

Ministry on Hebrews

Part 5

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[00:00:00] God, verse 2, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, verse 3, who, verse 4, being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. Last night, those who were here had to work very hard indeed. I felt for you, I really did. Looking at most of the verses in Hebrews, it seemed, to fill out all the wealth of truth contained in that prophetic statement in Psalm 110, the Lord hath sworn and will not repent, [00:01:03] thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. And it was necessary to consider, first of all, the imperfection of the Aaronic Levitical priesthood, arising from that the need for a new order of priests to arise, the establishment of the new order, and the personal and moral qualifications of the Lord Jesus as the only one who can rightly answer to that prophetic statement. I suppose that summary took about 20 seconds, but it would take about [00:02:04] a month, wouldn't it, to look at all the verses, some of which we read last night. As on other occasions, it is not the exercise or the intent, nor could it could be, that we should demonstrate fully every statement that is made, but rather to provide a framework against which we can all, cloistered in the Lord's presence, establish that these things are so, and follow up the detail for ourselves. If you come to different conclusions in detail to me, that doesn't bother me at all. I am always happy, as I often do, to receive further help as soon as the meeting is finished. I'd be glad to have some more tonight. One of the outcomes of [00:03:04] the establishment of the new order of priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, is the utter superiority of the order of Melchizedek and the priest called after that order, compared with and contrasted with the whole Levitical system. And tonight, certainly there wasn't time last night, we hope to look at some elements of the vast superiority of Christianity as a whole, compared with Judaism as a whole. And, of course, there's a ready framework built into the text of the [00:04:08] epistle to the Hebrews, which tell us again and again that Christianity is superior to Judaism. Of course, it was necessary to state these things repeatedly to the recipients of the letter, because there was great danger that they who'd been converted from the Hebrew religion to Christianity, that they might slip back to what they had been used to before. So, he repeatedly draws their attention to the fact that what they have is better. Now, it's easy to remember. In the mercy of God, the epistle to the Hebrews has been split into 13 chapters, and 13 times, not less, not more, in the authorized version, 13 [00:05:10] times the writer says that what he is considering is better. 13 chapters, 13 betters, but not one in every chapter. Now, there's another term, and I would say there'll probably be time just to look briefly at that as well, the term more excellent. Three times over, he refers to what is more excellent. Now, I've read the first of these statements, that what we have been brought to is better than anything else. Please look, as we study these references, to what has undergirded everything that has been said in the week that we are spending together. The [00:06:06] Hebrew believers had been weaned away, and were being weaned away, from that which was earthly to that which was heavenly, from that which was temporal, bounded by time, to that which is eternal, and from that which is material and sensual, pertaining to

the five natural senses, to that which is spiritual. Now, these contrasts are threaded through the epistle to the Hebrews from beginning to end, and so it is that when we consider in what ways Christianity is better than anything else, we'll see that these elements come to light again and again. Now, I read verse 4, but because it begins with this participle being, we [00:07:10] need to identify who is being referred to. Well, verses 1 and 2 say, God has spoken to us in his Son. The chapter is taken up with a recounting and celebration of the personal glories of the Lord Jesus Christ as God the Son. And he says, in verse 4, that compared with those the Hebrew believers were acquainted with, who had been used previously in other days to speak on behalf of God and bring the messages from God, he is infinitely better, [00:08:05] infinitely more worthy, infinitely superior to what they'd known before. As members of the nation of Israel, they were used to angelic ministry. Read the history of the nation of Israel, and we find that from their earliest days, supernatural intervention in the affairs of the nation, remarkable occasions, remarkable statements had been made to them, and God's messengers for the moment had often been angels. So much is said in chapter 1 in comparison with the angels, and here is the first use of this term, he is so much better than the angels because of who he is, God the Son. The angels are creatures. The Son is [00:09:05] creator and sustainer of the universe. Now, many things, easily to identify a perfect circle of seven aspects in which the Son is all-glorious, and one of the things that's said is that he has by inheritance, he deserves it because of who he is, he is the Son. Now, that's the kind of consideration we are having tonight. Less technical than last night, although everything that was said last night, absolutely essential, essential for the Hebrew believers, we, essential for us, who have been brought to Christ more latterly. Well, that was the first reference. The next one, chapter 6 and verse 9.

