

# Lecture on Hebrews 8

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon explores the profound implications of Christ's priesthood and the new covenant, emphasizing our access to God and the necessity of living by faith.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 4:14

**Topics:** "Access to God", "Christ as High Priest"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Hebrews 8, emphasizing the dual nature of our spiritual experience as believers. He illustrates how we are called to live in the world while being spiritually connected to Christ in heaven, highlighting the importance of understanding our position in Christ as our High Priest. Darby explains that while we face trials and temptations, we have a Mediator who intercedes for us, providing grace and strength to navigate our earthly journey. He encourages believers to maintain their focus on heavenly things, recognizing that our true identity and acceptance are found in Christ's completed work. Ultimately, Darby reassures that through Christ, we have access to the holiness of God and the sustaining grace needed for our walk of faith.

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## Transcript

This verses are just a summary of what has gone before.

It is remarkable how much we may be found amongst the circumstances in which we are placed - having God in them, but still amongst them - or how much we may get out of them all, in spirit, into that to which we are called by grace.

The very hymn we have been singing ("Lord Jesus! when I think of Thee"), you will find to be a different thing, with a totally different state of feeling, and not wrong, either, while singing it, according as you may be thinking of the wondrous blessedness there is in the place you are in, or as you look at it as a rest out of that place.

Scripture is so. Both are true. In one verse of the hymn, you may pray to be kept stayed on Him "till," or you may rise up to the blessing, by merely thinking of that. They are two different states of soul and feeling.

Now this is what the word of God does. It may bring light or testimony to us down here, or it may take us up there, in spirit I mean, just as a passage upon which I was meditating Elsewhere forms a link between

the two. Christ says, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." The Word has come down here, and deals with our souls as down here; but He adds, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth," that is, He takes us up there; as He has gone away, a man apart from the rest of men, so would He have it for us, forming our hearts into the same.

The Word of God has come down here, and brings divine truth into the scene where we are - love with it, too, and also holiness and grace - but Jesus did not leave us here, for He has gone back, and He associates us with Himself where He now is.

Our thoughts take up thus a double character.

Perfect grace has brought Him down to the sinner; at the same time, having secured the accomplishment of redemption, it carries us into the place where He is. And the heart is touched by this; and so it goes through a process of feeling of this double character. I ought never to be weary in well-doing down here, and yet rest is spoken of. It is conflict still. The Lord Jesus could say, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said I go unto the Father." He came down here bringing grace and truth to us; but nothing would have been done if, besides this, He had not gone away and linked us up there. We experience therefore mixed feelings and thoughts, through the bringing of divine light and love into the scene where we are, and then through the taking of our hearts out of it. In one sense, of course, it would not be true that our hearts are out of it; and therefore we have a further truth, and that is, that wherever we reach the other world, in spirit, we must get the cross.

250 This is true, not only as to redemption itself, but as to every step and detail, for the natural heart and flesh have no taste for heaven, no affections for heaven, nothing that corresponds with heaven; and therefore it is that I can say: "I ought to be all heavenly, but there is still a great deal in me that practically cannot conform itself with heaven." There, all is love; lusts have no place in heaven, and worldliness can never enter there with me; and therefore it is, as the Lord insists, "I will raise him up at the last day." You cannot know the bread come down from heaven, unless you know the dying Saviour who has gone up out of the world. He asked, "Wherefore, when I came, was there no man?" but He found nothing that answered, and there is still a great deal that does not answer.

Practical sanctification of the heart, whilst it judges that which is in us, takes us up into the other world. You will find from Scripture that a person may have a very blessed, God-given, apprehension of Christ, and of His Person, and yet not have the flesh subdued in him in the measure that will enable him to enjoy this thoroughly, or to take up the position and consequences down here that follow from it. We talk very truly of the church's place being in heaven, but we find a great many things in our hearts that have not the smallest place in heaven; and I do not now speak of insincerity.

