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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham

at Galeed Chapel Brighton
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HEBREWS 7 verses 24/28

"But this Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this He did once, when He offered up Himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore"

By Paul, the Holy Ghost in this chapter, contrasts the priesthood under the Levitical Law and the Great High Priest of our profession. The priests under the Levitical law were many and were not suffered to continue by reason of death. The High Priest under the gospel, in the covenant of grace, abideth continually. They were made priests without an oath and therefore they could be, and were, discharged from all that office and work given to them by Moses; this, being made a Priest with an oath, an oath that confirms His Priesthood for ever, abideth for ever. The priesthood under the Levitical law only could approach, by shadow and type and ceremony, and carnal ordinances appointed for a time till He should come who was prefigured and set out by them. Christ is the substance, the great anti-type and great fulfilment and fulfiller of all that had been fore-shadowed by that dispensation, which was a weariness to the people who had no heart in it. Sin has made a difference, a separation, between God and man. Sin brings, necessarily, punishment. It is necessary in God's nature that sin should be punished. Where He would punish it - in the persons of the offenders

or, for the sake of some of the offenders, in the Person of another appointed by Himself - rested entirely in His love and sovereignty, and this, believed, sets forth before the faith of God's elect, the greatness and the freeness and the wonder and the glory of God in choosing and setting up His Only begotten Son and making Him a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. Sin brought separation between God and man, and when the Holy Ghost convinces a sinner of that, the access he would fain have he cannot get under the terms of that law which he has broken. And now God has set forth His dearly beloved Son as the great High Priest of our profession.

The Priesthood of Christ has a two-fold relation. It is emphatically a relative term, and the relation it holds is two-fold. First it is Godward; a Priesthood that is entirely Godward as to its nature and great end with regard to the putting away of sin. Every priest taken from among men is ordained for men, that he may offer in things respecting God. God is first, and I believe that that is a truth written on the heart of everyone eternally chosen, redeemed by Christ and born again of the Spirit. God is first. My offence is against Him. David realised this when he said "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight". Sin has made us eccentric, turned us out of our centre; away from the great end of our creation. Who can bring us back? We can never get back by the law we broke; never return by aught we can do. Who can bring us back? Who can make again - and in a better and more glorious manner than any creation - God our end and centre? Faith has for its centre God in Christ, and love and hope have God for their centre and their circumference; He is first, and the Priesthood of Christ teaches this. When the high priest offered the ordained sacrifice, one may say, in a sense, he had his back on the people and his face toward God, and he went into the Holy of Holies with blood and incense, and was there with his high priestly garment, edged with a pomegranate and a bell, so that the people should hear the bell and know that he was living, and the pomegranate should set forth the fruitfulness of his intercession in the Holy of Holies. It was Godward, my friends; He must be propitiated; His justice must be satisfied; His law must be honoured; His holiness must be content and a vent must be found for His love. And all this the High Priest realised in his entrance into the Holy of Holies, not with blood of others, but with His Own blood.

And He entered heaven with His Own blood, that is, with the infinite merit of His work, His sacrifice, His vicarious death. And it is by this Godward ministry of our High Priest that access is obtained by His people. He is their forerunner; He went for them into the presence of God; no access any other way. "Through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father". O what a favour to get near to God, and whenever one realises that his access to God is the fruit of the Person, work and sacrifice of this great High Priest, it endears the Saviour unto him. "Unto you which believe He is precious". May we be enabled then to keep this first aspect of our great High Priest's position before our minds. It was Godward. And secondly, it is manward; it looks to men, poor, elected, dead men, for whom the Priest entered into the Holiest of all. Yes, when Aaron had offered all the sacrifices which he was commanded to offer we are told in the Leviticus that then he stretched out his hand toward the people and blessed them. He could not have blessed them if he had not first of all sacrificed for them. And then it was that that oft repeated word in Numbers became a possibility and an experience: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee" and so on. (Numbers 6 v 24) That took place after the sacrifices; the propitiation brought that sweet mercy forth. The death of the Saviour brought life to the church. The frown of God on the heart of Jesus Christ brought the smile of God to the hearts of poor penitent sinners. His Priesthood is man-ward. And now this brings an experience; all doctrine in Holy Scripture has, for its great end, one of its great ends, the experience of the saints. What God has prepared for His people is received by them, is communicated to them, and what Christ did bears fruit in their hearts; what He obtained He gives to them; He speaks peace to them by His sacrifice.