[00:10:04] Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. If, as to detail, you conclude differently from this verse to what I do, I won't be upset, I'll be very pleased to hear your views. To me, reading the first six verses, some of which we hope to consider in our Bible reading on Saturday afternoon, if the Lord will, in these first six verses, he makes a very important part. Writing to converted Jews, he says this, you got to a point in your spiritual career, the development of your spiritual life, when [00:11:06] you realized that the main import of the Old Testament Scriptures and the Old Testament system was to point you to Christ, and you turned away from the Hebrew religion, and you turned to Christ, and your whole life previously had been bound up in Judaism, and having turned away from that to Christ, if you subsequently turn away from Christ or turn your back on Christ, there's nowhere else to go. How sad. He considers now and again in the epistle to the Hebrews that he was speaking to a mixed multitude. Now, the people of Israel knew what [00:12:03] that was from the history of their nation in the wilderness. There were those who were affected in their heart and spirit and conscience, determined to be true to God. But, as always, there were those who were attracted to go along with them for what they could get out of it, not really affected in heart and conscience. And every now and again, the writer says to the Hebrew believers, now are you part of the mixed multitude who are not real? He says, oh but look, he said I'm persuaded better things of you. I'm sure you personally, he says to each of the recipients of the letter, he says I'm sure you are not like that. He says in fact, I am persuaded better things of you. Having been brought into touch with [00:13:09] a better servant than the angels, brought into touch with the Son, having been affected in heart and conscience and brought really to Christ, God the Son, he said I'm sure that you won't be those who on the surface appear to be real, but when the pressure and the test comes, well, the life gets too hard and you slip away and you give up. He said I'm sure you are not like that. He says in fact, I'm looking for outward evidence, practical evidence in the way you live your life that you are not like that. He says I'm looking for better things from you, things that accompany salvation. And so he goes on in verse 10 to speak about [00:14:08] your work, your labor of love, your ministry to the saints and so on. Well, you think about that. But certainly in substance he's

saying I'm sure you're not like that, you're better. Perhaps we should say now, we haven't said up to now. What does better mean? Better, in simple terms, is the comparative of good. It's good to a higher degree. Better, more worthy than something else. And this is what he's saying all along. 7 verse 7, the next one. We must keep moving. 7 verse 7. Without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the better. Now, we can [00:15:05] interpolate there to give ourselves the sense, better person. He's talking about tithing and the giving of tithes. And he says it's recognized that those who give tithes give them to those who are better than themselves. And he says, isn't it significant, he says. The Levites are used to receiving tithes from other people because the Levites, presumably the priests, are better than those receiving, they receive the tithes from. He said but their great ancestor Abraham, he didn't receive tithes, he gave tithes. He gave tithes to Melchizedek, [00:16:05] who is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the opening verses, 1 to 4, tell us about how much better Melchizedek was than Aaron as a priest.

Now some of these we looked at last night. But he sums up in verse 4, he says, consider how great this man was. Chapter 3, chapter 7, chapter 10, chapter 12, chapter 13, five times over, he draws to their attention something that's marvellous to consider. Look them up, consider, he says. Think, ponder well, meditate upon this, it's a wonderful thing. And here he makes this grand statement, which we could put [00:17:07] almost as a heading over the whole of the epistle, consider how great this man was. The greatness of Melchizedek was that he represents Christ, a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Called of God, a priest after the order of Melchizedek. And so he says in verse 7, in commenting on how much better what they'd been brought to, was than what they'd left behind, he says Melchizedek was evidently intrinsically better than Abraham. Verse 19, the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a [00:18:03] better hope did, by which we draw nigh unto God. A better hope. A while back, we had two visitors at the door, Jehovah Witnesses, engaged in conversation, and the callers were gracious enough to say this at the end of the conversation, it would seem that you have a heavenly hope, while we have an earthly hope. I thought well that's good. That's a very honest comment. They are seeing light at the end of the tunnel, if they are prepared to follow the light. That, of course, is true of Jehovah's Witnesses. It was true of Judaism. One of the superiorities of the order of Melchizedek is that he ministered and [00:19:10] speaks of Christ ministering in a heavenly, spiritual, eternal sphere of blessing. The hope of heaven is a better than a hope of blessing on earth. Although, if the Lord spares us to the Saturday evening, we'll be looking at God's final declaration of blessing on earth in time in the world to come of which scripture speaks. But here for the moment, he says, he draws the reader's attention to the fact that a better hope has been brought in, not only because it's heavenly instead of earthly, but where the most the Jews could hope for, the most the Hebrew believers in Israel could [00:20:03] hope for in their day, was that once a year and not without the fresh shedding of blood, their representative was allowed to draw near. Chapter 10 verses 19 to 22 and other scriptures tell us that our hope is a better hope because, as he says here in passing, because now by the which we draw nigh unto God. Simple thing, isn't it? We know we should pray more than we do. We know we should spend more time in communion with our blessed Lord and our God and Father. We need to remind ourselves it is a privilege which was hardly won by the shedding of the blood of Christ, but at any [00:21:07] moment, anywhere, we can draw near unto God. What, how much better it is than that which went before. Verse 22. Well we better read the end of verse 20 before the brackets. In so much as not without an oath he was made priest, verse 22, by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament or covenant. Now we read with that chapter 8 verse 6. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant which was established upon better promises. [00:22:06] The first covenant, the first contract, the first bargain between God and his earthly people Israel, at their request they said to God tell us what to do and we will do it. God took them at their word.

