

Sermon Summary #19

Who the heck is Melchizedek? Hebrews 7:1-10, 23-25

So, who the heck is Melchizedek? And assuming we can find an answer to that question here in Hebrews 7, what difference does it make to you and me? The best way for us to proceed in search of an answer is by pausing briefly and making certain that we know the flow of the book of Hebrews.

You will recall that the overarching theme of Hebrews is that Jesus is better! The letter was written primarily to Jewish men and women who had professed faith in Jesus Christ as Messiah. The purpose of the author was to persuade them not to revert back to the rituals of the Old Covenant under Moses. They were undoubtedly facing persecution and pressure because of their professed faith in Jesus. The temptation to seek safety and shelter beneath the legal umbrella, so to speak, of Judaism was very powerful. And so our author is committed to convincing them that it would be spiritually insane to return to their former ways. As good and helpful as were the practices and principles of the Mosaic Law, they were temporary; they were designed to point forward to something better, namely Jesus and the New Covenant that he has established through his shed blood.

So we have seen our author tell us that the revelation God made of himself in and through Jesus is better and more complete than the revelation that came through OT *prophets* (1:1-3). Jesus is also better than the *angels*, in spite of the fact that the Mosaic Law was mediated by these heavenly, spiritual beings (1:4-2:18). Jesus is better than *Moses*, as he made clear in 3:1-6. Jesus is better than *Joshua*, as we saw in 4:1ff. Then, in Hebrews 5, our author turned his attention to a theme that he now resumes here in chapter 7, namely, that Jesus is better than *Aaron*, the high priest of the old covenant.

But the Jewish people in the first century to whom this letter was written would immediately have raised an objection. “How can Jesus be a high priest,” they undoubtedly asked, “since he is a member of the tribe of Judah? According to the Law of Moses, to be a priest in Israel you had to be a member of the tribe of Levi. And to be a *high* priest you had to be a member of the family of Aaron. Jesus was neither. So how can he be a priest *at all*, much less a ‘better’ one than those who have gone before him?”

Our author responded to this objection by telling us that God established and appointed Jesus as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (see 5:6, 10; 6:20). In other words, there is another, superior high priesthood, says God, and it is entirely unrelated to Aaron and his family. Jesus is a high priest forever “after the order of Melchizedek” (6:20b). So, this brings us full circle back to our question: ***Who the heck is Melchizedek?***

Unlike the people of the first century, you and I today have a hard time relating to the significance of this point. ***We must remember how central and controlling and all-consuming the Aaronic priesthood was to the lives of first-century Jewish men and women. Everything they knew about God and their relationship to him and how they could be forgiven of their sins was based on the priestly system of the old covenant.*** So here comes this radically life-altering message of Christianity which declares that the Aaronic priesthood has been set aside; it has been superceded; it was but a foreshadowing of something better and greater; it was only a temporary system put in place until the Messiah would come and now it has been replaced by a superior priesthood, namely, that of Jesus of Nazareth. This was a world-shaking, breathtaking challenge to Jewish men and women who had come to know Christ. And this is the very point that our author is seeking to make here in Hebrews 7.

Having said that, it’s important to know that the superiority of Christ’s priesthood to that of Aaron isn’t the primary point. The primary point of Hebrews 7, and perhaps of the entire book itself, is v. 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.”

If, while I was providing that review of the book of Hebrews, you were asking yourself: what's all that got to do with me and my life and my fears and struggles and my battle with sin and shame, the answer is in v. 25! The reason why it's important to know that Jesus is superior to and better than everything that preceded him in the OT, especially the office of high priest, is so that you will be encouraged to draw near to him and find that he is able and willing to do for you what no one else ever could or can. So let's begin not with Hebrews 7:1 and Melchizedek but with v. 25 and Jesus!

Several things must be noted.