What I have in my mind is, Peter first of all confessing, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"; the next thing we find is, that Christ was to be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, etc., etc.; and then Peter says, Have mercy upon yourself, Lord, such a thing must not happen to you! But if Christ is to build the Church, this must take place. The Father had revealed to Peter the Person of Christ, Son of the living God; but the instant that his confession brought in the truth of the cross, Peter's mind was not prepared for it; and yet the cross was the necessary consequence of it. So that it is no question of sincerity. We may be truly taught of God, and yet we may find that when we come to our walk down here, we have not realised the practical effect of the cross.

251 Grace and truth have come by Jesus Christ. This is not merely to take our minds up to the heavenly, but also to bring the heavenly down to us, to enable us to judge the practical condition of our souls.

Both these things are seen in Christ, and His present position is just the link between them.

On a former occasion, we were seeing the way in which He enters into our sorrows (without sin, of course), and yet, if He were not up there, He could not be a priest, because the object of His Priesthood is to take our hearts up there. He entered into our sorrows and circumstances, in order that now He might sustain our hearts in them, so that we might be free to be occupied with the things above. In heaven, we shall not want trial, or instruction, or chastening, or discipline, or anything of the kind.

In what I have been saying, it is a question of the soul being with God (not of a child with a Father), and of its competency to enter into the holiest. If I have been naughty, I can go and tell my Father, but when we speak of going to God, it must be with fitness. God's majesty, His unchangeable holiness, and His glory are then in question. It is not merely a question of righteousness, but of all that belongs to the holiest. We have a perfect tide to be there, but we want two things; we need sustaining grace down here, and at the same time, as a present thing, we need the capacity to be close to the throne of God where there is no evil. I do not say "title," merely, for that question is all settled. The vail is rent, and Christ is in God's presence for us. He is our righteousness, and even though we may never understand our absolute acceptance, yet everything is founded upon it. I have, by faith, to reckon fully and distinctly upon this, that I have a perfect title to go into the holiest; but that will bring down the judgment of the holiest upon all that I am in fact.

We were seeing before, in chapter 2, that there are four grounds for the death of Christ.

First, the majesty of God: "It became him . . . in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering," that is, perfected in the glory, which is what is meant all through here by "perfect." If He took up our cause, He must go through what was needed for us.

252 Second, what is mentioned last, but what is foundation truth, "To make reconciliation," or propitiation, "for the sins of the people." Sacrifice there must be, and He was that Himself.

Third. He suffers, for He must sympathise with us down here.

Fourth. To destroy the power of Satan.

For all this it was that He was made a little lower than the angels. Christ has gone through all that was needed to bring us to God. And thus He is available for all, for everything in fact.

Then follows the consideration of the shadow (not the very image) of good things to come; under the law, the priests stood in contrast with Christ, specially in respect of their own infirmity, and so of their competency to sympathise; they were in the same things at the same time, and they could have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that were out of the way, for that they also were compassed with infirmity.

But that would not do for us; and still less so, because if they themselves were in the infirmity when they had the sympathy, they must always stay down here on earth, and thus, through them, the people could go no further than earth; if, therefore, that had been so with the priesthood of Christ, it would have ended where it was exercised; indeed it does so now, for it is in heaven, and cannot, of course, go further. The

vail indicated that if the high priest only went in once a year, other priests could not go in at all.

But now that redemption is accomplished, the vail is rent; the holiest and the holy are both one; and we are made nigh to God Himself. And so, all through this epistle, you will find contrast.

Thus, it is not now priests dying one after another, but the power of an endless life.

Then, sacrifices were repeated; now, in Christianity, we have one sacrifice once for all, never to be repeated. It is the groundwork on which priesthood is to be exercised for ever, and it goes on until there is no more need of it. In the glory we shall not want it.

There is also this complete difference, viz., we go into the holiest itself, and our High Priest is not compassed with infirmity (for even in the sense in which He was so on-earth, all that is over); and therein we find that of which I was speaking at first, the connection between the trials and sorrows here, and the place into which we are taken where Christ has gone.