"But this Man, because He continueth ever hath an unchangeable priesthood". He is the Mediator. The priest of old was the mediator between God and Israel. The offerings were the offerings of a mediator, and were propitiated for the purpose for which God ordained them, between His Majesty and the people for whom they were offered. What a Mediator we have; He "hath an unchangeable Priesthood" The old priests were not suffered to continue by reason of death. There were many priests and they were made priests without an oath. The whole of that dispensation was without an oath, so that God broke no

oath when He ended that dispensation. But when He brought in the gospel, He ushered the High Priest in with an oath and, as long as that oath continues, the High Priest will continue. The type of this was with respect to the cities of refuge under the old dispensation. When one, who had unawares slain a man, and had reached and entered into the city of refuge - one of the cities of refuge - he was safe during the life of the priest in whose life and day he entered that city. A beautiful type; and the anti-type is the unchangeable Priesthood of Christ, so that when a sinner, who has shed the blood of his own soul, and deserves death, enters the city of refuge, he is safe as long as the Priest lives, and that is for ever. O what a mercy for us who have been favoured to enter into the city. "Wherefore"; "because He hath an unchangeable Priesthood"; because He is made a Priest for ever, with an oath, after the order of Melchisedec and therefore it was an entirely new dispensation; there being a change of the priesthood there must be also of necessity a change of the law; "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. The "uttermost" may be spoken of in two ways. First it sets forth the ability of Christ. The word means "perfection". There is a perfect Priest, perfect in His Person, perfect in His work, perfect in His intercession in heaven. What a power Christ has. If I may use the word "mere" I would say it is not merely "mere". We say "mere" now in a very depreciating sense. As an old english word it had a better sense; it meant to the exclusion of defect. It was mere grace, no defect in it; mere love, no shortness in it. So this is not mere omnipotence; it is a perfect Saviour, a perfect heart, a perfect love, a perfect beauty, a perfect atonement, a perfect righteousness, and a perfect intercession. Well then it comes to this in the second way; it reaches in its perfection every case of a coming sinner. Coming is believing; a coming sinner is a believing sinner; he comes with something and he comes for something. When we pray, as some of us do, we go for something; we go with something. We go to take this; we go with our sins, a sorry burden, a shameful burden, but we cannot get rid of it. If ever we go to God we go with our sins. Herein lies much of the difficulty of praying; herein lies much of that weakness that we feel from time to time when we attempt to seek the Lord, and herein lies much of the advantage of the enemy who seeks to cast us down and to keep us from praying, for our sin is

our unworthiness; our sin is our unfitness for the presence of a holy God; our sin is the deserving of hell; our sin is that which procures darkness and brings reproof and rebuke; our sin is that which is barrenness and confusion and ignorance; our sin is often rebellion against a wise, chastening, loving God. But, as I say, if we go, we must go with this; it is a daily trouble to me, a daily shame, and often a stumbling-block. How could a Christian be what and as I am? is no light question with me. I must go in this way if I go at all. Then we go for something; and what is that? "Pardon mine iniquity, O Lord, for it is great". We go for a broken heart and a contrite spirit; an acceptable sacrifice to God. I know I go for this and so do you, who fear God. O, the mercy of a broken heart. O, the blessedness of having the Lord for your helper in an hour of need, and O, the favour of having a real hatred to sin. God can give this and nobody else can. We go for something when in trouble; we go for grace that it may be sanctified. When in weakness, we have to go to Him who is the strength of Israel, for strength; strength to support, strength to defend, strength to hold on, strength to believe against all the unbelief and hardness of our hearts. For wisdom, which is profitable to direct. Now these are points which I doubt not a goodly number of you have some acquaintance with, and a great mercy it is. There is a path promised in the Scriptures which, as we walk in, will always bring necessity with it, and that is tribulation. Christ has said we must have it, and when we are in tribulation we have necessity indeed. Necessity is written in our being, but I am speaking of a felt necessity. Many people, and indeed everybody in the world, is needing, has need of, the Creator. Necessity is written, yea interwoven, into the very woof and warp of our being, but there is a necessity that comes by tribulation. We need a God to help us; need His grace in the time of need, when rebellious nature would reject the cross; need the pity of the Saviour who sees how weak we are and how foolish. We need Him to sustain us in and under the heavy load and, says the Word, He is perfect; He is able. "Able to have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way." It is a sweet word, at least it was to me many years ago. "Able to have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way". Perhaps some of you feel just out of the way now and ignorant and unable to get back. Here is a High Priest who is perfectly able to bring you back. Think of the wandering; uttermost, the ends of the