Oh we must be careful in suggesting a bargain to God. If we strike a bargain, if we make demands upon God and say this is what we are committing ourselves to, in the ways of God we shouldn't be surprised when God takes us exactly at our word and gives us what we demand. As we read when they [00:23:08] demanded the flesh in the wilderness he gave them their heart's desire but he granted leanness unto their soul. We may well feel audacious enough in demanding something from God and when he gives us it we will probably find, we will certainly find subsequently we would have been better leaving it with him as to how things should be done and how things should come to us. Well the people said tell us what to do give us some commandments we will do it and it occurred and of course they failed under that and the contract was this God said I will tell you what to do if that's what you want I will say thou shalt do this and thou shalt not do that and if you [00:24:09] contravene these clear commandments you will be judged you will be condemned and if you fall foul of one jot or tittle of the law the whole weight the total weight of the law in aggregate will be applied against you. The first covenant thou shalt oh it's a better covenant that's been brought in by Christ. Jeremiah 31 tells us there will be a new covenant for Israel not on the basis of thou shalt but because God says I will read those verses 31 to 34 or thereabouts in Jeremiah 31 again and again God says I will I will I will. [00:25:09] The will of God revealed and implemented by him by Christ on God's behalf will always give us better promises a better covenant a better hope than anything that we fondly imagine we could ever deserve by responding to an instruction which says thou shalt but a covenant better promises connected with the will of God connected with heaven and spiritual things and eternal things and so it is in these references to the covenant and the promises now the next one chapter 9 and verse 23 give us one very good reason for that [00:26:01] chapter 9 verse 23 it was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these hymns are not scripture thankfully the hymns we sing are scriptural and we've sung the words not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away its stain but Christ the heavenly lamb took all our guilt away a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they a better sacrifice his own blood not the blood [00:27:08] of others as chapter 9 of Hebrews develops the pattern the model we're going back now to shadow and substance aren't we the pat if the patterns the models which depicted and typified and illustrated in advance of the time of revelation what the reality the substance would be like if bulls and goats and sheep were necessary for them to cleanse that sphere how much better must the sacrifices be to establish the blessing and the reality of it and so he says in chapter 9 verse 23 chapter 10 verse 34 [00:28:15] ye had compassion of me in my bonds and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance here we have the word again substance that which is substantial that which is real one of the better elements about the substance is that it is heavenly here is one of the scriptures which [00:29:06] assure us that Christianity and coming to Christ is better than anything else we could ever have because it is matters relating to heaven and also it is enduring not limited by time and sense spiritual and eternal and so he says that this substance is better than anything else we could ever have chapter 11 verse 16 after speaking of the faithful from the time of Abel onwards we read in verse 16 but now they desire a better country that is unheavenly here it is again [00:30:12] defined for us what better means within the context of Hebrews remember the lesson we always must apply interpret every text of Scripture first of all in its own context and then in the context of Scripture as a whole better in Hebrews refers to that which is heavenly and spiritual and eternally and so we have it here they are looking they desire a better country that is in heavenly if you're moving on to a heavenly home the fact that you're misunderstood that you're abused that [00:31:13] you're a nobody in this world in this life on this earth loses its importance the flesh in you still gets hurt the flesh in you is still inclined to bristle but in thinking of spiritual heavenly eternal realities we are going to a better country that is unheavenly we have opportunities every day to demonstrate whether the things we talk about

