing job.

I love being with this group! Let me pray and then we'll get started. The passage that we're going to look at today is awesome.

*Lord Jesus, I do thank You for the team that's called Grace Covenant Church, the men and the women who serve here in a professional way. And how professional they are! They serve You with all their hearts, with joyful hearts, they serve each other, they complement each other well. Lord, I'd ask that You still would continue to grant us favor in the context of our getting along well and seeing the vision and the focus and that being the primary, and all other things being secondary. I'd ask that You would continue to guard us and allow us to thrive. Protect us from this virus so that we wouldn't be threatened by illness and even greater illness. Help us continue to thrive in the ministry of Austin, Texas, and around the world. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

That was fun. Let's call it a day, let's take an offering. That was great!

**Question: What Would You Give for the Certainty of a Clear Conscience?**

Look, I'm just asking for a friend on this. It's not my thing, but I'm asking for a friend. Have you ever found yourself after committing or actually recommitting for the ninth or ten hundredth time some kind of offense or maybe an attitude that you can't shake—pride or vanity or pettiness—and then you find yourself in that berating yourself, just kind of beating yourself down? Because you're just growing weary of the cost upon your own life, but not just that—how much other people are having to pay for your pettiness or your injuries to them.

God himself is on His last lap with me. I mean, sometimes—I have a friend, okay—sometimes here's what it looks like for me. I will have prolonged shame and guilt that I carry with me and I'm doing it as a penance. Have you ever felt that, where you want to feel bad? *I have this coming. This is the punishment in my life.* And I just drag that out, longer than the Bible would ever suggest is necessary or even appropriate. Does anyone else do that? Maybe it's just me.

What would you pay for a clear conscience? No, I have a better question. This is even better. What would you give for the certainty of a clear conscience? Because today that's what we're going to look at, because the Bible has a lot to say about that. As a matter of fact, the passages that we're going to look at in Hebrews chapters 6 through 10, there's this singular drumbeat over and over and over again, and it is this: it is Jesus, your great high priest, has completely done away with shame and guilt. That's what it's going to say. And the way it's going to be said is convincing. The guilt is gone. Shame has no place in the Christian life.

And here's the thing—I'm just going to warn you right now. It's going to be repetitious. It's like the Bible is nagging us in these passages. And why is that? I'm going to do that as well. I'm going to look at maybe a third of the passages. You can go back and read chapter 6 through 10 five times in a row. Boy, it'll rock you.

I'm going to nag because the Bible nags. And the Bible nags on this issue because here's the thing: we want this so bad. We want to be certain of our guiltlessness and it's just on this side of hopeless. And we need it desperately. We want this. We want to be completely forgiven, but we want to have confidence that we are completely forgiven. That would change everything, wouldn't it, if we were sure of that? So that's what we're going to look at today.

## The Problem: How Can We Draw Near to God?



And here we go. Here's how it starts. It always starts like this, just the idea of the revelation of God in creation. It starts with the nature of God. Every single humble heart that has ever stared into the sky at night and seen what God has created has responded by saying, *Oh, dear God ...* And it's not just the realization that there is something else out there; it's also the longing that we have in our hearts from Eden. We know that we are not meant to be like this. And we come to the realization that there must be a mighty Creator, and we're not like Him and He's not like us.

And listen, friends, telescopes and microscopes have not helped solve the problem; they've made it harder to grasp, because it's given us a bigger picture of the creation. And if the creation is that big, the Creator must be bigger still. We are not alone here. And everything that we can see, touch, taste, or smell is contingent on something else for its existence. And so, all these contingent things that we experience point to something that's not contingent—an uncaused cause—that got it all started. And the more we understand about the nature of God that's revealed in creation, the bigger the gap we see. And we can start to realize that God is way past words like "brilliant." And "powerful" never touches what must exist in the attributes of the Creator. So, the greater God is, the greater the gap of who we are.

And there it is—there's that guilt. There's that shame.

And here's the thing. If that weren't just the nature of God that we can see revealed in creation, the nature of man is this: we want to draw near to Him. It will kill us, but we want to go

towards that. We're like moths to a flame, or better, moths to the sun. We can't go there—it will kill us, destroy us. But we cannot NOT go there. It's gravitational pull. And so, the nature of all religions, in many respects—most religions—is this: the realization that God has revealed Himself, we want to draw near to Him, but we can't do that on our own.

