

“Melchizedek” // Hebrews 5:1–6; 7:1–27 // 4 –Christ is Better

Scripture Reading

Hebrews 5:5 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; [6] as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

Hebrews 7:1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, [2] and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. [3] He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

[4] See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! [5] And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. [6] But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. [7] It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. [8] In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. [9] One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, [10] for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

[11] Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood... what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek?

[14] For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. [15] This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, [16] who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.

[23] The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, [24] but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

[25] Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

[26] For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. [27] He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

Introduction

In chapters 5–7 the writer of Hebrews brings up a pretty obscure figure named Melchizedek. Many of you probably have never heard of him. Like he’s not one of your OT Sunday School flannel graph heroes—he didn’t kill any giants or make any walls fall down or open up a can of whooptrash on a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey or anything like that... but the writer says this guy teaches you some really important things about Jesus.

- Now, real quick—you might have noticed in the reading that we skipped over chapter 6. That’s because the writer brings up Melchizedek in chapter 5, but right after he brings him up, he seems to get hacked off because he says they should already understand the significance of Melchizedek, and he says that understanding him and how

he points to Jesus is a test of spiritual maturity, and the fact that they don't know anything about him proves that they are not spiritually mature.

- So he goes off on this rant in chapter 6 about the need for them to grow up so that they can understand this kind of stuff. So we'll come back to chapter 6 next week... but this week we're going to combine 5 and 7 and look at all that is being taught about Melchizedek.

Now, honestly, I thought about just skipping Melchizedek altogether, since some of you can barely even pronounce his name, but then when the writer says that understanding him is a sign of spiritual maturity, I didn't want any of y'all showing up in heaven and some guy coming up to you and saying, "Hey, I'm Melchizedek" and you saying, "Mel-what? Who? Mel-chizzle?" Because then that looks bad on me... because I didn't get you to one of the clear benchmarks of spiritual maturity.

Alright... Melchizedek was an OT priest. And I know that some of you hear this stuff about priesthood and you think, "This doesn't really apply to me.... We don't really have a priest system and a temple like they did, so what could this have to do with me today?"

- I would encourage you not to think that way. You have to think about what was being expressed by the priestly system.
- They felt like they needed something, or someone, to represent them before God. They knew there was a disconnect between them and the Almighty, and they needed a go-between.
- Remember, I explained to you a few weeks ago that when mankind sinned we were left with a sense of shame about our nakedness. Man was naked before he sinned, but his nakedness didn't bother him because he was clothed in the love and acceptance of God. Now stripped of that, they felt naked.
- Their first impulse, of course, was to cover themselves, to find a way to cover up their nakedness, and that has been the universal quest of mankind ever since... to find

something that takes away our shame. Something that we can do or accomplish that will give us goodness and righteousness in the eyes of God, earn His approval again and take away our shame.

Even if you don't really believe in God, you can look at your life and see that for most of your life you've been on this quest to prove yourself to others. It's like you've needed other people to validate you, to make you feel important and worthy...

- and so you are always trying to show that there is something about you that makes you worthy of their love and admiration;
- something that sets you apart from others (you're smart; you've got a great body; you're a great athlete; you make a lot of money; you are a good Christian or you are fair and open minded and progressive and recycle and don't leave a big carbon footprint and whatever).
- You may not believe in God, but you still feel the need to have external validation.

All you've done is replaced God's opinion with other people's opinions—they have become God to you. You still need a go-between—some kind of priestly element—to establish your worthiness in their eyes. Your personal accomplishments are like your priest that establishes your worthiness.

- **Arthur Miller** (wrote *Death of a Salesman*; one his later plays (1964) was called *After the Fall*.) He talks about how there was always this sense of judgment that he carried around; even after he stopped believing in God. But for some reason, he still felt like he needed to prove himself to others.¹ He said in later life that he realized he had simply replaced the need to be approved by God with the need to be approved by people.
- **Ernest Becker** (Jewish agnostic)... said that after he quit believing in God, he found his soul still searching for

¹ From Tim Keller sermon on Hebrews 7:18–27 at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2005.

acceptance and validation from *somebody*. He said in his book *The Denial of Death*, "(After having ceased to believe in God...) The self-glorification that we need in our innermost being, we now look for in the love partner. The love partner becomes the divine ideal within which to fulfill one's life. What is it that we want when we elevate the love partner to this position? We want to be rid of our faults. We want to be rid of our feeling of nothingness. We want to be justified. We want to know that our existence hasn't been in vain. We want redemption, nothing less..."²

The Bible tells you that the reason you seek that validation is because you have an inner sense of your separation from God and a need for something or someone to go between you and Him and re-establish your worthiness in His eyes.

