



Sermon-Based Study Guide
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Sermon Title: The Great Priest-King

Sermon Text: Hebrews 7.1-10

Related Texts: Genesis 14.17-20; Philippians 2.5-11

I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

To what do you turn to find information about historical persons or events? By the way, would you be interested in purchasing a set of World Book Encyclopedias from 1981?

II. Introduction

The writer of Hebrews is ready to take the congregation into new depths of understanding about the nature, role and trustworthiness of Jesus Christ. As we look at chapter 7, we find that the preacher turns to the Book of Genesis as the resource for defining Jesus the Messiah and kingly priest. And in doing so encourages the readers to trust in Jesus, the unique high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

III. Study the Text – Hebrews 7.1-10

- 1) Let's begin by looking back to 6.20 where the writer refers to Jesus as a great high priest in the order of Melchizedek (also found in 5.6 and 5.10). Having identified Jesus this way the preacher now turns to his reference book – Genesis – to explain to the readers the significance of Melchizedek. How is Melchizedek described in verses 1 and 2? It may be helpful to look at the account in Genesis 14.17-20.

Note: As the writer of Hebrews points out, the name Melchizedek comes from two Hebrew words: Melech which means "king", and Zedek which translates "righteousness" or "justice". He is also identified as the king of Salem ("peace") the original name for the city of Jerusalem. What must be noted is that Melchizedek has knowledge of and a relationship with the God that Abraham knew and followed.

- 2) Verse 3 is difficult and yet offers some amazing possibilities. What do you make of Melchizedek being described this way? In what way is this description a "pre-figuration" or "pre-representation" of Jesus Christ?

Note: The best way for us to translate verse 3 is to see that the writer is emphasizing that Melchizedek was a "priest-King" not by virtue of his ancestry or lineage (like the Levites who became the family of priests who served in the temple in Jerusalem or like Solomon's descendants who served as kings of Israel). The source of his kingly and priestly roles was – like Abraham's call to be the father of many – the direct action of God.

- 3) What does the fact God was present to Melchizedek just as he was to Abraham suggest about God's activity of self-revelation going on in the world, even today?

- 4) This is a tough one, but can you follow the writer's line of thought in verses 4 through 6 that describe the greatness of Melchizedek (greater than Abraham)?

Note: Yes it is initially confusing; however, the argument goes this way: Abraham honored Melchizedek by giving him a tithe (one-tenth) of the spoils. The writer then jumps to a later history in which the Levites (descendants of Abraham) collect tithes from the people of Israel. Melchizedek is not a descendant of Abraham yet he received the tithe from Abraham. And, though Levi was not yet conceived (was still in the body of his ancestor Abraham) he figuratively also paid the tithe to Melchizedek. My head is spinning. Bottom line: Melchizedek – the lesser – is blessed by Abraham – the greater (and by association the Levites). Ergo, Melchizedek is the greater. He is the greater priest because he received the honor of the Levites (priests), and he is superior to Abraham who gave him the tithe. The Greek word is "kraittonos" which means "greater", "better", or "superior". We have seen this term roughly 20 times already in Hebrews.

- 5) The preacher says Jesus is the high priest in the order of Melchizedek. If this is applied to Jesus, than what does it suggest about his superiority to 1) the Levites and the Temple ritual and the Levitical Law; and 2) his superiority to Abraham? How does Jesus make the temple and its rituals unnecessary?
- 6) The Hebrews are being pressured to turn from Jesus and return to Judaism. How does this passage encourage them?

IV. Theological Reflection

This passage raises the question of the relation between the Law and God's work of grace that is centered in Jesus Christ. Jesus said he came to "fulfill the Law not abolish it (Matthew 5.17). One way he fulfills the Law (and is superior to it) is by being the means of atonement between God and human beings. The Law prescribed animal sacrifices; Jesus became the once and for all sacrifice for human sin. The Law could only prescribe outward and ritualistic actions; Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and empower us to live lives that are pleasing to God. Jesus, the Messiah, is the unique and superior priest-king typified by Melchizedek.

V. Apply It – Reflect and Respond

- 1) Reflect on Philippians 2.5-11. How do you respond to this picture of all people bowing before Jesus – the great, superior, unique kingly-priest?
- 2) Are you able to put the full weight of hope on Jesus? How can you do so today?
- 3) Please pray for yourself and for the Good Shepherd congregation to be anchored securely to the hope that comes from trusting in Jesus, our great high priest.