And so, most world religions, in tribal or pagan context, or more sophisticated ones, one thing they do is to come up with a priest. And they say, *We're going to set up this one guy separate and far apart. He's going to be the most righteous guy. We're going to clothe him with the entire village wealth. We're going to make sure he's the best dressed and the one that's the highest and most beautiful to look at. And then he's going to be in charge of going to God for us, and he will give God offerings of thanksgiving and certainly offerings for penalties—propitiations, appeasements to the wrath of God because of our unworthiness.* That's what happens in world religions. They give their best offerings to appease God or be grateful to God.



It's always their best—have you ever noticed that? It's always their best. They throw a virgin into the volcano. They don't throw a lying, murderous Biff into the volcano, because what kind of god is going to want a retread guy that's kind of a loser already? What kind of god would the villagers be serving if they think that their god would like that? No, it's always the best. It's the beautiful virgin. That's who gets thrown in the volcano.

If you look at a lot of world religions, it's simple that. It's this exalted priesthood with really beautiful, best offerings, and hoping to get by. Because that's all you get with general revelation.

If we had special revelation—if God were to tell us, then we would know how to draw near. That would change everything.

Well, the Bible is a story of the dog who catches the car. Uh-oh—we did get special revelation from God, and He does say what He's like and what is required of us. It's the Bible. He explains that to us in the older Testament especially, but certainly the Pentateuch, the first five books, and Leviticus particularly. He's rolling out what He's like. And He says, *Here I am and here's what is required. Here's what worship looks like. Here's what payment of sin debt looks like.*

Because God chose himself and the Bible to be holy. As a matter of fact, it's a descriptive word that's used for God three times in a row. It's the only word that's used like that. It means “set apart; different; other.” It's a word that we can't completely comprehend. But here's how blazing the word “holy” is. The ones that are saying, “Holy, holy, holy” are worship angels in the story. They're worship angels and they're in the presence of the glory of God. And to protect themselves, these worship angels have to use one set of wings to cover their eyes lest they be disintegrated. That is the nature of God, the Creator God, the one that's revealed in the Bible very specifically.

And He just continues to say, *That's what I'm like and this is how you're to act.* And so, the Ten Commandments is not a bad first place to look to understand the nature of God and how we're to respond. The first commandment: “I'm the Lord your God and you shall have no other gods before me.” Yahweh God says, *Look, I'm holy. I'm not going to compete for second place in your life. I have to be first. That's where I sit. That's my place.*

And so, if you put even good things, your family, first, you're an idol worshiper. Your work first—yeah, that's you. Your child first—that's not where they belong. *I am a jealous God because I can be.* That's the first commandment.

The second commandment: “My name is holy.” You take it carelessly, you use it recklessly, and you'd be better off never having spoken a word in your life.

“I have a day that's holy. Keep that Sabbath day holy, separate. It's for me.”

You get the idea.



The Old Testament rituals that were described, particularly in the Pentateuch, in those first five books, were telling us that this is the nature of God and here's how we are to come close. How do we draw near to God and survive?

Now I want to make sure you absolutely understand this; that what's described in the Bible about how to draw near to God is the best we can do here with all this dirt that we have to work with. It's all we have. It's just a shadow. It's not the real thing. This is more like an echo of God's voice, not His real voice.

It's like yesterday someone brought over a Christmas gift, a candle. And the candle's name is "Homemade Cookies." And I've got to tell you, it smells just like homemade cookies. And I also need to tell you, it does not taste like homemade cookies. And the point is to make you want homemade cookies.

