

## Hebrews 7:23-27 Jesus Is Our Eternal High Priest Easter Festival Service April 1, 2018

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God's grace and peace belong to us through our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen

We read about the great advantage it is to have Jesus as our great high priest in Hebrews 7:23-27

These are Your Words, heavenly Father to give us confidence in life and death. Your Word is truth! Amen.

Dear people of God in the name of the risen Savior,

Throughout the season of Lent we've had readings from the book of Hebrews about the office of the Jewish high priest. The high priest was chosen by God to bring God's blessing to His people. The first high priest was Moses' brother Aaron. Eventually he died in the wilderness and his son succeeded him. This went on for about 80 generations up to the time of Christ. This overturning of positions showed the people that the priests could not offer a permanent solution for sin or death any more than I can do for you. But,

### Jesus is the eternal High Priest

**First, He met all our needs.** Jesus was different from all the other high priests who had served. He had no sin. All the other priests were sinners; that's why they died. Whether they were wicked men like Caiaphas, who hatred and rejected Jesus and showed Him injustice, or whether they were godly men, they all sinned. That is why, our reading states, they had to "*offer sacrifices first for their own sins, and then for the sins of the people.*" (v. 27) Only with the blood of an animal sacrifice could the high priest come into the presence of God or he would have died instantly, which happened to one of Aaron's sons.

Jesus was different. From His birth to His death, He had no sin. He had done nothing wrong against the Romans or the Jews. More importantly He had never committed any sin against God in His thoughts, words, or actions. We read in *verse 26* of Christ: we have "*a high priest [who] truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners.*" As one of us, Jesus lived such a good life that even the all-knowing God said, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.*" (Matthew 17:5) Jesus challenged his enemies who carefully watched His every move and tried trick Him with questions to make Him sin; he said: "*Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?*" (John 8:46) He was sinless and should have never died. That is why His death was so important to God and to us!

Because of His innocence, the results of Jesus' sacrifice were different than the Old Testament sacrifices. The endless animal sacrifices of the Old Testament couldn't really take away sin; they could only point to and foreshadow the promised Savior who would pay for sins once for all.

As the Great High Priest, He offered Himself on the cross, and His sacrifice satisfied the justice of our holy God. That is great news for us! Our sin and guilt were like permanent stains on us to our shame. If a child has new clothes for Easter and gets them all dirty, he wants to hide from his parents as long as possible. We can't hide our sins from God. Daily, we feel the effects of the power of sin in our bodies, in how people hurt us, and eventually in death. The Bible warns that after death comes eternal judgment! But, Jesus' innocent blood was shed to wash away the stain of our sin. So God declares us holy through Christ. How do we know? How can we be sure? Christ's rising from death is proof that His sacrifice is complete!

Sometime we order items online or from a catalog. When the item is delivered, we find that some parts are missing. When we try to use it or assemble it, it won't work. When God planned to save us from His judgment of death and eternal shame, He sent the complete package in Jesus. He put an end to the punishments we deserved by the payment of His innocent life. On this Easter Day, we rejoice that God decreed Christ's sacrifice complete by raising Him from death and seating Him at His right hand in glory.

This truth led Paul to exclaim in *1 Corinthians 15*: “*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*” *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (vs. 55-57) People were created by God to live forever. The power of sin makes death scary for all because it leads to shame and eternal separation from God. But, Jesus pulled the stinger out of death and rendered it powerless to hurt those trust in the forgiveness He won at the cross. Because of Jesus, death now serves to bring Christians into the glorious presence of our great God. Christ’s rising from death also shows that He broke the iron grip of the grave. He promised that death will be like a sleep for us just like it was for Him. Death cannot permanently hurt us. The grave will not hold us. When our risen Savior returns in glory, with one command He will open the graves of His people and believers who have died will rise to live forever just as Jesus lives. He promised, “*Because I live, you also will live.*” (*John 14:19*) Truly, Jesus meets all our needs to give us eternal life.

**Second, He still intercedes for us.** The first high priest, Aaron, was a good example of someone who interceded for the people. As the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, a man named Korah led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. He claimed the right as a Levite to lead God’s people instead of them. In judgment, God opened a huge hole in the earth that swallowed Korah and his followers. The next day, the people were angry with Moses and Aaron about his death and tried to harm them. God became angry with them and He told Moses and Aaron to move away from the people because he was to destroy the people. But Moses told Aaron, “*Take your censer... along with burning coals from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them....*’ So Aaron ... ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron ... made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped.” (*Numbers 16:46-48*) Almost 15,000 people died, but the loss would have so worse without Aaron. As high priest, He pleaded for the people. Aaron did that until he died.

Jesus is our eternal High Priest. As our risen Savior, He is before the throne of His Father today pleading for us. And through His Word He is reaching out to sinners like us calling us to repent every time we lie or cheat or hold a grudge or do any sin. On Good Friday we heard Jesus say from the cross, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*” (*Luke 23:34*) And just before He died, He declared, “*It is finished.*” (*John 19:30*) That message is what He speaks to His Father on our behalf. And as our great High Priest, He wants to daily assure us of His forgiveness. On the first Easter day the angel told the women at the empty tomb, “*Go, tell his disciples and Peter.*” (*Mark 16:7*) Why did he mention Peter specifically? Peter earlier had cursed and swore that he didn’t know Jesus. He repented and Jesus wanted him to know that He had died for forgive him. He had risen so Peter would know the joy of forgiveness and the peace flowing from the resurrection.

For us, dangers in the world and troubles in life surround us. We will not always have happy lives. But, we can always have joy in knowing Jesus’ sacrifice speaks to the Father for our good in this life and forever! We have good reason to sing, “*He lives to bless me with his love; he lives to plead for me above. He lives, my hungry soul to feed; he lives to help in time of need.*” (*ELH 351 v. 3*) This joyful news not only helps our faith but helps us to share the good news of forgiveness and peace in our risen Savior!

Take to heart the message of Hebrews this Easter Day: Jesus lives as our high priest forever! His resurrection assures us that he is able to save completely those who come to God through Him. He has the love and power as our Savior to meet all our needs. Rejoice! Christ is risen! Amen.