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SALVATION GUARANTEED

Hebrews 7:20-28

By

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Hebrews Lesson 22

Salvation Guaranteed! Hebrews 7:20-28

Money-back guarantees are a great thing! You buy a product, but it fails within the time of the guarantee. You take it back to the store and they either give you your money back, or replace the product with one that works. Such a deal!

Sometimes the guarantee is worthless. Perhaps you were guaranteed a seat on a flight, but you got to the airport at the last minute and discovered that the airline had overbooked the flight and your seat was gone. The more important the situation, the more important it is that you have a sure guarantee.

The most important matter where you need a certain guarantee is your eternal destiny. This life is brief and uncertain, but eternity is forever! You don't want to show up at the pearly gates and hear, "We don't have a reservation under your name. When did you book it?" If there is anything that you want to be certain about, it should be your salvation. The author of Hebrews wants us to know that because Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, He is the guarantee of a better covenant that ensures our salvation.

The author is continuing his argument that as a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is far superior to the Levitical priests. In our text, he shows that Jesus is superior as our priest because of: (1) God's oath (7:20-22); (2) Jesus' permanence and perpetual petition on our behalf (7:23-25); (3) Jesus' perfect purity and His sacrifice of Himself (7:26-28). His message is that...

The superiority of Jesus our high priest guarantees salvation for all who draw near to God through Him.

The heart of the text is 7:25, "Therefore He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, ..." To understand that sentence, we need to be clear on the meaning of "save." As I have said often, salvation is a radical term. You don't need to save someone who is doing pretty well, but could just use something extra to round out an otherwise happy life. You don't need to save someone who is fairly competent and together. To save

someone is not to offer advice or tips about a better way to live. Someone who needs salvation is lost, incapacitated, and in immediate danger of perishing. He cannot save himself. Without outside help, he will not survive.

Last week, they tried to rescue a fallen climber off of Mount Rainier, but they failed. He died before the helicopter could get him off the mountain. His injury prevented him from hiking down the mountain by himself. He was helpless and desperate. He needed to be saved, but the attempt to save him failed.

Spiritually, every person needs to be saved. What do we need to be saved from? The biblical answer is, "We need to be saved from God's wrath and eternal judgment." John 3:36 puts it, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Or, as Paul wrote (1 Thess. 1:10), it is Jesus "who rescues us from the wrath to come." In Romans 5:9 he wrote, "having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." Or, again (1 Thess. 5:9), "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Either we are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, or we will face God's wrath because of our sins.

God never compromises His perfect righteousness and justice in order to save sinners. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), which means eternal separation from God. To satisfy His justice, God demands that the penalty of our sin must be paid. In His love, God sent His own Son to be the perfect high priest, offering the sacrifice that we need to escape His wrath. But amazingly, rather than offering an animal sacrifice, He offered Himself! John Piper (<http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper96/12-01-96.htm>) puts it, "All this is the *love* of God rescuing us from the *wrath* of God, in such a way that the *justice* of God is vindicated and the *glory* of God is exalted."

The author wants us to see the superiority of Jesus as our high priest. He didn't want his readers to return to Judaism under the threat of persecution, so he is showing how Jesus is superior to the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system. Although we may not be tempted to give up Christianity for Judaism, we are easily tempted to turn away from Christ when trials or disappointments hit. We

face problems for which knowing Christ more deeply is the answer, but we turn to worldly psychology that offers techniques for coping, or insights into our pasts. Or, we salve our pain by pursuing material comforts or worldly pleasures. But what we really need is to see the supremacy of Jesus Christ as our high priest, who is able to save to the uttermost all who draw near to God through Him.

1. Jesus is superior as our high priest because of God's oath (7:20-22).

The author is contrasting the Levitical priests with the priesthood of Jesus according to the order of Melchizedek. With the Levitical priests, God did not make an oath that the priest would serve forever. But when it came to the priesthood of His Son, "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever'" (7:21, citing Ps. 110:4). We saw a similar thing in 6:13-18 regarding God's promise to Abraham, that He swore by Himself to make the promise that much more secure. God's bare word is enough to make His promise certain. But when He adds His oath, it is like underlining the promise, highlighting it, and putting it in brackets with multiple exclamation points after it! And then He adds, "and will not change His mind"! You get the impression that God wants us to take note—Jesus is a priest forever!

As such, he adds (7:22), "so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant." In Greek, the name Jesus is placed last in the sentence for emphasis. Jesus is the human name of our Savior, which means, "Yahweh saves." As the angel told Joseph, "you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). This is the only time that the word "guarantee" is used in the New Testament. Jesus, who offered Himself on the cross for our sins, is our surety or guarantee of this better covenant, the New Covenant, which the author only mentions here, but will expand on in 8:7-13.

