

## **The Priesthood of Melchizedek**

Hebrews 7:1-19

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, September 25, 2022

I want to invite you to take your Bibles with you and open them up to the book of Hebrews. And as you're doing that, I want to encourage you to keep an eye on the bulletin right now, because it's September. And it's the time of the year, when we're kicking off a lot of fall ministries here at the church. As Kevin already tells you, we've started up our women's Bible study, care groups, men's Bible study, youth group, it's just kind of all coming together for the fall, which means that we have a lot going on right now. And so there are plenty of opportunities for you to serve. So please keep that in mind. The Bible tells us God doesn't want you to just attend the church, he wants you to be committed to it. And He doesn't want you to just show up, He wants you to be plugged in. And this is how you can do that. The church calendar gives you lots of ways to plug into the ministry here at Grace. And so I would invite you to do that.

And with that said, we are coming to a time in the service when we are enjoying one of our favourite ministries, and that's the preaching of the word from Hebrews chapter seven. That's the text we're in today. So if you want to turn over to Hebrews seven, the Word of God says this,

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priests to the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of Righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.

Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. And those indeed of the sons of Levi who received the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the law) what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is

changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. And this is clear still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it as a test of Him, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

We will stop the reading there. You know, I don't have to tell you, as you read that, that that is a difficult chapter to process. There is a lot in there. I will explain it from a bird's eye view, and then we'll get into the details. But we have been in the book of Hebrews for some time now. And in our studies, we have discovered that the theme is the supremacy of Christ, or how Jesus is greater than everything the Old Testament had to offer. In this book, it tells you that Christ is greater than the prophets and he's greater than the angels. It tells you Jesus is greater than Abraham, He's greater than Moses. He's greater than the temple, greater than the tabernacle sacrifices, everything the Old Covenant system showed us.

And in fact, the outline of the book would go like this: in chapter one, it tells you Jesus is God. In Chapter Two, it tells you He is a man. And then from chapter three onwards, it tells you that this is what the God-man did, He became a high priest for you, which is what you see right here.

The author started this discussion in chapter four, verse 14, of Christ's high priesthood. And then he took a digression in the middle of chapter five to deal with a shepherding issue because they were dull and apathetic. And now he is going to dive right back into it. You could look at Hebrews Five, Verse 11, all the way down to the end of chapter six as one long parenthesis in the book. It is sort of a digression of thought, because he starts talking about the priesthood, and he gets distracted. And now he comes back to it. And you could sum up what we just read in verse 11. If you look in Hebrews seven, verse 11, this is a good summary verse, it says that if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood, what further need was there for another priest? For when the priesthood is changed, so is the Law. Now that sounds a little foreign to us, because we don't have a priesthood today, that office has been closed now for the church. So it is always good to go back to that and refresh your memory. In fact, I've told you before, anytime we come to a passage like this, I'm reminded that it would be good to have a Hebrew tutor sitting next to us, so we could ask him questions. We could call him our pocket Rabbi. And every time you don't know something in the book of Hebrews, you pull out the rabbi and you say, "Well, what does that mean?" Because we're not the original audience here, the Jews were, and so we need to ask, what did they think when they heard the priesthood is changed along with the law? That's the question. And to explain that, the word "law" in Hebrew is the word *torah*, which refers to the law or the commandments that God gave Israel to follow. In the first part of the Bible, it spelled out in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In fact, if you looked at the cover of a Hebrew Bible,

you would see three words written on the cover, you would see *Torah*, or law, *Nevi'im*, or prophets, and *Ketuvim*, or the writings, which is the division of the Hebrew Bible. But it starts with the law. It was the most important thing under the Old Covenant system. Because the idea there is that you can't find your way to God on your own, you are way too sinful for that. So you need something to show it to you. And that's what the law was created to do. It was written to tell you what God is like, and what He demands of you as His disciple.