253 Before going up on high, our High Priest went through everything that was needed in order that He might sympathise with us, and help us, and lead us on. But now that He is exercising priesthood, all that is over. And we have perfect boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood, so much so, that I want my heart to be in the place where everything is settled. I want to have done with the things that hinder my heart from being there (and there are plenty of them), dimming the perception of these heavenly things. The Lord, therefore, puts us through various temptations of heart and spirit, that we may really know ourselves; and we need, not simply the fact of being kept safe (though that is true) all along the way, but also the sense we are being kept by the power of God, through faith. That is the way we are kept.

Is your faith ever dim or feeble? I mean, as to your walk; not, of course, as to your salvation.

In Hebrews 11 it is all through the path of faith, save in the case of Abel, which gives us the introduction to it. He takes up, first, creation, then redemption, and then the rest is just a question of the pathway, of that which exercises the faith we have in walking onwards, and which needs to be sustained. All things down here, agreeable or painful, tend to hinder our going on. "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee"; they do not always do so; sometimes they look askance.

Well, the devil tempted Christ; and have not your hearts seen a little of that? Is there not a little bit in you that is not so dead but what your own heart knows it? Christ rejected it all, of course. And so, again, towards the end of His ministry; then, it was-by testing His obedience, which though perfect, was tested; it was tested at the first by the attraction of everything that Satan could offer to Him as a man, and then, at the last, by every terror that Satan could press upon Him as a man.

Well, we have to walk the path of faith; and therefore, Christ is spoken of as the Author and Finisher of faith. He was tested in every possible way in which He could be tested, and it just proved His perfectness. In the garden, His disciples went to sleep for sorrow, when they should have been watching with Him, only showing what poor human beings we are.

254 And so, too, at the Transfiguration, when He was in the glory, they were fast asleep, and only just woke up in time to see it. The flesh was weak, but the spirit willing.

In Gethsemane, they were asleep again; they could not stand the cup they saw coming upon them, and they would get rid of it by going to sleep; poor work, indeed, but it is what we find in weak human nature.

With the blessed Lord, it was either communion with Moses and Elias about His decease, or that, being in an agony, He prayed the more earnestly. Poor human nature quailed, but in Him it produced more energetic supplication to God, in respect of that which was before Him. This is what we see in the perfect Man, and this is what we have to learn. I do not say that there is any sin in weakness, though it may run into it; but when a person is going through the path of faith with everything against him, this becomes either the occasion of obedience, or the means of temptation. There is not a thing we meet with but what proves to be so; take even the question of sleep, well, we may be lazy in that. If in what comes to me, I am without Christ, it will keep my heart from Christ; but if I am with Christ in it, it may be a blessed opportunity for me to learn His grace in it. There is not a thing we meet with, from morning to night (apart from the question of sins), but it becomes a question of our eyes looking straight forward, with Christ all in all, i.e., all to us as Object, and in us as Life.

And there is another thing: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh" and here I come to practice - "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." I am dead; I have died; Christ is my life; He is all to me; am I, then, living as if He were all?

And then we find a further thing, and that is, that Christ is unceasingly occupied about us. He suffered being tempted; it was a constant trial to Him, and yet He was perfect in it; the more He was tested, the more the odour of His good ointment came forth, and He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; such was the result produced by the exercises and trials of His heart.

255 So all the snares around us, the difficulties in the Church or in the family, are either the occasion of making us quail from the straight path, or they are the occasion of blessed obedience.

In Gethsemane, observe, that the Lord says, Watch and pray lest ye enter, not into sin, but, into temptation. Christ was perfect through all, but Peter fell to cursing and swearing, and denied his Lord. If faith is tested by the way, we find also in the path that, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." It was not a question of Peter's integrity, for he loved the Lord, but he did not know himself, and he had to be put through this process; yet before ever he had failed, Christ had prayed for him. And we know, beloved friends, that He ever liveth to make intercession for us.

