

'A Great High Priest Over the House of God'

by H.J. Vine

Through Christ's perfect sacrifice and priesthood, we can approach God with boldness and confidence, enjoying the fullness of His presence and love.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 10:2-19, 1 Peter 4:17

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "Atonement"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the significance of the work and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, emphasizing how His sacrifice on the Cross allows us to boldly approach God with confidence, knowing that our sins are completely forgiven and forgotten by God. Unlike the sacrifices under the law that needed repetition, Christ's sacrifice is perfect and has perfected the sanctified for eternity, enabling believers to stand before a holy God without the burden of guilt. Through Christ, we have a great Priest who sympathizes with us, saves us completely, and encourages us to draw near to God with full assurance of faith, offering continual praise and thanksgiving.

Transcript

These wonderful words are given by the Spirit for our encouragement. The value of His work and the grace of the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ are made known to us, so that we may boldly draw nigh to God by them "having boldness by the blood of Jesus," and "having a great Priest over the house of God" (Heb. 10:19-21, N.Tr.), we can approach with the fullest confidence.

The offering made on the Cross to God was such that He can say of those who come to Him, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more," and the One who made that offering for us is so pleasing in God's sight that He is now sitting at God's right hand. As regards the sacrifice He has "sat down in perpetuity": there is to be no repetition of it. And then, as regards those for whom He made that perfect offering, it is said, "By one offering He has perfected in perpetuity the sanctified." The sacrifice is perfect and the result also. The worshippers once purged can be before a holy God, having no longer any conscience of sins; and they honour the work of Christ thus, and show their faith in what God says as to it.

Under law this could not be. The offerings had to be repeated, and the remembrance of sins also. Those sacrifices could not take away sins, but only call them to mind annually. There was then no seat in the house of God, since the priest's work was never finished. The work of Christ is done and done for ever, and He has sat down. What a blessed contrast is this to the sacrifice and the priest of old Therefore we are told in Hebrews 10:

1. "There remains no more sacrifice for sins" (v. 26).
2. "There is no more offering for sin" (v. 18).
3. "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (v. 17),
4. "Once purged . . . no more conscience of sins" (v. 2).

The second and third show that Christ has to make no further sacrifice for sin, and that God's memory holds nothing against us now; while the first and fourth show there is no other sacrifice to turn to, and that the worshipper can now be in God's presence happily. And, along with this, having such a great Priest over the house of God as Jesus, we may indeed approach with holy boldness by Him, and allow our rejoicing hearts to overflow in thanksgiving and praise to our God and Father.

Our great Priest has suffered as none other, and now He helps those that are tried, sympathizing with their infirmities, but also saving them completely as they draw near to God by Him, living for them, interceding for them, and encouraging them to enter where He Himself is in the holiest of all. No wonder the apostle says, "Such an high Priest became us."

"The House of God"

It is necessary to say a few words now as to the house over which our Lord Jesus Christ is. It is constructed in Himself as the rejected One of man, but the chosen of God. All true believers are built together in Him. The words, "the house of God," occur three times in the epistles:

1. "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17).
2. "A great Priest over the house of God" (Heb. 10:21).
3. "How to behave thyself in the house of God" (1 Tim. 3:15).

And this last Scripture goes on to tell us that it is "the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth."

Now the first sends us back to Ezekiel 9 for instruction. There we read the words, "Begin at My sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house" (v. 6). Began what? Began to execute judgment! Why? "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah was exceeding great," and they said, "The Lord has forsaken the earth, and the Lord sees not." All manner of idolatrous practices and abominations consequently were carried on in the courts and chambers of God's house. "Therefore," He said, "will I also deal in fury: Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I pity" (8:18).

He had not forsaken the earth! His presence was still in the house. Ezekiel, meaning "strengthened of God," was empowered to see this! Jeremiah, too, had said, "Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by Thy Name; leave us not" (14:9); but they were incurably corrupt, and He would remain no longer. This caused Jeremiah great consternation, but Ezekiel was not allowed to mourn. Slowly the glory of the Lord withdrew, first to "the threshold of the house"; and even then "the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory" (10:4), whether any but Ezekiel had eyes to see it or not. Afterwards "the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house" (v. 18), and finally it "went up from the midst of the city" (11:23).