The law still serves the purpose in our world, by the way. When you come into the nation of Canada, from the United States, what's the first thing you see at the border, you see the law; you see the guards. Because it's their job to show you that you are entering a different country now with a new set of rules and a new set of laws and a new set of expectations. It's the same way with the Torah. It was given to show the Jews that they are facing a brand new God with a different set of rules from what they anticipated before. Deuteronomy six, verse five says the law was given so Israel would love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Why? Because He is the only one who's worthy of it. He is the only one who deserves that affection. And the law spells out what that looks like. This is what it looks like to love God. Deuteronomy four verse one says, "Will Israel listen to the law which I am teaching you, so that you may live?" Why? Because God will kill you, if you don't do this? He will send you to hell. There are consequences for not obeying the Law. In fact, to show you how serious God was about this, the rabbis have counted it up and determined that there were 613 laws in the Old Testament. We often think of the law as consisting of 10 commandments, and that was the summary of the law. But there were far more than that. In reality, there are more than 600. And they can be divided up into 33 categories. And we don't have time to go into all of this, but I did print this off on a handout in your bulletin. If you want to take the handout and follow along with me, these are the categories of the law. We're doing all this as an introduction so you can get your mind around what our text is saying.

There are 33 categories. Let me read them to you. There are the laws about God, the laws about the Torah, the laws about signs and symbols, the laws about prayer, the laws about caring for your neighbour, laws about the poor, laws about the Gentiles, laws about marriage and divorce and family, laws about sexual relations, laws about the seasons, laws about diet or the food laws, laws about business, laws about servants, laws about vows, laws about the Sabbath and Jubilee years, laws about justice, ones about personal injury, property rights, criminals, punishment and restitution. There are laws about prophecy, farming, clothing and the firstborn. You see rules in here about priests, tithing and taxes, Temple sacrifices, rituals, purity, leprosy, and war. Now, I don't know about you, but that's overwhelming to me. It just seems like it's just a bunch of rules, rules, rules, rules. But the reason God gave all this to Israel was to show them that they cannot come into His presence any way they wanted; they can't approach God any way liked, they had to come to God like this. This is how you approach Yahweh now.

For example, if you just take these laws on sexual immorality in here, that one's interesting because it would take a lot of faith to keep it. The ancient world was very wicked in that department and they lived

in a very perverted culture. And yet listen to some of the laws Israel was told to follow as it relates to that subject. Leviticus 18 says, “No one has to approach any close relative to have sexual relations, I am the Lord. You shall not have carnal relations with your mother, you shall not have carnal relations with your father's wife, you shall not have carnal relations with your sister, you shall not have carnal relations with your sons and daughter, you shall not have carnal relations with your daughter-in-law, or with your neighbor's wife. One cannot sleep with a man as he does with a woman, that is detestable, or with an animal.” And you read all that and you wonder, why is he saying that? That's explicit. Well, those laws are in there, because that's how Israel's neighbours behaved. The Lord told them not to do all that, because that's what the people did all around them. They slept with animals, they indulged in homosexuality, they were very improper toward their family. So we will take a tremendous amount of faith to break away from that. And that is what the Lord was calling them to do with the law. The law wasn't given for Israel to earn God's favor or gain it through works, it was all about faith. I trust Yahweh enough to do this, instead of that. I love God so much, I will follow Him instead of the people around me.

And a big part of this was the priesthood. The law was followed under the guidance of the priests. I just told you there were 613 laws in the Old Testament, but about 100 of them, or one in six of them related to the priesthood, they were the ones responsible for upholding the law. That is the connection between the law and the priests here. The Book of Leviticus tells us in order to do that, they offered animal sacrifices. And we've been through all that before in our series. They also led the people in prayers at the temple. Priests directed the music, they oversaw major events like Passover and tabernacles, and the Day of Atonement, and they taught and preached the Word of God. But with that said, I want you to look back at our passage again in Hebrews. With all that background, I think it'll make more sense to you.

If you look in Hebrews seven, verse 11, let me read this again. It says, “Now, if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood, what further need was there for another priest, for when the priesthood is changed, of necessity, there takes place a change of law also.” The word “perfection” there really sums up what this is about, because that's a Greek word that means “complete” or “finished.” Because it was the job of the Levitical priesthood to help the people finish the requirements of the law. That's why they were there. They were there to help you keep all of God's rules, all 613 of them, every single one. But the problem is they couldn't do it. It was too much. Try as hard as they might, people still sinned and fell short. And so the passage says there was need for another priest to step in and deal with that. And that's what Jesus did.