It is sometimes said, this means His appearing for us on the question of sin. It is nothing of the kind. Intercession is going and addressing yourself to a person, on behalf of another, to get anything you want for that one. It is the same word in Romans 8:26 and 34; the Spirit works in our hearts, but He does not appear anywhere for us. But Christ is standing in the presence of God, and He is the One who is actively engaged in obtaining for us all that we need. It is not that we go to Him, but that He goes to God for us. He is our righteousness there, He has made propitiation, and therefore He can use the grace that is in God, according to His knowledge of all that is in God, and of our weakness too, to bring down to us complete and needed grace. That is the place He is in, and He ever liveth to carry on this constant service on our behalf. He is our servant in that way.

When He was going away, He went to God He could not stay with them, to have blessing here with them as His companions. He must go away; and He went back as perfect as when He came. And, in John 13, knowing that He was going to God, He sets Himself to wash their feet.

Having completed redemption, and washed ("bathed") us, there is something else that we need; therefore He says, "He that is washed ("bathed," lit.) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." If I

look at God, as to my acceptance, I am as white as snow; but we do pick up dirt by the way, and we want our feet washed. The Lord insists on this, that Peter is perfect as to his person. But when Peter says, "Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head," the Lord does not wash his head. And so Christ is ever living to make intercession for us. John 13 and Hebrews are to a large extent the same.

256 Christ Himself suffered being tempted, and it is perfection to suffer being tempted. We all know, in measure, what it is to suffer in such cases, but He who was Himself perfect, understands all the trials and exercises, for He has gone through them, and as a result, we obtain grace and mercy from Him to help us in our time of need.

Christ came to be a servant as a man, and He never gives this up. It is love, and it is His glory, in that, becoming a man, He has become our servant. He says, "I am among you as he that serveth," and that comes out in John 13. To wash the feet is the lowest work of a slave. Again, in Luke 12, we read, "Blessed are those servants whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them," i.e., He ministers blessing to them.

The constant strength of His affection never gives up its fixed purpose, whether it is in coming down here to die, or in going up there to take us up there with Himself; or, as now, in the midst of our trials, He obtains for us mercy and grace to help us in time of need.

There is another thing connected with this: "Such an high priest became us." If it "became" God to deal with Him in suffering and death, we can speak also of the kind of high priest that becomes us. We need a high priest without infirmity, One who takes us right into the sanctuary. Unlike the Jewish priest of old, Christ was not encompassed in any sense with infirmity; as to all that by which He learned, in an experimental way, the capability of sympathy, it was when He was not a priest. He went through all that, and now He exercises priesthood in the heavens; because although I have infirmities and trials here below, yet I belong to heaven. I need a priest that can feel for me here, and I need one, too, that can take me there. And such an one became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. Such an one is ours, so that, speaking of going into the holiest, I may go higher than the heavens. As to my place, I am holy, looked at in Christ (He was actually so, in everything); and that is my place in the new creation The grace that has visited sinners has reached us in the Apostle of our profession. Now that redemption is accomplished, Christ is the High Priest of our profession; He has passed into the heavens, and is made higher than the heavens. And such is my place, in my associations with God; my worship goes into the holiest, for the veil is rent. All is founded upon the settled point of our acceptance in Christ; else how could we talk of going higher than the heavens? It is because this is my place I need such a high priest, One who can meet my need and take my heart up there. Surely, that is where go the desires of our hearts; and, in a sense, we have to bring these poor infirm, feeble creatures there; so I need Christ, therefore, to be in the very presence of God in the light, for that is where I must be. I do not say so as to Israel, for the veil was not then rent, the thought of going into the holiest was utterly excluded there. But for us, it is not now impossible; it is our very place. A wonderful place, I grant you, but Christ being in the presence of God has settled everything; now I need a Mediator there in every respect that concerns me. God cannot be alone with the creature, and therefore in every respect (although not always in the same respect), we need a Mediator.

