

The Good Things to Come

Hebrews 8:11; Ephesians 1:3-14

Sunday, November 3, 2024 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction

Today's message is called "The Good Things to Come" and it is based on our passage in Hebrews. Writing to people who grew up seeing the awesome spectacle of the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies in the Temple with the blood of animals to consecrate and purify the Temple and atone for the sins of Israel. We can only imagine what those ancient Israelites felt when they watched, for the Temple fell long, long ago. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that that the Tabernacle, the Temple and the activities of those priests are copies of an original heavenly reality, and that we are the beneficiaries of that reality, for Christ is the High Priest of the good things to come. But there is a Scriptural variant here, for some sources indeed say that Christ is the High Priest of the good things to come, but others say that Christ is the High Priest of the good things that have come. Couldn't both be true. Our other passage in Ephesians 1, gives us a marvelous overview of our position of grace because of Christ. It is worth careful consideration and has applications both present and yet to come. We are chosen in Him before the world began and we are predestined to adoption in Christ. For today, I just want to consider three benefits of Christ being our high priest; that He intercedes for us before God the Father, and that means He offers us promises, including that of wisdom, and that we can ask Him to bless us.

Christ intercedes

In contrast to the event of the ancient High Priest and the Temple in Jerusalem, Hebrews points out Jesus entered the very presence of God the Father with His own blood and stays, seated at the right hand of the Father ever interceding for us. I believe that the prophet Daniel saw the very event centuries before and recorded it interspersed with another vision of the rise of the Antichrist, signifying that evil even at its worst cannot overcome the Lord. It's found in Daniel 7:9-14:

Daniel 7:9-14 (NKJV)

⁹ "I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment *was* white as snow, And the hair of His head *was* like pure wool. His throne *was* a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire;

¹⁰ A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened.

¹¹ "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame.

¹² As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

¹³ "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him.

¹⁴ Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed.

God dwells in unapproachable light

Unlike the High Priest, who entered the Holy of Holies and then left, Jesus remains at the right hand of God the Father interceding for us. This same God who dwells in unapproachable light, that no one can enter and survive, Jesus is there now on our behalf. As I reflected on that, I wondered about places that we are not allowed to reach or are impossible to reach. There was Area 51, a place in New Mexico that is the subject of strange tales and, I'm told, the government guards carefully. There is Point Nemo, an area in the South Pacific that is the most remote point on earth, thousands of miles from any land and far removed from any shipping land. And then there is Fort Knox in Kentucky, where the government keeps gold bars.

Fort Knox

We only have limited knowledge of the security of Fort Knox, because the employees are sworn to secrecy, but we have some idea. Fort Knox is a military base with 30,000 soldiers, and you would have to get through them to steal the gold. The area around the gold repository is laced with land mines and electric fences. Ground sweeping radar is used, the same kind used by predator drones. The perimeter of the repository has laser triggered machine guns. If you get beyond that, the Mint Police will be waiting for you. If you get past them, the vault door weighs 20 tons and no one person has the complete combination. The vault can be flooded so any criminal wanting to steal gold bars would be at risk of drowning. None of this compares to the Presence of God the Father, who is impossible to approach, yet Jesus is there right now, praying for us.

- Application: Jesus prays. We should pray.
for wisdom

If Jesus prays, we should pray as well, but the subject of what to pray or how to pray is way too broad for any single sermon. Let me share a few thoughts on the subject, knowing that there is much more to it than what I share. Since we are told to pray, I would first suggest again that the church pray for one another, by name, using the passage from Ephesians 1 as a template for that prayer. The passage is very rich in the promises of God. I would also lay claim to the promise in James that God grants wisdom if we ask for it (James 1:5) with the understanding of wisdom goes far beyond profound insights into the nature of life. Wisdom, in the Bible, is practical. You can pray for wisdom regarding work, business, school, family, all sorts of pressing matters that you face every day. Ask for that kind of wisdom.

to prosper and be generous

Don't be afraid to ask to be blessed. A man published a popular book several years ago called the prayer of Jabez. His story is brief, found in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. Briefly, he asked God to be blessed, indeed, to prosper, but he wanted prosperity in order to be blessing. God granted his request. So pray for prosperity but pray also for generosity. If a Christian is rich, then the Christian has the opportunity to be very generous. Imagine a fine young man from a difficult background who wants to go to college with everything he has but whose grades are good enough to get him accepted but not quite good enough for a scholarship. The prosperous Christian would write a check to cover all his expenses and would enjoy doing so. I remember Cliff Wilson, several years ago, walking into the pastor's study and saying, "say, Dan, why don't you find out how much it costs to go on a trip to Israel? Let me know what you find out. It was the trip of a lifetime, and I will always be grateful to Cliff for that. Prosperity and generosity go together well.

Finally, pray against sin. We are very good at fooling ourselves into thinking that we are more righteous than we really are. The Psalmist wrote that he had hidden the Word in his heart that he

might not sin against God (Psalm 119:11), and Jeremiah wrote that the heart is deceitful (17:9). Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal to us the depths of our hearts. We might not like what comes to mind, but it is better to know.

- **Conclusion:** Those are just a few examples of how to pray with the confidence that we have Jesus, the Great High Priest of the good things that have come and those that have already come, who is where no one else has gone, the very Presence of God the Father. We can pray for great things, because He intercedes for us in the most holy place there is, one that is symbolized by the great temple in Jerusalem, but which is greater than that temple, or of any temple on earth.