- You crave the acceptance of God, even if you've never realized that is what you were craving.
- So while your mind might not admit there's a God, your heart knows without a doubt.

So, bottom line, this discussion about Mel-chizzle applies to you. Only 2 things in this message I want to do: I want to show you (1) who Melchizedek was and (2) what he teaches us about Jesus and what it means for you whether you are religious or not.

I. Who Melchizedek was

He is only mentioned two times in the Bible, other than here in Hebrews:

Genesis 4:17

- Abram had gone out to protect his cousin, Lot, because Lot had made some dumb decisions and was being hunted down by a couple of OG's (original ganstas) from Sodom. (I'm sorry. I've been hanging out all week at a high school

camp with Jason Gaston our student pastor and he's been catching me up on pop culture so I can sound more legit).

- **Genesis 4:17-20**, "After his return from the defeat of (a guy whose name I can't pronounce) Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him... Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine for Abram (or, for you more traditional Baptists, "near beer") (He was priest of God Most High.) (El-Elyon). And he blessed Abram... And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

So he was a king and also a priest of the Most High God. He seems to have come out of nowhere.

- We don't know where he comes from; who he descended from; how he came to know God; or who anointed him as God's priest.
- But after Abram had won this battle he knew he wanted to thank God for the victory so this was the priest of God he tithed to.

And after that 3-verse reference, Melchizedek disappears and is not brought up again for 1000 years, when David makes a prophecy in the Psalms (Psalm 110 to be exact) about the Messiah that he would be a "priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." That is the prophecy that quoted there in Hebrews 5.

That's it. That's all that's all that is in the Bible about Mel-fizzle-chizzle before Hebrews.

II. What Melchizedek teaches us about Jesus

1. The stories in the Old Testament point to Jesus

- The story about Melchizedek is such a small reference (tiny!), yet the Hebrews writer identifies it as placed in the Bible to teach us some things about Jesus.
- One of the things I love about reading the Old Testament is discovering how the whole thing is woven together to teach you the gospel, and, honestly, that's been one of the things that helps my faith the most... seeing how there really is

² *The Denial of Death*, 160-67.

one story being taught the whole time; one Person being pointed to.

- *Blood on doorposts*
- Numbers 24: *Moses lifted a serpent lifted up: if they didn't see it, they would die*
- Numbers 35: *One of my favorites: Moses set up these things in Israel called "The Cities of Refuge"*
 - If you killed someone unintentionally you could flee to the city of refuge. And as long you stayed in the city, the avenger of blood couldn't harm you. If you left, open season. But you could stay in that city until the high priest died. When he died, you were free.
 - Do you not see Jesus in that?
 - We find refuge in Him.
 - Kind of like when God sent the flood, people were saved by being inside the Ark. When God destroyed Jericho... He told Rahab that if she would stay in her house and hang a scarlet thread out of her house it would not be harmed. And the whole city fell around her and whoever was in her house was saved, with that blood-red scarlet cloth hanging out the window. If you were in the City of Refuge, you'd be free forever. It was like his death had paid your penalty.
 - When Jesus, our High Priest died, the curse was lifted off of us forever. We were free.
- We've learned in our study this year how **Jonah** was a picture of Jesus... cast out in the sea of God's wrath and then swallowed up by a big fish for 3 days and 3 nights, after which God brought him back from the depths to bring salvation to Nineveh. A picture of Jesus cast out into the sea of God's wrath for us and swallowed up by death for 3 days after which God brought Him back so He could bring salvation to us.
- And now, Melchizedek....
- It all points to Jesus...