The holiness of God's house had to be vindicated; therefore, as we have said, judgment began there. Nevertheless, the executors of the judgment who stood by "the brazen altar"--the place of sacrifice--were told not to come "near any upon whom is the mark" (9. 6)--"the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done" (v. 4). This illustrates what is said in 1 Peter 4. The righteous are saved, though it be with difficulty, because of the false state of religious profession all about them, Christ has borne their judgment. At "the brazen altar"--the Cross in type--He once suffered for their sins and brought them to God. Moreover, they have "the mark"--the Spirit of God; and though they feel the dishonour of, the corruptions around, they have what those in Ezekiel's day had not--"the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God" resting upon them (1 Peter 4:14); and, though reproached they could rejoice with exceeding joy.

Both the tabernacle and the temple were called the house, and both were desolated. That, however, which is built up in Christ as the Head of the corner today will abide and shine forth in glory soon. The right way, therefore, to learn from the tabernacle and the temple now is to see what the Spirit teaches concerning Christ in their wonderful details.

At the beginning of Ezekiel we see the glory of the Lord lingering before it departs from the house and city of His Name, but at the end we see the same glory returning in brightness and splendour!--"The earth shined with His glory" and "The glory of the Lord filled the house" (43:1-5). That will take place when the kingdom of the Son of Man is set up on earth, and the new house is built at Jerusalem. Look, however, at the heavenly city, the holy Jerusalem, at the end of Revelation. There is no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (21:22). No longer hidden behind a veil, our God, fully revealed in Jesus, is there.

"Rest of the saints above,

Jerusalem of God,

Who in thy, palaces of love,

Thy golden streets have trod?

God and the Lamb shall there

The Light and Temple be,

And radiant hosts for ever share

The unveiled mystery."

"The Lord God"

That day of glory is surely drawing nigh! The time when we shall be glorified with Christ for ever is fast approaching! But what is our present portion? It will be Himself then--what is ours now? The same as then--HIMSELF! That one word expresses it; but who can tell us all that it does express? Who can unfold all that it enfolds? Nevertheless, He Himself is our present and eternal portion. He that dwells in Divine love now dwells in God (1 John 4:16), and that will be true for ever. "God is love."

Let us learn again from Ezekiel. When the judgment fell, and the glory was departing, the Lord said, "Son of man, thy brethren, even thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, are they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far from the Lord: unto us is this land given in

possession. Therefore say, Thus says THE LORD GOD: Although I have cast them far off among the nations, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them for a little Sanctuary [Or, rather " a Sanctuary for a little while"] in the countries where they shall come" (11:15-16). Those who held the right place, the place of Jehovah's Name, were in a hardened state, and thrust the real aside; but "THE LORD GOD" would not fail them.

If they lost the material house at Jerusalem, they had Himself, who is greater than the temple for a Sanctuary, during the period of the scattering--the "little while."

Do we not read of "a little while" in Hebrews 10--the second Scripture we cited? And is it not in the same chapter we are encouraged during this "little while" to "draw near" and to "complete assembling together," even though it becomes "the custom with some" to forsake this, and sinning wilfully follows--apostasy from the Son of God and His finished work, and insult to the Spirit of grace--yet, as the long-expected return of our adorable Saviour approaches, these things are to be maintained with increasing zest "by so much the more as ye see the day drawing near." The very things that religious men are apostatizing from are to be our encouragement to approach boldly, even into the holiest of all--the work and Person of our glorious Saviour, "the blood of Jesus" and the "Great Priest over the house of God." "The Spirit of grace," whom the apostates insult, will grant power and favour to those who honour Christ's work and Person by approaching boldly as worshippers. "By Him," therefore it is said, "let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name."

Full assurance of faith is needed for this. To draw near by any man-appointed leader or priest is to ignore the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even if the priest were of the family of Aaron (the only earthly family appointed to this of God) it could not be Divinely owned, for God has set this order of priesthood aside; and Jesus (after another order, the order of Melchisedec) having gone into heaven, is now the one and only High Priest Divinely provided for us. He was of the tribe of Judah as Man. If, therefore, "He were on earth He would not be a priest" (Heb. 8:4). He was not of the priestly tribe or family, but He has gone on high for us, "a Son perfected for ever," "Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (6:20), and "Such an High Priest became us" (7:26). The earthly system of priesthood organized in Christendom sets this aside and does not become us. Truly all who are living stones in the spiritual house of which Christ is the Corner-stone, are also "a holy priesthood." He has washed them from their sins in His blood and made them "priests to His God and Father" (Rev. 1:6), but there is no other High Priest but Himself.