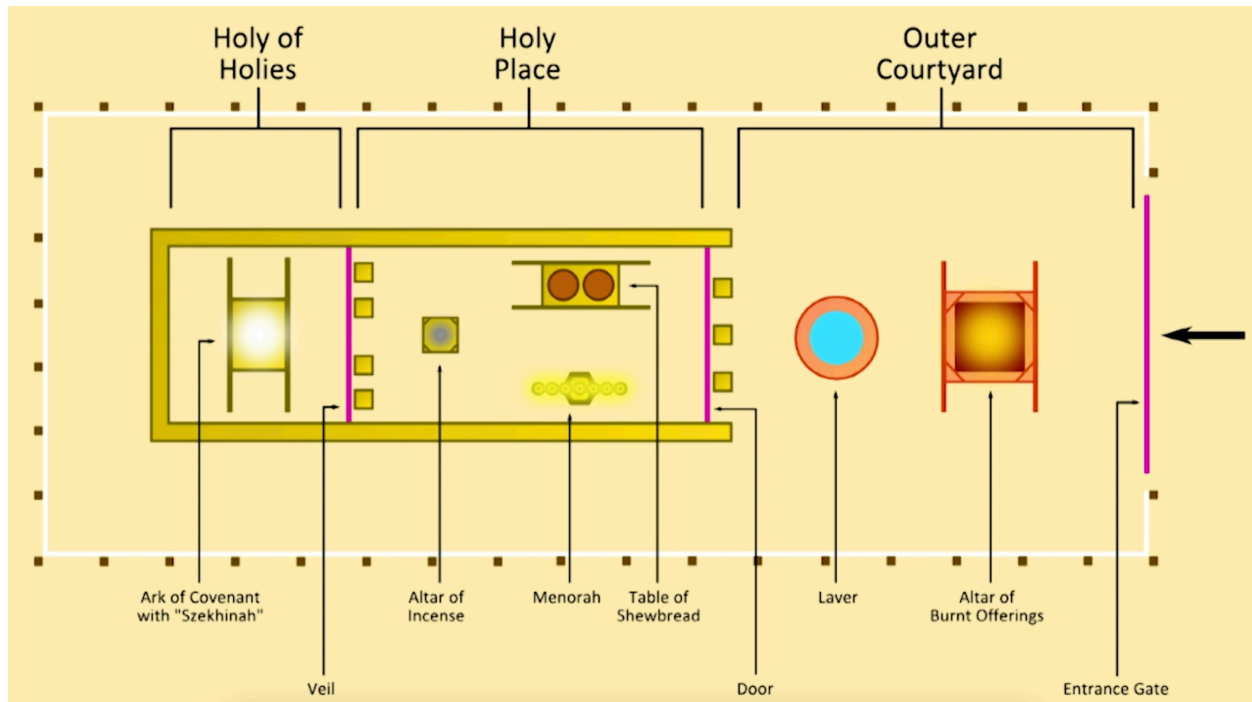
And do you know what? There's a lot of truth to it. When I talk about these rituals, they're not the real thing; they're to make you want the real thing. They're going to put you in a place where you say, "I want something more. This isn't enough." *The smell of homemade cookies—I want to EAT something.*

### **The Role of the Priest**

So, the first thing that happens when God is revealing and describing how we are supposed to have relationship with Him, how we are to draw near to Him, is that we're going to have a priest. And of course, it's going to have to be a firm descendant of Abraham, it's Jewish; but from this one tribe, that son that's better than the other sons. He set himself apart. He's the holy one. He's Levi. So, this one tribal group, one descendant of the sons of Abraham, Levi—they were the Levites, they were the priests. And they were different than everyone else. They couldn't own land. They have no business owning land—they couldn't have a job. Their job was to be a priest. And they dressed and acted different than everyone else. And they were the ones in charge of bringing those offerings of gratitude and of sacrifice to the presence of God.

But here's the thing. They're just regular guys too. Right? I mean, who does a Levite offer sacrifices to? Who does the offering for the Levites? Who are the priests? Because right now it looks like it's broken people helping broken people be less broken. But no one's getting fixed in this because it's just a shadow. It's an echo, not the real thing.

## Purpose of the Tabernacle



God tells them how to set up a tabernacle, and so they do. And it's supposed to be designed after heaven, apparently. There's this outer court and there's an inner court. And inside the inner court there's this building, and inside the building there's this most holy place.



And you go inside that most holy place and inside there would be the Ark of the Covenant. And the Ark of the Covenant is where Aaron's rod was held and the bowl of manna that God gave Israel, and also the Ten Commandments that God gave them.