(Now, real quick word of caution for you Bible teachers: you can go overboard with this... I've heard people do it... Samson

had long hair which was a sign of Jesus' long hair; Moses parted the Red Sea like Jesus parted His hair in the middle or other ridiculous stuff. You can overboard with this stuff but the more you read the Bible the more you develop an instinct to see the face of Jesus in these stories.)

2. Jesus was a King and a Priest (7:14)

- One of the things you see about Melchizedek was that he was *both* a king and priest. Nobody else in the Old Testament was that.
- King and priest were two offices you never combined, and wouldn't want to combine. Like policeman and pastor, or little league Dad and referee (examples—I love going to games at Duke and watching the **Cameron crazies**; imagine if you handed them the whistle...)
- The King, was a lawgiver; a judge. The priest was a friend, a counselor, who could sympathize with people in their weaknesses and help them where they'd messed up.
- **Whereas the King represented God to the people; the Priest represented the people to God.**
 - **The King was the person of truth; the Priest was the person of tears.**
- They never combined those offices in the Old Testament because one person could not do both. Melchizedek was the one exception. And the next was Jesus. **Vs. 14** says that Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi, where all the other OT priests were from. He was from Judah, the Kingly tribe.
- But how can Jesus rule with perfect justice but in a way that sympathizes with us in weakness? **The cross.**
- The cross was where the absolute justice of God met the fullness of His mercy.
 - There's a story in Genesis about **Judah... Judah was** one of the 12 sons of Jacob. Well, if you know the story, their daddy favored Joseph and so all the other brothers hated him and sold him into slavery in Egypt and one thing led to another and Joseph ended up being prime minister in Egypt. Well, there was a famine and the other sons of Jacob go to Egypt

to buy grain and they stand before Joseph but don't recognize him in his little head turban gear. So Joseph wants to see if they've changed so he plants a silver cup in Benjamin, the youngest brother's bag. He then sentences Benjamin to die. Judah sticks up for Benjamin and says, "No, let me die." In that a great picture?

- We were sentenced to die, and Jesus died in our place!
- The debt we owed to God our King was paid in full by God the Son so that now He could relate to us with mercy and acceptance without compromising His justice.
 - **He is our perfect priest.** [25]... He always lives to make intercession for them.
 - **He stands before God now holding up His finished work on our behalf. Case file, "Greear."** The thought of Jesus as my Advocate standing before God, begging for mercy on my behalf, used to not give me much comfort. I imagined Jesus going into the heavenly courtroom with a stack of folders and one marked "Greear," which Jesus pulled out and said, "OK, Father, Greear again. I'd really like for you to give Him one more chance. He's a good kid, really. Please? Pretty please? After all, you owe Me, God, I went to earth and everything for you..." Deep down I'd wonder when I would reach the end of God's patience—I'd sin for the 491st time and God would say, "No more leniency for Greear. Clearly he's not getting it. We're going to have to punish for that one."
- God speaks to us now with the justice and truth of a King but the compassion and grace of a priest. Honestly, we need both. Truth without grace is fundamentalism. Grace without truth is sentimentality.
- We don't need God telling us our sins are OK, they're not that bad, or they are not that big of a deal.

- They are a huge deal. They released the curse of death on the earth; send people to hell, and cost Him His life.
- But because we are sinners, we need a God who can deal with us in our messed up state without judgment. Jesus can do both because He died in our place.
- And that means when God speaks truth to us, He does so with tenderness.
 - **Here's a great example.** When Lazarus died, his sisters Martha and Mary both came up to Jesus, at separate times, but said *exactly* the same thing to Him. "If you had not been here, my brother would not have died."
 - To Martha, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." In other words, "I am in control of everything. You don't need to fear." He gave her truth.
 - But to Mary He said nothing, He just wept with her.
 - **As King He pulled Martha's perspective up into His own, letting her see what He saw; as priest He lowered His heart into Mary's, feeling what she felt.**
 - **E.g.** Doctor who was rough... it was only when he became a patient that he became tender...
 - Jesus suffered our loneliness, our pain, our abandonment, and so now hears us with sympathy and treats us with tenderness.
 - *Every time you pray you pray to a God who weeps with you in your pain.*

3. Jesus can save anyone, anywhere (7:3, 14-16; 23-27)

- The problem with the other priests, the writer says, is that they were all Jewish, which meant that they could only represent other Jews.
 - Because Melchizedek has no recorded genealogy, we don't know what family line he belongs to, it's like he can represent anybody. Same with Jesus.