257 The first thing I need is a Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, because I am afar off. God visits us in love, and says, "Be you ever so vile, I have not put on my glory and the terrors of

Sinai, but my Christ has come down to you, to bring ME close to you."

There I see, in Christ, the Mediator coming into this world. How, then, am I to be with God? I want my sins put away, and I want righteousness. In Jesus, I find the Mediator that makes reconciliation for the sins of the people - One who dies for me. All that is settled, and He is now appearing in the presence of God for me, and there, I am assured, is my place. In my walk, I find weakness, but I have a Mediator: "When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them." Is there uncertainty as to my way? He goes first. In the path, we meet with all sorts of difficulties (without talking of an evil will). Christ could say, "Reproach hath broken my heart." Do we never feel in the way the energy of reproach enough to break our hearts? Suppose death threatens us for the Lord's sake; well, the Lord has Himself gone through it (I am not now talking of atonement). Tarry ye here, He said, and watch with Me; how blessed! He was in an agony, pleading with God, shewing how He felt everything as a man (it was divinely felt, but still, as a man), that He might experience the trials and exercises of a man according to divine perfectness, and when all has been gone through, He goes up, presents the sacrifice, and appears in the presence of God for us. He is thus a Mediator of righteousness, because we are accepted in the Beloved; beyond all this, that through which He has passed has given Him competency to be a Mediator of intercession; though, of course, He would not be so unless He were close to God. Now, for a little while, we are meant to be present in the body, and absent from the Lord. Paul felt doubtless what that was when, say, he was fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus. Do you think he did not need grace to help? And again, the Lord had mercy on him, for He sent to him Epaphroditus with the bounty of the Philippians; and Paul writes to them, "I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

258 It is no question of the perfectness which we have before God. But when God has given us that, He sets us walking through this world, where faith is tested, and where we find the constant supply and ministrations of blessedness according to our need. He takes us up, in spirit, to the place where He has given us title to be, right away from sinners - "Come out . . . and be ye separate" - and we are separate (not outwardly, of course), but we are with Christ in the heavens, and above the heavens, there where we have our Priest. It is not now a question of righteousness, but of maintaining us practically so as to be consciously in the holiest of all. If Christ were not our righteousness, we could not have that place, but that is all settled, and now my heart wants to be there. In myself, I am a poor infirm creature going there where I have Christ; but I have One who carries my heart with Him right into the holiest, One from whom it cannot be separated. We have One who is a Mediator, to take our hearts with Himself, and by Himself, right into the presence of God; I mean, to take us there now, in the spirit of our minds. This is the intercourse of those who are priests, without any veil.

In the presence of the perfect holiness of that place, have we now power to maintain ourselves there in association with Jesus? Ah! we soon find how infirm we surely are.

Just stay for half an hour, beloved friends, in the positive sense of God's presence in the holiest, and then see where you will be! Nothing more tests the condition of a man's soul than seeing how long he can maintain intercourse with God in the holiest. Stephen looked up steadfastly into heaven - any length of time and always? Why not? I am not talking of evil, that would need our humbling ourselves, but supposing you are consciously in the presence of God, and that the light of God is shining upon you, how long can you remain in the enjoyment of it?

259 But we have there One who becomes us, One who is sustaining our intercourse with God upon that footing. Blessing is always mediatorial, because it is always dependent upon, as also it is always, through

that Blessed One. While He is God over all, blessed for evermore, yet He has come down to this earth, and in every possible way and shape, He has put Himself in our place, in order to bring God close to us in grace. He has put Himself into our place, as made sin for us, and He has since gone up on high and made that our place, to be with Him where He is.

And now the priesthood of the Lord takes account of our very weakness, to make it the occasion of showing us the perfection of supply. Where does a weak person find strength but in the arm he leans on? We have, then, a Mediator for us, One who gives our hearts confidence, not only in God, as knowing all things, but also in His sympathy, so that we learn there is not a thing in the pathway through the wilderness, where the sheep pass, but the Shepherd has already gone through it.