But here's the thing, everyone. This temple, this tabernacle that was built, was made by men out of man stuff. I mean, it's beautiful man stuff, but it's just earthly. That's all it is. And so, how good could it be?

## Purpose of Offerings

And in the context of that priest using that tabernacle--the best we could do in the shadow world—they would bring offerings. And what would these Levites bring? That great high priest that one day of the year would bring bowls and goat blood. It would cost the life of a bull and goats to be able to draw near to God. And we know—come on, man, come on—that’s not going to fix this. That’s not going to pay the sins of people’s debt. It will pay the interest, but it won’t pay the principle. You know that. Animals dying for our choices? No.

And so, these shadow rituals, these things that were just echoes, were just a smell of the real thing. You couldn’t have confidence in a clear conscience. It didn’t give you that ability. It wasn’t made to. But it failed desperately, and so year after year after year they’d have to go through these rituals and rites, because you never touch the principal. You only paid the interest. You never had the confidence. You never had your shoulders back knowing that you were right with God and you never knew if you could go near to Him. It was all shadows, silhouettes.

But those were pointing towards something new and something bigger and better. The silhouette, the shadow, was to give us an outline of a face so that when He came, we would know it was Him. And that’s exactly what happened. In the fullness of time, God so loved the world, He sent His only Son. And that Son was a great high priest. He was real. He was solid. He is the voice of God himself. He came to do what no one else could do. And that’s the whole point of Hebrews chapters 6 through 10. The point of that is to give us confidence that we have a clear conscience because there are no more shadows, no more echoes. This is the real thing.

## A Better High Priest

### Hebrews 6:19-20

**We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,<sup>20</sup> where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.**

And he starts off by saying, *We have a better high priest... from a whole different lineage.* Look at what he says about Jesus being the high priest: “So now we have this hope as an

anchor for our soul, and we are firm and we are secure.” Look at these words that are talking about certainty. “It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

Melchizedek is a whole different lineage than the Levites. And that makes a big difference, because the Levites were just earthly. They had a lineage, they had a genealogy, they all died.

### **Hebrews 7:1-3**

**This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, <sup>2</sup> and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” <sup>3</sup> Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.**

But Melchizedek is different. Look at the next chapter, verse 1: “Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of some kings and he blessed him” –he blessed Abraham. “And Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.” This is the priest that Abraham gives to. This is the priest that the Levites have to turn in their sacrifices to, he’s saying. “First, the name Melchizedek means ‘king of righteousness.’” That’s a good title. “The ‘king of righteousness;’ it also means he’s the ‘king of Salem’; that’s the ‘king of peace.’” It goes on. “He’s without a father or a mother, without genealogy, from beginning days to the end of life, resembling the Son of God, He remains a priest forever.”

This Melchizedek is unlike all these other Levites that are on a genealogical ladder—and it’s a broken ladder. And when Jesus comes, He says, *Oh, I’m a high priest, but I’m from a different ladder, one that’s eternal and perfect, righteous and peaceful. I am from that genealogy.*

### **Hebrews 7:23-26**

**Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; <sup>24</sup> but because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. <sup>25</sup> Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them. <sup>26</sup> Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.**

And it's not just that He's from a better lineage; He's also forever. He never dies. He's perpetual. Chapter 7 says, "Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever,"—look what it says—"He has a permanent priesthood." And therefore, since He's permanent—"Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them." Jesus, our high priest, is always alive to intercede for us. "Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens."

Jesus never dies and He's not like any other priest. He is holy, pure, blameless, set apart from sinners. That's the high priest we're talking about.

### **Hebrews 8:1, 2**

**Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty of heaven <sup>2</sup> and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.**

Here's the point he's going to make again. I told you I was going to nag because the Bible nags. Here's what he says again. "Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who came and sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven and who serves in that sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being."

He came, He did what He came to do in that ritual, and then He sat down. There are no chairs in the earthly tabernacle because nobody takes a rest. This chair is an icon of the confidence we are to have in our clear conscience because of the nature of the high priest.

## A Better Tabernacle and a Better Offering

But there's more. Wait, there's more. It's not just a better high priest; it's a better tabernacle and it's a better offering. Everything is real. Nothing's in the shadows anymore.