Jesus didn't come to add to what the law had done, He came to fulfill it and save us completely from the penalty of it. And in doing so, He changed it for another law, His law, His commandments that are based on His gospel, so that after Jesus came, you don't have to approach God through the Torah anymore or the old priesthood, you go through Him. That doesn't mean the law is bad because it's not bad. And that doesn't mean that we should forget the law, we should not forget the law. It played a major role in human history. This is how God taught man for 1000 years. It just means that the law was there for a

season until Christ came. Now that Christ has come, you have a better covenant with God. I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but there's a reason why none of you brought a lamb for me to slay up here on the altar this morning. And there's a reason why none of you are preparing to fly to Israel next month to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles starts on October 9, you didn't know that, did you? There's a reason why you young parents are not really caught up in the idea of circumcising your brand-new son on the eighth day. That's because you understand all that is over now for the church. On a functional level, you believe the law has changed. This tells you why. This chapter is the doctrinal reason why you think that way, which is good news.

I do not know about you, but that's a relief to me. Can you imagine trying to keep all those laws? We can't keep 10 commandments, try to keep 613. We find it difficult to follow the Sermon on the Mount, let alone the Torah. But the reminder in this passage is that even with our failures, that's okay, you have a new high priest, a new law to show mercy to you. And the author describes Christ's ministry in this department by relating it to a man named Melchizedek, who was a priest of a different type in the Old Testament, and he served the Lord, but not in the same way the Levites did. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning with six things. We learn about Jesus' priesthood from this comparison with Melchizedek. So if you are taking notes, this is what we are talking about today. In Hebrews seven, the first part of the chapter, we are going to look at six things we learned about Jesus' priesthood.

And the first one is that He's a king, which means he rules over everything. Your Saviour, your priesthood, has the power to reign overall. If you look in verse one of Hebrews seven, it says this, "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priests of the Most High God who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace." Now, if you're wondering why he says that, and what that has to do with the greater argument of the book of Hebrews, the passage starts off with the word "for", which points you back to the previous text, where it says in chapter six, verse 19, it says, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope, both sure and steadfast, and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priests forever, according to the order of Melchizedek, for this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God..." In other words, when you read chapter seven, the name Melchizedek, seems to come out of nowhere, but it doesn't, because the author is making a connection between Melchizedek and Christ, to show you how they are alike, because they both come from the same order of the priesthood. Back then, in order to become a priest, you couldn't just get into the office. You had to come from a specific group or line or order based on things like your race or genealogy, that type of thing. And this passage says that this is what Christ did, He came from the order of Melchizedek, which was unusual.

Usually the priests in the Old Covenant came from the Levites. And we'll get into that in a moment. And just to show you what Melchizedek is like, verse one says, "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priests of the Most High God who met Abraham..." and goes on to tell the story there. That's a reference to the

account in Genesis 14, when Abraham met Melchizedek after fighting the Four Kings in the valley of salt right next to the Dead Sea in Israel. It wasn't called the Dead Sea back then. But it was the same region. And if you remember the story, Abraham did that because the four kings had made war against Sodom and Gomorrah and kidnapped his nephew Lot. So Abraham armed his men for the battle, and he chased after them and defeated them. Before you ask the question, "How could one man do that?" The reason is because he wasn't fighting kings in the ordinary sense of the term. They were kings of small towns or city states, which means he didn't fight against several 1000 men, there was more like several 100 and he defeated them. And after he did, he encountered this man Melchizedek for the first time. In verse 17 it says, "[After Abraham won the battle against the Four Kings Melchizedek, king of Salem brought out bread and wine.] Now he was priest of God Most High and blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth and blessed be God who has delivered your enemies into your hand.'" The significance to that passage is that it is one of only a handful of references in the Bible to Melchizedek. The other one being in Psalm 110. And the next one being here in this passage, and it says he is a king of Salem, that's a reference to modern day Jerusalem, and it was located about 75 miles from Sodom and Gomorrah, which is why Melchizedek shows up in the story he would have heard about the fight, heard about the battle and when he came out there, it says he met Abraham and blessed him and called him "Abram of the Most High God." Now that's significant, because Melchizedek was saying, you worship the Most High God, I'm a priest of the Most High God. You serve the Lord and adore Him and follow Him. So do I. But I do it as His representative, which was unusual at the time, because as far as we know, Abraham had never met someone like this before. The priesthood had not been established in Israel. So Melchizedek was probably the first one he had ever met. And in response to that, the passage says that Abraham gave him 1/10 of his spoils, which means he accepted Melchizedek's priesthood, he affirmed it, and he gave him some of his plunder. That's the first time the Bible mentions tithing as well. And it's a strange setting, because if you think of the scene here, Abraham had just gone to war with four kings in one. And on his way back, he meets this king who wasn't even there, he didn't even fight it at night, he did nothing. And he gives him some of his spoils to demonstrate that he knew Melchizedek was something special.