Philip Hughes (*A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 267) observes, "It is a matter of exceptional significance that the covenant with Abraham and the declaration concerning the priestly order of Melchizedek were both confirmed by God with an oath, for under these two heads all the gracious promises and prophecies which precede the coming of Christ are gathered, and with the coming of Christ both the evangelical cove-

nant and the evangelical priesthood burst into fulfillment." In other words, God's oaths stand behind the two crucial prophecies and promises about Christ. It's like a double warranty from the God of truth Himself backing our salvation! John MacArthur puts it, "All of God's promises in the New Covenant are guaranteed to us by Jesus Himself. He guarantees to pay all the debts that our sins have incurred, or ever will incur, against us" (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Hebrews* [Moody Press], p. 198).

2. Jesus is superior as our high priest because of His permanence and His perpetual petition (7:23-25).

A. Jesus is superior as our high priest because of His permanence (7:23-24).

The author continues his contrast between the Levitical priests and Jesus, our priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The Levitical priests existed in greater numbers because they died and had to be replaced. The Jewish historian Josephus says that there were 83 high priests from Aaron to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. The Talmud says that there were 18 during the first temple and more than 300 during the second (Leon Morris, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank Gaebelein [Zondervan], 12:71). However many there were, the point is that they were not perpetual. They all died and were replaced. But Jesus, "because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently" (7:24).

To put this in modern terms, human pastors come and go, but Jesus is always in heaven for you. Of course, a pastor is not like an Old Testament priest, in that I do not represent you before God. You can go directly to God through Christ. My role is to proclaim and explain God's truth to you, but in that role there is always the danger that you might depend too much on me. It was 12 years ago next Sunday, by God's grace, that I began my ministry at this church. But the fact is, I could be in heaven by next week, because I am mortal. While I pray that God will use my ministry as long as He keeps me here to equip and encourage you in your walk with God, don't look to me or become dependent on me. Look to Christ! He "holds His priesthood permanently."

B. Jesus is superior as our high priest because of His perpetual petition (7:25).

Jesus "is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." What a wonderful verse! John MacArthur says (p. 199), "Like John 3:16, it contains the whole essence of the gospel." It has several important parts.

*"*Jesus is able to save.*" As the angel promised Joseph, "He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). There are many Christians who would modify that verse to read, "He will do everything He can to save His people from their sins, but it's up to them to exercise their free will. If they don't do that, He can't save them." They make God out as pining away in heaven, *wishing* that He could save people. He desperately *wants* to save them. But, alas, His hands are tied, because He limited His ability to save when He granted free will to people! When a soul gets saved, according to this view, it is a joint project between God and man. God has done His part; now man must do his part, which is to exercise his free will and believe in Jesus.

Theologians call that view "synergism." It is the view of salvation that the Roman Catholic Church teaches, but it is not the view of the Reformers. They correctly taught that because of the fall of the human race into sin, there are none who understand or seek for God (Rom. 3:10). We are born dead in our transgressions and sins (Eph. 2:1). To use a different analogy, we are in spiritual darkness, blinded by the god of this world so that we may not see the light of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4). We cannot cooperate with God in the matter of our salvation any more than a dead man can will his own resurrection, or a blind man can decide to see. In this fallen condition, we don't even *desire* to be saved, because as Jesus taught, "men loved the darkness rather than the Light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19; see also John 8:44).

To appreciate the biblical doctrine of salvation, you have to recognize how hopelessly, helplessly lost sinners really are. Apart from Christ, sinners are "darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness" (Eph. 4:18-19). It's not a

pretty picture, but that is the biblical description of our condition before salvation (even if you were raised in a Christian home!).

How then can anyone be saved? "Jesus is able to save"! As Paul follows up his comment about us being dead in our sins, and being by nature children of wrath, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:4-5). Salvation isn't a matter of throwing a rope to a drowning man who has the ability to grab the rope. It's a matter of breathing new life into a man who has already drowned! What man cannot do, Jesus is able to do! He is able to save!

*"*Jesus is able to save forever,*" or "*to the uttermost.*" The Greek word means "completely." In the context, the thought may be on His ability to save us forever because He abides as our priest forever. But also it probably has the further nuance of saving us completely or to the uttermost. The infinitive, "to save," is present tense in Greek, pointing to the ongoing process of salvation. We are saved totally the instant that we trust in Christ, but there are also present and future tenses to salvation. Presently we *are being saved* and one day we *shall be saved* in the total and final sense.

This is the great doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. What God begins at the moment of salvation, He promises to bring to completion. As Jesus said, "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day" (John 6:39). The Father has given an elect people to His Son. Of those, how many will Jesus lose? *None!* They will go through doubts, like Thomas. They may go through denials, like Peter. But Jesus is able to save them completely. He will lose none! But, how does He do it?

*"*Since He always lives to make intercession for them.*" The word "intercession" is used in the papyri of a petition to a superior (G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* [Charles Scribner's Sons], p. 99). As the eternal Son of God, Jesus sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father. He is equal to the Father in His deity, but as the Son, He submits to the Father's will. He is able to save His people because He always lives to make intercession for them. His high priestly prayer in John 17 is our greatest look into

how He prays for His own. Also, when Jesus predicted Peter's denials, He said, "But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32).