are realities to us [00:32:04] I remember being told once a nomad has no home a stranger is away from home a pilgrim is on his way home there are people described in the Bible who were nomads Abraham's people were nomads but we don't get the word as far as I can remember but again and again we are told that we are strangers and pilgrims strangers in the sense that we are away from home pilgrims in the sense we are on our way home now if we accept that we are not in our home country but we are on our way [00:33:02] there in the mercy of God it will make all the difference to how we respond in this life in the things of this life yes we'll be conscientious we should be the most conscientious person where we work where we live the family in which we've been placed whether it's school the office the factory it should said we may not be the most clever or the most wise we should certainly be the most diligent and conscientious but we touch things lightly and we don't get too disturbed because we are on our way home scripture also says we are foreigners well if a stranger being a stranger [00:34:02] means I don't belong here being a foreigner means I do belong somewhere else if anyone stops me in Glasgow and asks me the way to somewhere I don't say I'm sorry I'm a foreigner I would say I'm sorry I'm a stranger I don't belong here it would be immaterial whether I belong Germany Switzerland or anywhere else the vital thing is I'm a stranger I don't belong here try not to labor this too much but if we believe that we are moving on towards a better country with a better hope that our center our citizenship is in heaven just going outside of the bounds of Hebrews to Philippians just for a moment we are demonstrating and we have the opportunity to demonstrate that our [00:35:05] home is elsewhere not in this world we are on our way to heaven well some of that comes out in this better country that is and heavenly chapter 11 verse 35 women received their dead raised to life again others were tortured not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection there are going to be two resurrections the first resurrection began with the personal resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ he died he was buried on the first day of the week he was raised from among the dead beginning the first resurrection Christ the first [00:36:05] fruits and then for the other groups and persons in the first resurrection read Revelation 20 verses 4 to 6 and the longest verse in Revelation details the groups who are included in the first resurrection and then after the world to come that's a little more than a thousand years after the first resurrection has been completed there will be another resurrection we are told the rest of the dead the wicked dead will be raised and judged and condemned at the great white [00:37:01] throne these two resurrections are distinguished Daniel chapter 12 or thereabouts some raised to to life some raised to judgment John 5 again distinguishes between the two resurrections but here it's not saying one rather than another it's saying a better resurrection takes us back to the Lord's words doesn't it he says if you confess my name before men I will confess your name before the Father we learn in Scripture that if when the assessment is made at the judgment [00:38:15] seat of Christ of everything we've done in the body if it's deemed to be like gold silver and precious stones rare precious gems and commodities that we will receive honor and dignity in association with Christ in his dear glory manifested then but if we've done that which is dishonorable and dishonoring to our Lord and Master there will be that which necessarily is burned up we as individuals saved forever by the blood of Christ but maybe works dishonoring to [00:39:13] Christ having to be removed as by fire so there is that left to our responsibility while we live on earth and this better resurrection is available to those who have such a right estimation of things in this life that if being faithful to Christ means that they will be abused means that they will be persecuted means that they will be martyred so be it fear not the Lord said those who have power to destroy the body fear him that has power over the soul the immaterial part and [00:40:10] so I'm sure when he says here that these good people on going on to a better country were concerned about a better resurrection yes having part in the first resurrection but having lived in such a way that they would have honor metered out to them I'm sure something of that is involved chapter verse 40 well verse 39 these all having obtained a good report through faith received not the promise God having provided some better thing for us that they without us should

not be made perfect God allowed time to run its course Christianity superseded the Hebrew religion [00:41:10] those who died in faith in every day being reserved held in reserve so that when God's final thoughts are made known in the person of the Son Christ and the church being brought to light God's last page in his revelation of himself could never be perfect and complete until in the present day there has been brought to light Christ and the assembly and he says the writer says well without us they couldn't be complete because that which has been brought in in this present dispensation is the crowning stone of God's revelation chapter 12 verse 24 and to Jesus [00:42:06] or he says you've come to some wonderful things but he says the crowning consideration is this to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant to the blood of sprinkling that speak of better things than that available yes we've been brought into the blessing and the spirit of the new covenant in anticipation of the day when the nation of Israel recovered to God as such will be brought into the letter of the new covenant and it all rests upon the precious precious blood of Jesus if the blood of Abel cried for vengeance the blood of Jesus cries for mercy and in the mercy of God God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he has loved us has brought us [00:43:09] into it at the present time now let me read I think we've considered the elements let us read the three verses which instead of saying better say more excellent chapter 1 verse 4 he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they a name conveys that which is personal that which is personal to him his personal glory has been outlined in verses 1 to 3 and continues through the chapter and he says his name yes his name is wonderful but his name is more excellent certainly than the angels honored though they were to bear the messages of God because his [00:44:06] name is personal he's God the Son chapter 8 verse 6 now he hath obtained chapter 8 verse 6 now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry by how much also he's the mediator of a better covenant established upon better promises better because it's heavenly rather than earthly better because it's established in the purpose of God not the responsibility of man better because it enables us to draw near to God at any time as we have looked at earlier and then finally chapter 11 and verse 4 by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain Cain offered the [00:45:10] first fruits of his own labor what he'd been privileged to grow from the land Abel gave that for which he toiled not not a question of his works at all he offered the firstlings of the flock that way God had provided the gift God had done all the work provided all the care that was acceptable to God because it represented the work of Christ on our behalf and as we read the blood of Abel crying for mercy the mercy was available because that more excellent sacrifice the sacrifice of God's lamb had been made available God shall provide himself a lamb in order that [00:46:12] due sacrifice might be made and all the blessing be brought in wonderful wonderful consideration