He had a role, a high position in God's kingdom, which is what verse two goes on to explain when it says, "To whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils was, first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace." The reason the author gives you that information is to explain that the connection here between Jesus and Melchizedek, which is found in the name. Melchizedek's name means king of righteousness, and his town's name means king of peace. Salem means peace, which is a good description of Jesus because that's what He is. He is the King of Righteousness and the King of peace, and the King of mercy.

In fact, all this highlights a major difference between Christ and the former priest. And that is that the priests under the Old Covenant could never be a king. They couldn't serve in that role, because the King's job was too violent for them and involve too much bloodshed. So they avoided it at all cost. And in a similar way, the kings under the Old Covenant, they could never be priests because they were just



too sinful for that and too worldly, materialistic. But with Christ, it says He fulfills both offices, which means this you can never have a better Saviour than Jesus, Amen! Because when He says He can save you, He really means He can save you. And when He says He can help, He can really do it, because He does it with the power of a king. He's not some helpless, petty little person. He is the Lord of heaven and earth.

We don't have this in Canada, but like I said earlier, every town had its own king back then. And the king symbolizes one thing above all else, and that was power. If you had a king it showed he represented the strength and wealth and glory of the nation. And in a similar way, Jesus represents that with God. He has the wealth and glory of heaven itself on His side, which tells you that if you think you can't defeat your sin by yourself, the truth is that you can't, but that's okay Christ can. And if you feel like you can't obey God and keep His commandments and follow His word and your own power, that's true. You're not able to do that, you are too weak, but you can do it in the power of Him. He is strong enough to help you in this. You have Christ, you don't need another Saviour.

One commentator said at this way. He said, "If this passage teaches us anything, it is how God throws His whole self into salvation. Because he gave more than His little finger to save us, he gave Jesus Christ, the King of kings, the Lord of Glory. And if he did all that to save you, don't you think He can finish the job?"

And it brings you to another thing we learn about Jesus' priesthood from this chapter. And that is that He is eternal. We are going to cover some heavy doctrinal stuff in here. So I just encourage you to bear with me. But the first one is that he is a king. But the second thing we learned from this comparison between Christ and Melchizedek is that Jesus is eternal. Which means this priesthood never ends. It goes on and on forever. And before I read this passage, I want to mention that one thing you are going to notice as you go through this is that the author doesn't always follow an orderly train of thought, he kind of lets his mind wander in a stream of consciousness style, which can be hard to follow at times, because he will go back and forth between Jesus and Melchizedek without showing you always which one is which. But in verse three, it says, "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life and made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually." Now, when the author says that Melchizedek was without all these things, it does not mean literally. He is not saying Melchizedek was some kind of Superman who was born without parents. It's just saying that as far as the biblical record is concerned, those things aren't mentioned, which makes him a good illustration of Christ, he just kind of pops in and out of the scene without his genealogy being mentioned.

Interestingly enough, this has led some in church history to come up with some strange ideas about Melchizedek. Some have said that he was an angel, not a real man. Because angels don't have these things they are created without any father or mother. Other people have suggested that he was the pre-incarnate version of Christ. So he was more of a vision than a person, but I don't think that's what this is saying. Everything you read in Genesis makes him sound like he was a normal person. But if you go

through the list here, it says Melchizedek, or Christ does not have four things. For one he is without father. And I think we all understand that's a fitting description of Jesus because He was born without a biological dad. Isaiah seven, verse 14 says, "Therefore the Lord himself will bear you a sign. Behold, a virgin will be with child and bare a son and you will call His name, Emmanuel." That's how Jesus came into the world, born of a virgin, completely unique. And it says here he was without mother, which doesn't mean a biological mother. It means the word could be translated motherless, it refers to someone who is lonely. All the friends that abandon them, all their disciples ran away, Jesus experienced that as well. It says he is without genealogy, which means he came from no important lineage as far as the priesthood is concerned.