earth, far off on the sea; uttermost. You are afraid perhaps of God's tokens, some of which may seem very threatening; yet there is One whose mercy and wisdom and merit, and whose power, can reach you just where you are. Able to sink down to the very depths of your misery brought by your sin; able to rise as high as your fears, and higher; able to go after you in all the wide wandering of your spirit. What a perfection this is. "Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them". And this speaks His love, His loving care; He never intermits His care for a moment. The promise is, by the prophet Isaiah respecting the vineyard: "I, the Lord, do keep it night and day. I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it." Intercession; not to make an unwilling Father willing to bless, but to be ever presenting the infinite merit of His Person and death, so that they, in their utter unworthiness and frequent sinning and departures, may have given to them the sweet favour that they need and that they are brought to seek. I wish we had two blessings every day; I have often sought them for myself and for you; and these are the two - a daily repentance and a daily pardon. Huntington speaks of one corner of a room and the cushion where, every night, he had accounts straightened between God and his soul. O, to have daily reckoning; it is terrible to run up a long score, by backsliding, against yourself. No hell will swallow you up, but a good deal of pain will be your lot when God brings you to a reckoning. This I painfully know. Now I would like to live by the day and to fear God and not sin wilfully, and not go on persistently in any known wrong. Nature says, I will go; love, in God; I will hedge up her way with thorns; I will build a wall about her so that she shall not find her paths; and the intercession brings all this out; it brings God's love in chastening; it brings His care for His people, and brings His providences about so that what shall be for the good of the soul shall be partly effected by some providential things. Able to save us. Well, may the Lord help us to believe it; help us to hold fast to it. Seek daily grace, seek daily forgiveness, seek daily communications and remember, if you can, and God help you to remember and help me to remember, through whom we have to go, by whose sacrifice we may be accepted, if accepted, and by whose intercession we shall be preserved from final falling.

"For such an High Priest became us" - was needed by us - "who is holy - infinitely so in His divine Person and absolutely so in His human nature - "harmless" - went about doing good and never inflicted an unnecessary pain on any - "undefiled" - in His Person - "separate from sinners" - in His heart and spirit, though He had undertaken to save sinners - "and made higher than the heavens" - after His atonement was accomplished - "who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this He did once when He offered up Himself. For the law maketh high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath" (and God cannot break an oath; He cannot break an oath ; He can set up a king for a time and remove him; He set up a dispensation for a time and ended it; He made priests for a time, but only for a time, and that by a word of commandment that they should be, and He confirmed the priesthood of Aaron against the murmuring of those that rose up against Him, but He never said by an oath that that dispensation should continue for ever, and when the anti-type came it was necessary that that dispensation should end; there was no room for both of them in the church and the one was against the other, that is to say the anti-type could not tolerate the type); "the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son who is consecrated" - perfected - "for evermore". "Consecration" is a word that is much abused by the general professors of the day, but it is a beautiful word; you will find it in the Levitical dispensation, and in the ordaining and setting apart the priests of that dispensation. The consecration was this, "having the hands full"; that is really consecration; "having the hands full". God's oath set His Son up for a Priest and, being a Priest, He must have somewhat to offer. He had His hands full of what He offered; His Own love, His Own precious blood, His justifying righteousness. And God made this Priest with an oath for ever, and therefore the church is safe and some of us are safe as we believe. Grace reigns; grace reigns to pardon crimson sins. A new access is given to quickened sinners; a door is opened to them, a door of faith - "I am the door" - and by that door they get access to God. Forgiveness is freely given out, given out of a full Saviour; grace to help in time of need is freely bestowed. The holy lips, the anointed lips of Jesus Christ contain acceptable words. Grace was poured into His lips, not that they should retain that grace unuttered always, but that they should utter that grace; speak it

into a broken heart, into a wounded, distressed conscience. Speak it so as to produce submission and hope and love in the soul; and all this, dearly beloved brethren, all this is by the High Priest, the great High Priest of our profession. I wish He were dear to us all. I wish we knew Him better, that we had a clearer perception of Him, a belief in Him, a hope in Him; that we could more earnestly follow Him, and the more closely cleave to Him and feel that there is nothing worth knowing that is outside Him; nothing worth having but what comes from Him. I am very fond of toys, as you are, that is, trifles, poor perishing things - necessary because God has made them so for our short life - but O, what foolish creatures we are to set such store by them and to so often turn away from, and neglect, this great, this blessed Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest. Be careful of your spirits. "Keep thy heart", says Solomon, "with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin". But if one should say - I am a poor, fallen professor; I am a poor hard-hearted creature; I live at a grievous distance from Him who has been near to me as I hope, and with whom I have felt some union and communion - now may the Lord help you to remember that this High Priest is consecrated for evermore, made with an oath, and that He is able "to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him".

AMEN.