Because we are conscious of these infirmities, let us therefore go boldly to the throne of grace. I do not go to the Priest to get Him to do anything for me, as if God were not Himself love towards me; but, as regards my walk, I go to the throne of grace to obtain mercy, and to find grace to help in time of need; and as I go there, so I find a High Priest there who becomes me. How He fills up the whole measure! He has passed through every weakness, trial, and exercise down here, such as no other has ever been through, and He has gone right up to the throne of God.

Now, He is sitting at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. That is where we see Him at the opening of this epistle. Then, too, He is Son. And He is saluted as Priest who has gone within the veil. His priesthood is the expression of love, for He lives to make intercession for us. This applies to the double case of meeting trial here and strengthening faith, and also to taking us above it all to be with God in the holiest Blessed love it is! Not only sovereign grace has saved us, but also love, gracious, thoughtful, and condescending, is occupied with us, touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Christ is completely out of them; and the character of His priesthood is, that it is exercised in heaven, and not on earth where infirmity is. And this, too, after having passed through all that which has made Him perfectly acquainted with our suffering.

260 In Scripture, everything that tests us is called temptation, not merely the sin in us which does, of course, tempt us. Christ was tempted; but in His case, it was, not exactly "without sin," but, "except sin." Not only He did not fail, but there was no sin in Him. When, however, I talk of my old man, I want the hatchet of God's word for that, not sympathy with it. There was failure with the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, and the Lord might have reproached them for it, but He did not. When Scripture speaks of being tempted like as we are, this is in the path in which God would have us to walk, where everything possible is trying to turn us out of it; it is a path in which we find what feeble creatures we are, and in which Christ is always making good to us what we need.

In James 1, the word "temptation" is used in both senses. When he says, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations," he is speaking not of sin, but of trials and exercises. And again, when he says, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed," we do not want sympathy with that. As I learn the evil of the flesh in me, I want to have it thoroughly judged, and so I say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts." I want God to be with me as I am walking here in feeble faith; but when we fail, then intercession of another kind is needed to restore. We need Christ to be both strength and grace to us in the path of faith; and we go to the throne of grace with the consciousness that there is our righteousness - propitiation - and thus we can reckon on the constant grace of God to strengthen us.

With Christ, temptation was always the occasion of obedience; with us, it is too often not so.

We need to have the thorough consciousness that Christ is ever living to make intercession for us, because it is then that we can reckon on the supply of grace that shall hinder us from falling.

261 Do we look to our own hearts to see how far they trust that ever-living love of Christ? It is not simply that He has loved and given Himself for us, but that He ever lives for us. It is such a comfort to know that there is no infirmity in us that does not rightly become the occasion of confidence in God, which leads us to say, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me," and to see that God can be always occupied with us.

The Lord give us to see how far, since such a high priest became us, how far our hearts are really under the effect of that ministry of His which alone can keep us steady; and this will prove a thorough test of the state of our souls. For those who go to-the throne of grace, there is always indeed grace for them.

Let us remember this, that the very priesthood of Jesus is founded on the passing away of everything Jewish. If there was a change of the priesthood, there must of necessity be a change of law. We have a high priest in heaven itself, and we go there in spirit. Israel is still waiting until He comes out as Melchisedek, and then the remnant will come into their blessings. But their priest, where will He be? Down here. Now, He has gone in. Why? Because He wants us there. And while He is waiting up there, the Holy Ghost is come out to us, and therefore our association with Christ is entirely within, where He is. If this were not so, how could I tell if Christ's work had been accepted? But He says, "If I depart, I will send him [the Comforter] unto you." The Comforter has come, and we have now the assurance of faith; whilst, through Christ's being there, we shall have the supplies needed to faith, until He comes and receives us unto Himself, so that where He is, we may be also.

The Lord give us to know where He has called us to, and, at the same time, to have the comfort of trusting to the grace that sustains us by the way!

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