First, the word “*consequently*” with which the verse opens is crucial. We could also translate it, “therefore” or “on account of this.” The point is that it is *because* the high priesthood of Jesus according to the order of Melchizedek is infinitely superior to that of Aaron and the OT, you and I can have unshakable confidence that when we draw near to God through faith in Jesus we will find all we need, both now and for eternity. So, if, in a moment when we dig deeply into this person named Melchizedek, you find yourself wondering what possible practical relevance it has for your life, look at that word “consequently.” Simply put, the practical, life-giving, hope-stirring, heart-warming consequences of Christ's superior priesthood are massive and immeasurable.

Second, *only* Christ can save. My emphasis is on the word *only*. Don't be swayed by the politically correct mood of the culture which says that it is nothing more than arrogance and elitism when Christians insist that the only hope for salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ. If you ever hope to “draw near to God” it can only be “through him,” that is, through Jesus and what he has done in his life, death, and resurrection for lost and hell-deserving sinners.

It isn't through the saints of the RC church that we draw near to God. They don't pray for us or make intercession for us: *only Jesus does*. It isn't through his mother Mary that we draw near to God. Nothing in Scripture indicates that she prays or intercedes for us: *only Jesus does*. And you can throw into the mix the Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, and every other religious leader or philosopher.

Third, *only* Christ can *save*. Save from what? Only Christ can save from the righteous wrath of an infinitely holy God. It does no good whatsoever if during this life you are “saved” from *financial bankruptcy* only to face an eternity of separation from God. It does no good whatsoever if during this life you are “saved” from *an Islamic terror attack* or from *a painful and crippling disease* only to face an eternity of condemnation and judgment. It does no good whatsoever if during this life you are “saved” from *psychological distress or emotional turmoil* only to face an eternity of suffering for the guilt of your sins. My point is that Christ is able to save us from the wrath and judgment of God, and that to the uttermost!

And never think for a moment that what this means is that God the Son, Jesus Christ, is for you and that God the Father is against you. It was the unified purpose of our great Triune God from eternity past that out of love for lost sinners God the Father would send God the Son to voluntarily and freely and with great joy endure the wrath of God that we each deserved. Thus as I will often say, *the love of God sent the Son of God to die under the wrath of God that we might draw near to God.*

Fourth, this very Jesus, our great high priest, also *lives to make constant and unbroken intercession* for you and me. He is ever present and ready to supply us with the *help* we need when facing temptation or the *encouragement* we need when confronted with disappointment or the *strength* we need when faced with weakness or the *wisdom* we need to make sense of life when it seems so senseless.

I'm not going to wait until the end of this message to make my appeal: Draw near to God through Jesus Christ now! What is it that you need most? Is it the forgiveness of your sins and freedom from the horror of the guilt and shame that you carry around in your heart? Then draw near to him, now! Is it renewed hope that God has a purpose for your life and that he will truly work all things together for your good? Then draw near to him, now! Is it the peace and joy that come from his promise that he will never leave you or forsake you? Then draw near to him, now!

To “draw near” doesn't mean you have to walk an aisle in a church building. To “draw near” doesn't require any physical movement whatsoever. It only requires desperation and trust and the cry of your heart, “O, dear God in heaven: help me! deliver me! heal me! comfort me! hold me! strengthen me! fill me with your abiding love and

presence so that I can make it through today!” And if you come to God through faith in Jesus Christ in that way, he will hear you.

That is the primary point of this seventh chapter of Hebrews. So now let’s back up a bit and see how our author got us to it.

Who the heck is Melchizedek? (vv. 1-3)

So who is this guy named Melchizedek and why does he warrant such extensive discussion? We find our answer in Hebrews 7:1-3. There are numerous proposals as to his identity. But let’s begin with **Genesis 14** where Melchizedek first appears.

After his [i.e., Abraham’s] return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he [Melchizedek] blessed him [Abraham] and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him [Melchizedek] a tenth of everything (Genesis 14:17-20).

Some believe Melchizedek is an angel, possibly the archangel Michael. Others have suggested Shem, the son of Noah. But Shem’s genealogy is explicitly set forth in Genesis 11 whereas Hebrews 7:3 says Melchizedek has no genealogy. Many believe that Melchizedek was God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, before his incarnation in the person of Jesus. Theologians call this phenomenon a “theophany” or a manifestation of God in human form; not an incarnation, but a momentary, passing appearance in human form. But v. 3 says he “*resembles*” or is “like” the Son of God, not that he “is” the Son of God.