We saw that He had opened the way for us to draw nigh, through the veil, "His flesh." Now in the third Scripture (1 Tim. 3:15-16), we read, "God was manifest in the flesh"; and again we read, "Behold He comes with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him . . . I am Alpha and Omega, says the LORD GOD" (Rev. 1:7-8, N.Tr.). Israel will exclaim when He comes to her, "Lo, this is our God . . . this is the Lord, we have waited for Him." When He showed Thomas His hands and His side, he said to Him, "My Lord and My God." It is "THE LORD GOD" who says, in Ezekiel 11, I will be "A SANCTUARY." He has been manifest in flesh. He has tabernacled on earth. The fullness dwells in Christ on high, but "through the veil, that is to say, His flesh," He has dedicated for us "the new and living way," so that we may come into the presence of God with holy boldness and fullness of joy.

"WHERE DWELLEST THOU?"

To this question of the two disciples Jesus replied, "Come and see" (John 1:39). And is He not saying the same today to those who desire to be near to Himself, to be in His presence? God is known in Him and He brings us to know God in the presence of God. And the final ministry of the Spirit is given that "your joy may be full" (1 John 1:4).

The priests of Israel failed. Our Great Priest never fails. Christendom which professes His Name may become corrupt and apostate, but He remains in unchangeable perfection and faithfulness. Nothing, therefore, need be allowed to rob our hearts of their true portion. The Spirit has told us that men would make shipwreck as to faith, that some would depart from the faith to spiritism and satanic teachings, that the love of money would cause others to wander from the faith, that the profession of false-named science would also cause some to miss the faith, that difficult times should be present in the last days, that men should be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God though they have a form of godliness at the same time, that men corrupted in mind would be worthless as regards the faith, that evil men and seducers should wax worse and worse, that some would turn the grace of God into lasciviousness and deny the only LORD GOD, nevertheless the same Spirit of Truth, the Comforter, has given us full instruction, that those who have been called by God's grace according to His purpose, may be preserved in Christ Jesus, as the beloved of God the Father; that, abiding in the love of God, they may build themselves up on their most holy faith and look forward to the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying meanwhile in the Holy Ghost.

Because of the corruptions we have named judgment indeed begins at (or from) the house of God as we have seen. The Great Priest over the house of God nevertheless succours, sustains, and completely saves those who are all of one with Himself, those He is "not ashamed to call brethren," those who approach by Him who "worship by the Spirit of God, and boast in Christ Jesus, and do not trust in flesh" (Phil. 3:3). Moreover, we are shown how to conduct ourselves in that house where God's presence is known and where the truth is represented and upheld.

The first epistle to Timothy was written that one might "know how to conduct oneself in the house of God, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. And confessedly the mystery of piety is great, GOD HAS BEEN MANIFESTED IN FLESH, has been justified in the Spirit, has appeared to angels, has been preached among the nations, has been believed on in the world, has been RECEIVED UP IN GLORY" (1 Tim. 3:15-16, N.Tr.). All our behaviour is to be ordered in reference to the presence of God. What is pleasing in His sight is to characterize us until we, too, are received up in glory. Then, when the holy city shines forth in Divine splendour, everything will be ordered in practical perfection in reference to the immediate presence of God, for THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY AND THE LAMB ARE THE TEMPLE THEREOF.

Meanwhile the present ministry on high of our Lord Jesus Christ as the great Priest over the house of God avails to maintain us in the present good of the presence of God. His finished work on the Cross gives us boldness to draw near, and His unfinished work, His present priestly service, enables us with confidence to be before our God and Father as glad worshippers so that even now by Him our offerings of praise may be more and more abundant though the darkness deepens in Christendom; and, preserved in Him, we may value more highly the privilege of being in nearness to Himself, and thus yield to Him a return for His exceeding grace and His unchanging love.

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