### Hebrews 9:11, 12

**But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. <sup>12</sup> He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but He entered the most holy place once for all by His own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.**

Chapter 9, verse 11: "But when Christ came as High Priest of the good things that are now already here, He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made by human hands that is to say, is not a part of this creation."

In other words, He didn't go through some manmade deal made with dirt and stuff. He went to heaven. His tabernacle was heaven itself. That's the holy of holies that He broke into.

Wait—with a better offering. Next verse: "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves: He entered the most holy place once for all by His own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption." Debt paid, in full. Be confident.

## A Better Cleansing

### Hebrews 9:14

**How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!**

A better priest, a better tabernacle, a better offering, a better cleansing. "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

How much more ... how about that clean conscience now? How about confidence in that clean conscience now because He sat down?

He still stays at the throne of righteousness because He still intercedes for us. Here's the summary of what He's done. He's going to say all those things over again, and I'm saving you. I'm telling you, this is a half or a third of what's really in these passages. But look what he's saying again so that we will believe this to be true.

### **Summary of the Works of Our Great High Priest**

#### **Hebrews 9:24**

**For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.**

A **better tabernacle**, chapter 9, verse 24: "For Christ did not enter the sanctuary made by human hands that was only a copy of the true thing"—just a shadow. "He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's very presence."

#### **Hebrews 9:25, 26**

**Nor did He enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the most holy place every year with blood that is not his own. <sup>26</sup> ... But He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.**

**He had a better offering.** "Nor did He enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own." He didn't do that. "But He has appeared once for all at the culmination of all the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself."



**Hebrews 10:12, 14**

**But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God ... <sup>14</sup> For by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.**

**And then He sat down**, chapter 10: “But when this High Priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for all sins, He sat down at the right hand of God ... for by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

What would you pay for a clear conscience? No, better question. What would you give for the certainty of a clear conscience? It's already been paid. It's already been done. Jesus fixes the problem of it, the transcendent nature of God being unattainable. But the gulf, this gap between God and man is fixed through this high priest. And He's not any priest—He's a better priest; He is holy and blameless and pure and set apart from sinners. He went into a better tabernacle not built with hands and sticks and stuff; it was heaven itself. He gave a better offering—not bulls and goats and stuff; He gave His only life for that.

And then He sat down and stays alive to continue to intercede for us. That's how we have confidence. It's not hope. It's just remembering facts. That's what this is about. That's how we have confidence of a clear conscience. It's done. It's over.

## Hebrews 10:19-25

**Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus,<sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body,<sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God,<sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.<sup>23</sup> Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.<sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,<sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching.**

Look, I'm just going to do it again. Look, therefore it's done. Chapter 10, verse 19: "Therefore"—this is the therefore part, this is the application of it—"Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to Him with a sincere heart and with the full assurance"—the absolute certainty—"that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from our guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."

Here's another application. "Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful." Everything we just read is true. Verse 24: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but rather encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the day of the Lord approaching."

You see the application there? The application there is to continually remind ourselves of what happened with this greater priest and greater tabernacle and greater sacrifice so that we can enjoy this perfect cleansing. And then we're supposed to gather with each other as much as possible to encourage one another to love and do good deeds. And that's why it says we need to meet with each other regularly. Let's continue to do that. Let's continue to encourage each other, give each other courage. Why? Because He sits. Jesus sits. And He's alive and He's interceding for us.

## How Jesus Intercedes for Us

And when He's sitting in that chair next to the Father, His intercession is not, *Hey, Father, we're talking about Matt again. So, here's the thing ... Okay, I know he said he wouldn't do it again and then he made a promise that he wouldn't do it again, and then he promised and promised that he wouldn't do it again. But here he is. So, if you would do this for me, your Son. I'm interceding for him. I'm asking for some mercy. If you could just give mercy to my children, my saint, my bride.*

Is that what He does? He does not do that. Jesus intercedes for us and never appeals to mercy. He goes to the Father and He says, *You are holy and just. And I appeal to this justice. I am interceding for my saint, my brother and my sister. I am the great high priest, not like other priests. I'm from Melchizedek. I never die. I am holy and pure and set apart from all sinners. I came to the absolute real tabernacle here in heaven. I didn't bring bull blood, I didn't bring goat blood. I gave my life. And so that justice that You require and that You have to have to be satisfied and to continue being who You are—oh, great Yahweh God, I have satisfied that. So, Father, I do not appeal to Your mercy; I appeal to Your justice. And if You are a just God, I speak for my son, my daughter. I intercede for them and I live eternally to do that.*

How's that for a mediator?