But everything points to the idea that Melchizedek was a genuine human being, a literal, historical man who served as the King of a literal, historical city called Salem. But here is the key. Given the way Melchizedek is portrayed in the OT, he serves as a type of the Son of God. A “type” was simply a person or event that prefigured or foreshadowed the coming of Christ. Adam in the Garden of Eden was a type of Christ. David, King of Israel, was a type of Christ. Jonah and his experience in the belly of the fish for three days was a type of Christ and his three days in the grave. And there are numerous others. So too was Melchizedek.

Let’s look at how he is described.

(1) We begin with his *rule*: he is king of Salem, priest of the Most High God. Salem is clearly an early reference to what we know as Jerusalem.

(2) We then note his *name*: the Hebrew word “*melek*” means king and the word “*tsedek*” means righteousness. Thus Melchizedek = king of righteousness, as v. 2 indicates. Even in his name, then, he is a type of Jesus Christ, for Jesus is the true King of Righteousness. And insofar as “Salem” means peace, Melchizedek was the king of peace in anticipation of Jesus as the glorious Prince of Peace.

(3) Next we see how Melchizedek served as a type of the coming Christ. It is seen in what the OT does *not* say about him. I repeat that. It is found in what the OT story does **NOT** say about him. Notice the description in v. 3 –

- he is without father or mother
- he lacks a genealogy
- he is portrayed as one who was neither born nor died

He is not saying that Melchizedek was some sort of biological anomaly as though he was hatched or was brought to earth by the proverbial stork. Of course he had a father and mother. Of course his genealogy could be traced through history. Of course he was born and eventually died. ***But the Scriptures intentionally omit any reference to his parents and it is that silence that forms the basis for his being a type of Christ.*** That he has no genealogy was

stunning, given the fact that genealogies are so prominent all through the OT. In fact, Melchizedek is the only individual among the true worshipers of God whose ancestors and descendants are not mentioned.

And again, “having neither beginning of days nor end of life” doesn’t mean he wasn’t born at a particular time and died at a particular time. It simply means that *we have no record* of his birth or death in Scripture.

It is, of course, of God the Son that he was a type. When the incarnation occurred, Jesus clearly had a mother, Mary, and his birth and death are explicitly recorded for us. So too is his genealogy in both Matthew and Luke. *Thus it the eternal being of the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, of whom Melchizedek was a type.*

I should also point out *the silence of Genesis concerning the termination of Melchizedek’s priesthood and its silence concerning anyone who might have succeeded him in that office.* This finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ who was appointed by God to be a priest “forever” (6:20; 7:17, 21, 24). No one succeeds him in this office because he has his priesthood “*by the power of an indestructible life*” (7:16).

So let me sum up. Our author is saying that this man Melchizedek resembled the Son of God based on what Scripture does *not* say concerning him. Insofar as the biblical record is concerned, Melchizedek was “like” the eternal Son of God and that he typified or foreshadowed the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ.

But why are these particular omissions in the biblical record of such great importance? What significance is there in the fact that Melchizedek is described as one without a father, mother, or genealogy? The answer is this: *these were all absolutely essential for determining who could serve as a priest after the order of Aaron!* A man’s pedigree was of immeasurable significance for the OT, Aaronic priesthood. A man being considered for the priesthood had to prove conclusively that his mother was an Israelite and his father not only an Israelite but also of the tribe of Levi. Even more than that, he had to provide evidence that he was of the family of Aaron (see Num. 16:39-40; Ezra 2:61-62).

Furthermore, no Aaronic priest retained his priesthood forever (see Num. 8:23-25). There were term limits for serving as a priest! And eventually all of them died. But Jesus lives forever!

Thus in this way our author is telling us that Jesus Christ serves as our Great High Priest on completely different terms from those of the Old Covenant. But not just “different” terms: superior and better terms!

