



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Prepared by Rev. James R. Wilson, D. Min.
Good Shepherd Church w August 28, 2011

Sermon Title: A New Order of Priesthood

Sermon Text: Hebrews 7.11-19
Related Texts: Galatians 3.1-14; 23-25;
Jeremiah 31.31-34

I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

Have you ever experienced a 100% perfect vacation? Do you know any event that was 100% perfect?

II. Introduction

As the Preacher/Writer of Hebrews encourages the readers to trust in Jesus, the unique high priest in the order of Melchizedek, the emphasis shifts to the subject of perfection. What is meant when the Bible speaks of "perfection"? How is a person made "perfect"? Jesus made the incredible statement that "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5.20). Then how can anyone ever be perfectly righteous? Let's find out what the writer has to say.

III. Study the Text – Hebrews 7.11-19

- 1) Verse 11 introduces the first part of the writer's argument: if perfection comes through the Levitical priesthood, that is, through following the ritual sacrifices offered in the Temple laid out in the Law of Moses, then why was that Levitical priesthood replaced by a new priest "in the order of Melchizedek?"

Note: The Levites were a family descended from Abraham and his descendant Aaron. The men of this family line were set apart to serve as priests who managed the worship and system of sacrifices for forgiveness and atonement that took place first in the Tabernacle (while in the wilderness – pre 1250 B.C.) and later in the Temple in Jerusalem even to the time Hebrews was written. The author of Hebrews has already argued that Jesus, the great high priest in the order of Melchizedek (not a Levite), has made the Levites and the Temple redundant and unnecessary. Now the argument is that if the Levitical Law and priesthood were sufficient, why did this new priest enter the picture and nullify them?

- 2) Verse 12 continues the argument. If the Levitical priesthood has been changed (or nullified) then the Law has also been changed or nullified. Take a look at Jeremiah 31.31-34. How does this prophetic word support the argument here in Hebrews 7? What will be different in this "new covenant?"

- 3) Verses 13 - 17 take the argument even further. The new high priest will come from a different family or tribe. Jesus came from Judah, not from Levi. According to verses 15 and 16, how is Jesus like Melchizedek? What is the basis for Jesus' call to be the great high priest? What do you think the phrase "the power of an indestructible life" (verse 16) refers to?

Note: Did I mention that the writer of Hebrews wants to take the reader into a deeper understanding of Jesus? This is getting deep! Yet the point is that the author is expounding the promise of Jeremiah 31 – God will do a new thing and establish a new covenant that is not based on keeping the rituals and demands of the Law, but is centered on Jesus, the new, great (greater) high priest. Verses 11 - 16 lead up to the affirmation of Psalm 110.4 (found in verse 17) that Jesus, the Messiah, is both the king over all things and the priest who is superior to Abraham, to the Levites (and Law), and to Melchizedek.

- 4) Verses 18 and 19 summarize and state the significance of the argument found in 11 - 16. The former regulation – the Law – was weak and useless. Why? Why is the Law incapable of making a person "perfect?" Read through Galatians 3.1-14 and 23-25 to get some clearer insight into this.
- 5) Verse 19: "and a **better hope** is introduced by which we draw near to God." We have seen the author use this Greek term "kreittonos" which means "greater", "better", or "superior" about 20 times already. Hope is another major theme in the book. How is Jesus a "better hope" than the Law?

IV. Theological Reflection

Jesus stated that "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5.20). He also claimed to fulfill the Law but not abolish that Law (Matthew 5.17). The author of Hebrews seems to be touching on both of these statements by referring to "perfection" in 7.11 and "perfect" in 7.19. Perfection means a righteousness that surpasses religious ritual. Perfection suggests moral purity but more significantly has to do with being made complete. God desires for us to be complete, mature, Christ-like. God's plans for the world are to make all things complete under the Lordship of Jesus. The Law is not able to do this because it cannot transform a human heart. Jesus, the great high priest can and does. He also is the provision by which all things are reconciled (made complete) to God. He is the one who fulfills the Law by doing what it could not do.

V. Apply It – Reflect and Respond

- 1) It has been said that being in church does not make a person a Christian any more than being in a garage makes a person a car. Good point. Are you depending on

religiosity, following the rules, trying to be a good person to earn God's favor? Or, are you relying on Jesus, the great high priest in order to draw near to God?

- 2) Galatians 3.1-14 contrasts living by the Law and living by faith in Christ. As you reflect on these verses, what role do you see the Holy Spirit having? How does the Spirit enable you to live by faith, to be made more Christ-like, and to become "perfect" or "complete"?
- 3) Please pray for yourself and for the Good Shepherd congregation to be anchored securely by faith in Jesus and to be a congregation that is being made perfect in him.