### 1 John 1:9

**But if we confess our sins, He is righteous and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

The second verse I ever memorized: “If we confess our sins He” –Jesus—“is righteous and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Is there an appeal there for mercy? If we confess our sins, He is righteous and merciful? “If we confess our sins, He is righteous and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” He appeals to the justice that He fulfilled. That's how He does it. That's how He intercedes. He sits down. Boom. I've done this.

Let me tell you the day this happened to me. As many of you know, I grew up a very dedicated Catholic. And when I was twenty years old, I'd been told so many great things

attending mass all those years, but it didn't hit until I was twenty for some reason. And then, wow, did it ever hit.

And the first verse I ever memorized was John 3:16 and the second verse I memorized, for obvious reasons, was 1 John 1: 9, "If we confess our sins, He is righteous and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Yeah, that's a great verse.

So, I went home that Christmas. And here's the thing with the Catholic church. One of the practices they do, the traditions, is called confession. You might have seen this in movies—I hope so, anyway. You go into a place called a confessional and there's a priest sitting there and there's a wall between us and a screen so he can't see your face. And you kneel down before him and you confess your sins and then he forgives your sins on behalf of God and then usually gives you a penance. And that is usually five Hail Marys and six Our Fathers—something like that. Then you go back and you kneel down and you pray those and then you're off. You're forgiven.

So, during major holidays, holy days of obligation, Christmas and Easter, there's a pretty big rush for people to go through confession. And so, what they did this one time was to set up—all the confessionals were being used, and then they put priests up on the altar—they call it the stage—of the church. And the priest would sit like this and you would just come up behind him and kneel down behind him and just whisper in his ear your sins, and he would give you your penance.

So, you know, all the Cassidys come in, all seven of us fill up the whole aisle, and we're going through the confessional deal, and I come up behind him and I kneel down behind him and I'm there for about an hour and a half, you know. I go back to the pew where there are six other Cassidys on their kneelers doing their penance. And I'm two sentences into the Lord's Prayer—that was one of my things that I had to do—and 1 John 1:9 hits me. And I think, *Wait a minute. "If we confess our sins, He is righteous and just to forgive us for all our unrighteousness."* I think, *Okay, well ...* So, in a transcendent moment of the lack of social awareness, I got up from my kneeler and I went back to the stage and went down on the kneeler and told that priest, "I'm not confessing my sins to you. And I'm not doing this penance."

And he started turning around and he realized he couldn't turn around. And I'm sure my family was thinking, *He's got seven more sins to confess.* But the priest and I were going back and forth up there. And I said, "If I confess my sins, He is righteous and just to forgive my sins

and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. I don't do penance. I will confess my sins to the people that I sin against and I will take responsibility. That's not penance--that's just due diligence."

So, I got off the kneeler, I went down—six Cassidys, on their knees—and I sit down. And do you know why I sat down? Because Jesus sat down. And I sat down and they're staring at me and I'm staring back. I'm free.

That was some Christmas at our Cassidy house. How's your Christmas going? It's not a Catholic story. I've had so many conversations with people, especially repeat offenders. And they want to feel the guilt and they want to prolong the shame, because it's their penance. And even some well-meaning people—I've had this conversation in the lobby too many times—"You know, I've just done some stuff, I don't even want to tell you, but I need to get back to church and I need to start reading my Bible again and I need to start helping other people"—like they're trying to even the score a little bit.

It's like, "Brother, you can do all three of those things because they're healthy. But they're not penance. If you're going to church and you're reading the Bible and trying to do good stuff, you're throwing stuff to a volcano god to satisfy him. That's not the God of the Bible."