Though we may stumble badly, as Peter did, our salvation is guaranteed because our high priest is at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for us! His very presence there, having accomplished our redemption through His blood, means that when we sin, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:2). The guarantee of our salvation is not voided if we fail to follow the "owner's manual" perfectly, although we should always seek to obey God's Word. It depends on the perpetual prayers of our great high priest!

Thus Jesus is superior as our high priest because of God's oath and because of His permanence and perpetual petition for us in that office. These things guarantee our salvation.

3. Jesus is superior as our high priest because of His perfect purity and His supreme sacrifice of Himself (7:26-28).

"*It was fitting for us*" points to Christ's suitability for His saving work (Morris, p. 72). It means that He "answered exactly to the requirements of the predicament" that we were in as sinners (Hughes, p. 271). The author piles up five terms that emphasize the perfect purity of Jesus.

First, He is "*holy*," which points to His character as set apart unto God, without any sin. It has a specifically messianic connotation, since it is used in Psalm 16:10 (LXX) of Jesus as God's Holy One who would not see corruption (Hughes, p. 272).

"*Innocent*" means that He is "entirely free from all that is evil and harmful, both in action and in motivation" (*ibid.*). "*Undefiled*" means to be "free from any moral or spiritual blemish" (MacArthur, p. 202). It may point to Jesus' moral purity, in contrast to the outward ritual purity of the Levitical priests. Though they may be pure outwardly, inwardly they were defiled as sinners. But Jesus was completely pure throughout (Hughes, p. 273).

"*Separated from sinners*" does not mean that Jesus removed Himself from contact with sinners, in a monastic sense. Rather, although He was the friend of sinners, He kept Himself separate and undefiled. Unlike the Levitical priests, who had to keep them-

selves away from anyone who would defile them ritually, Jesus could mix with sinful people and yet their defilement did not affect Him. He could touch lepers (Mark 1:41), the ritually unclean, and even the dead (Luke 8:40-56) without contracting their defilement. Instead, His purity and life-giving power were imparted to them!

“Exalted above the heavens” “embraces the truth of Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and glorification, and it portrays the supreme perfection of our ever living High Priest in the sanctuary above” (Hughes, p. 275). It means, “The power of his all-sufficient atoning work is available without diminishment to us today as it was to the believers of the first century, and it is so because he who died for us is alive from the dead and enthroned on high” (*ibid.*).

The author adds (7:27) that Jesus “does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.” Those priests were weak (7:28) sinners, standing before God with their own sacrifices before they could represent other sinners. But Jesus didn’t need a sacrifice because He was without sin. Rather, He offered Himself as the sacrifice, and that, once for all! Verse 28 summarizes, “For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.” The superiority of Jesus, the Son of God, as our high priest guarantees our salvation. But, whom does He save?

4. Jesus saves forever those who draw near to God through Him (7:25).

Those who teach the synergistic view of salvation accuse us who say that salvation is totally from God of teaching that God saves us apart from faith. That is not true. We teach that God saves us through faith. We are responsible to believe in Jesus Christ. But we are *unable* to believe the gospel unless God grants faith to us as His gracious gift. As Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44; see also 6:65). Hebrews 13:21 says that God works “in us that which is pleasing in His sight.” Since drawing near to God through Jesus is pleasing in His sight, He must work this in us if we are to come to Him in faith.

“Draw near” is a present continuous tense, describing those who are being saved. They continually draw near to God through Jesus. They do not just draw near to God to get a few benefits. They know their desperate condition as sinners, and so they draw near through Christ’s blood for salvation, and they continue to draw near for sustaining grace. They draw near *through Jesus*, because He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). They draw near *to God Himself*, not to church or religious duties. It is impossible to draw near to the holy God and at the same time cling to your sins. So in drawing near, we turn from our sins and pursue holiness (12:14), not just outwardly, but also on the heart level, since God looks on the heart.

Conclusion

Have you ever gotten a promotional letter that said in fine print, “Actual results may vary”? Or, “Amounts used in this letter are for illustration purposes only; actual earnings may be less”? Those statements greatly limit the promises of the offer!

But God promises that because Jesus is our superior high priest, salvation is guaranteed for all who draw near to God through Him. There is no fine print stating, “Sinner must clean up his life first.” It does not say, “Offer does not apply to really bad sinners.” Jesus promises, “The one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37). He guarantees salvation for all eternity if you will come to Him!

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to affirm that salvation is *totally* of God, and not a cooperative project between Him and man?
2. How can salvation be *all* of God if the sinner must believe?
3. If God is able to save (Heb. 7:25) and if He desires all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), then why isn’t everyone saved?
4. If sinners are unable to come to Christ on their own, then is it a sham to invite them to come? See John 6:37, 44; Matt. 11:25-28.

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