[3] (Melchizedek) is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

- The other problem (vs. 23) was that they had their own sins to deal with, and they died (could only serve as HP between the ages of 25 and 50).
 - Jesus didn't have that either of those problems, either
- So, the writer says, [25] Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him.
- In other words, Jesus can save anybody, anywhere. Jesus didn't die for a certain type of person. The cross is sufficient for all sinners of all types.
 - People sometimes look at the cross and wonder why it is so bloody... simple: Because our sin was so bad. Blood grosses us out; our sin grosses God out. But because the gross was so horrific and gruesome and bloody, you never have to wonder if your sin can be forgiven.
 - The price He paid was so large that He can save to the uttermost. Say you found out that you owed someone \$600,000 and the court said you had to pay back every penny. That would be overwhelming. Unless you had 10 million dollars in the bank. What you owe is larger; what you have to pay is even larger. The wickedness of our sin against God was great; the price He paid at the cross was even greater.
- **So now, He can save "to the uttermost."**
- Which means what keeps you from God now is not your sin; it is pride and unbelief. His blood is sufficient to pay the price for any sin and remove it completely; His power of resurrection is able to heal and restore the most damaged person.
 - It is pride that keeps us from God:

- Some people (irreligious people) think they don't need God so they have no interest in Him.
- A lot of religious people may know that God is important, but don't think that their sins are so bad that they can't save themselves.
 - Neither come to the cross of Jesus.
- Here's the point. God can save you. You just have to believe! **You have to believe that you were so bad Jesus had to save you and He was so gracious that He was glad to save you.**
- He is able to *save to the uttermost* those who come to God through Him.
 - He can restore you *perfectly* to God.
 - Litmus test of whether or not you get this: The mark of works-based religion (or the opposite of the gospel) is fear.
 - Have I done enough to get to God? Is this happening because God is mad at me, because I haven't gone to church enough?
 - The good news of the gospel is that it's not about you doing enough to get to God, but God having done enough to save you.
 - The mark of religion is fear of not having done enough; the mark of the gospel is assurance, based now on what you've done but on His work sufficient to save you.
- **He restores you perfectly to God. And before I go on to our final point:** *To go back to what I said at the beginning... to those who may not even believe in God... He's the one you've been looking for all your life. His validation is the one you have been seeking in the praise of others. The arms you were seeking in your string of boyfriends and lovers were His arms*

4. Jesus deserves our first and our best (7:4-7)

- After Abraham had won the battle, he looked for someone on God's' behalf to whom to tithe.

- He wasn't strutting back in saying, "Yeah, yeah, look what I did." He was looking for someone to thank.
- And so he tithed to Melchizedek. He was thanking this future picture of Jesus Christ, the King and High Priest, for the victory.
- In the same way, we, who have been saved by the real Jesus, ought to thank Him with our first and our best.
- Sometimes people say that the tithe is only something for the law. No. This is pre-law. The first and the best of what God gives to us should ALWAYS belong to God. It's called the firstfruits. And the tithe is a good place to start.
- He deserves the first and best of your time, your money, your talents
 - "I can't afford it!" I showed you that 90% with God is greater than 100% with you³
 - Bottom line is that tithing shows if you are thankful.
 - I used to think I'd come into heaven to a parade. "Thank you..." Now I think I'm going to be looking for Jesus.
 - The way I show it now is by giving to Him my first and my best of what He's given me.
- Have you done that with your money?
- With your talents? How might your career, or your skills, be used for God's Kingdom? Have you given back to Him to show Him thanks?
- With your time and opportunities? Are you serving the Kingdom? If not, can you say you have any real concept of the victory coming from God?
 - Most of us tend to slip into this mindset where we think that we have gotten where we are. We worked hard. We got the job. We put in the long hours.
 - Yes, but there is so much that you used to do that was a gift. Your health. Where you were born. Your skills and talents. It all comes from God. And the way you show that you get that is by giving your first and the best, I'd say start with 1/10, back to God!

³ James MacDonald from sermon on Hebrews 7:1-10