Christ is Superior to Aaron because Melchizedek is Superior to Abraham (vv. 4-10)

Our author then turns in vv. 4-10 to demonstrate yet again the superior nature of the priesthood of Jesus Christ to any and all priests in the line of Aaron. And he does it by *demonstrating the superiority of Melchizedek to Abraham.* We see this in three ways.

First, Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, not the other way around (vv. 4-5). The fact that Melchizedek is the recipient of tithes from Abraham proves that he is superior and worthy of greater honor. And thus the fact that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek proves that his priesthood is superior to that of Aaron.

Second, it was Melchizedek who blessed Abraham, not the other way around (vv. 6-7). Hebrews 7:7 makes it clear that “the inferior is blessed by the superior.” Thus in this case, Melchizedek is the superior because he blessed Abraham, the inferior.

Third, nowhere is it said in the OT that Melchizedek lost his priestly office by dying (vv. 8-10). Again, of course he would have died. But remember that the case is being built on what the OT narrative doesn’t record about Melchizedek, and nowhere is his death written down. Our author’s point is that OT Levitical priests, like Aaron, were “*mortal men*” (v. 8). But this Melchizedek to whom tithes were paid is never described in the biblical text as having died. It is only said “that he lives” (v. 8b).

The point of all this is that our author is laboring to establish the greater and superior high priestly office of Jesus Christ above that of Aaron and all the Levitical priests of the old covenant. *And because of the greater, better, far superior priesthood of Jesus, we know and have confidence and rejoice in the fact that “he is able to save to the*

uttermost those who draw near to God through him” (v. 25a). Unlike all other OT priests, Jesus never ceases to serve in this capacity; although he died he rose again to eternal life and therefore “always lives to make intercession” for us (v. 25b).

Conclusion

Do you remember the incident where Peter denied Jesus three times? Before it occurred, Jesus said to Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32).

What we are being told in Hebrews 7:25 is that *Jesus continues to fulfill this same role for you and me*. He always lives to pray for us and to intercede on our behalf and to supply us with the strength to endure the temptation of the enemy and to repent when we fail. The reason I have hope and assurance that my sin will never cut me off from Christ is because Christ himself is seated at the right hand of the Father interceding on my behalf, pouring out on me and into me whatever strength of will I need to continue to believe in him for everlasting life.

Paul said much the same thing in **Romans 8:31-39**.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39).

How can Paul be so sure? He is rock solid in his assurance and confidence because Jesus Christ, who died and rose again from the dead, “is at the right hand of God . . . interceding for us!”

What more can I say to you? So, draw near to God through Jesus Christ. Now! Find in him and in the spiritual blessings and resources he abundantly supplies everything you will ever need.

- To the weary and worn out, draw near to God through Jesus Christ that you may find strength to endure
- To the shame-filled and downtrodden, draw near to God through Jesus Christ that he may cleanse you of all guilt and turn your shame into shouts of joy
- To the broken-hearted, whose dreams and desires never seem to come to pass, draw near to God through Jesus that he may fill your heart with his presence and satisfy your heart's deepest desires
- To those who have lost hope, draw near to God through Jesus Christ that he may restore hope in his promises and his purposes for your life
- To those who are broken and weak in body, draw near to God through Jesus Christ that he may touch your physical frame with his healing power
- To those who are filled with anxiety and worry about things you can't control, draw near to God through Jesus Christ that he may impart his peace that passes all understanding
- To those who have been deeply wounded or abused, whether by a parent, a spouse, or someone you thought was your friend, draw near to God through Jesus Christ to find a friend who can be trusted and who can heal those wounds and love you in the way your heart was meant to be loved
- To any man, woman, young or old, who has believed the lie that nothing will ever change and that life simply isn't worth living, draw near to God through Jesus Christ who makes all things new
- To anyone else whose pain or problem I haven't mentioned, draw near to God through Jesus Christ and find the God-man who knows your pain and understands your problem and stands ready and able to help.