The God of the Bible says this: "I will send a better priest to go to a better tabernacle to give a better sacrifice so that you can be convinced that you have a clear conscience"-- not because of you but because of Him. It's complete, it's done, it's over. He's sitting down! Let Him enjoy the sitting. He's not getting up for you.

There's so much power in shame. And I think we like the power. We want to feel bad. You can't learn when you're feeling shame. There's nothing to grow from when you're overwhelmed with guilt.

And here's the other thing. When you're feeling shameful and guilty, you can't enjoy the freedom that comes in understanding the sitting Savior. You can take responsibility for your junk and it doesn't matter anymore. I mean, sometimes people don't feel forgiveness and they don't have a clear conscience because they haven't taken responsibility for their stuff. If you owe a guy fifty bucks, pay him back—maybe that will help. *I don't want to pay him back.* Why don't people take responsibility? *Because a lot of times I'd be ashamed. I'd have to admit that I was wrong. What would other people say?*

If you start understanding the confidence, the certainty, that you have, and the clear conscience that comes from having a better priest, a better tabernacle, a better offering, then you

say, *I don't care what other people think about me. I'm not going to give him fifty bucks back, I'm going to give him a hundred. I want him to remember this. And I want to cock-a-doodle-doo about how good my Savior is. I'm going to dance there and I'm going to dance home.* There's no shame. It gives you so much freedom.

And that's why when the movie *The Passion of the Christ* came out—if you remember that Mel Gibson movie—there was a rash for two months of people confessing to things, like murder and stuff—crimes that they had gotten away with, because they saw the price that the priest paid, the great high priest, their great high priest. And they saw the tabernacle that He went into and they saw the sacrifice that He gave, and they said, “Well, if He's going to intercede for me, then I can take responsibility for the stupid stuff that I've done. Lock me up. I'm free. I am certain of my clear conscience.”

You get to have fun in life when you understand this freedom. I know it takes some time. Some of you are going to have to rewrite some programming. But it's a great life journey. You'll get your playfulness back. You won't be so self-important. You won't be hating on yourself and feeling inferior, because you're a child of the King.

So, I hope I've done that much of a job of helping you understand Hebrews 6 through 10 that is out to convince you that Jesus Christ is the great high priest, a different kind of priest, from Melchizedek, who never dies and is holy and pure and set apart from all sin. And He went into heaven, the Holy of Holies, and He gave His life, the great sacrifice. And when He did that, He sat down. He likes sitting down because He lives to intercede for you. That's your high priest. Be confident.

Let's pray.

*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, since we have so much confidence, we can enter the most holy place now. We can enter it by the blood of Jesus. It's a new and living way that's open to us. The curtain's been torn. That was His body that was torn.*

*And since we now have this great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and the full assurance of faith and absolute confidence, having our hearts sprinkled clean, our guilty consciences having been done away with, our bodies being washed by the pure water. So, let's hold without waver the hope that we profess because He made a promise, and He's faithful to His promises.*

*And hey, let's figure out how we can spur one another on to love and good deeds. Don't ever give up meeting together. That's the great stuff about life. You can encourage one another all the more. Let's do it until the day of His return. It's approaching. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And through that peace we gain access by faith to the grace by which we stand. Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And we celebrate that, Lord Jesus.*

*And all God's people said, Amen.*

[Song: *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*]

Come, thou long expected Jesus,  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us;  
Let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear Desire of ev'ry nation,  
Joy of ev'ry longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,  
Born a child, and yet a king,  
Born to reign in us forever,  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Thine all-sufficient merit,  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

I love Christmas at Grace. Don't you? I love this church. I love you. I'm so proud of you. I'm proud of you guys like I'm proud of our staff. It is a joy to be part of a beautiful congregation. Thank you for coming.

Listen, it'd be a great service if you want to come Christmas Eve. Register online. And if you want to serve us, you text the word "EVE" to that number and we'll figure out a way to put you in a place that will serve you and will serve us at the same time, and the more people could be blessed by your involvement in our church.

Thank you again for coming. Enjoy your time. Let the ushers dismiss you. We'll see you next week.

[Song: *Angels We Have Heard on High*, instrumental version]