And then in verse three, it says "He had neither beginning of days, nor end of life." And that's the most important point here because what the author is really driving at is that He is eternal. Christ is the Son of God, the second member of the Trinity, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, which made Him a priest perpetually. And that means he was a priest, continually. The idea here is that there is never a time when His priesthood stops, there is never a day when it is over, which is another source of comfort for you. Because this means if you need Jesus today, you can have him today. And if you need Christ's help tomorrow, you can have Him tomorrow. He never leaves you abandons you or forsake you. This would have struck a chord with the Jews. Because Numbers eight, verse 24, says that the average priest could only serve from the age of 25 until the age of 50, which means if you had a priest under the Old Covenant, and you got attached to him, he would only be there for so long. He turned 50. That's it, he's done. He gets into his middle-ages, and then he disappeared from the scene. But this passage is saying that Jesus never does that. He never disappears. Never leaves. He just keeps going, which is why you can put your faith in Him.

You know, we can just stop here and just say this, I don't know about you, but I find this aspect of his priesthood, very encouraging, because my battle with sin is relentless. And do you ever have a day when you don't struggle with sin? Is there ever a moment when the flesh doesn't come knocking at your door, morning, noon and night, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, wake up struggle with sin, go to work, struggle with sin. This is saying that every moment of the day, morning, noon and night, 24 hours a day, you have a Saviour to help you. You have a priest that you can call on, you don't have to go to the temple, you don't have to go to an altar, you don't have to pick up a lamb on the way home from work to slay somewhere, you can just come to Him.

This is totally different from the old covenant system. The Jewish priests couldn't do that. They were in one spot on all the earth, Jerusalem. You have a priest that is everywhere, all the time in every sense of the word. And that's where your hope is found. The story is told with an old man who became a Christian in the first century. And when he sinned, he started to bring a lamb to the temple for sacrifice, because that's what he always did, until his pastor caught him. And he said, "You don't have to do that anymore." The old man said, "What do I bring then?" And the pastor said, "Jesus. You take His blood to the Father. And that's what pardons you from your sin." And the old man said, "What do I do if I sin



again?” The pastor said, “You bring Jesus again.” The old man said, “What do I do if I sin after that?” “Same thing.” It always points back to this high priest.

Which brings us to another thing we learned about his priesthood in this passage. And that is, and this is where the doctrinal stuff is going to get really thick, so just bear with me, but we learn that Jesus’ priesthood is older than the old covenant priesthood. Jesus is older, which means His priesthood precedes all the ones that came before. Now, you may wonder, why does that matter? Well, it matters because the Jews thought the older something was, the better. And the further it could go back in history, the more important it was. And so this is what the author addresses here. And he sums it up in verse four, by saying, “Now observe how great this man was.” In other words, the writer is giving you this next part to show you how great Christ was or how great Melchizedek was. The word “observe” is in the continuous tense in Greek, which means to observe and keep observing, look, and keep looking at how wonderful He is. I mean, salvation comes when you keep your eyes fixed on Christ. And damnation comes when you get your eyes fixed on something else. So He encourages them keep staring at the Saviour. And verse four goes on to say, “Now observe how great this man was, to whom Abraham, the patriarch gave a tenth of the choices spoils.” Now, apparently, this was very important to the author, because he already had said something about this in verse two. But in the ancient times, people believed they had a responsibility to pay tithes to a priest. It was their duty to give a percentage of anything they earned, to their God out of respect. So if a Canaanite King came back from a battle, and he plundered the enemy, he would give a 10th of his spoils to the priests of Baal. That's how it worked. That's just what they did. If a Philistine King came back, and he defeated his neighbors, he would give a tenth of his spoils to the priests of Dagon. And in a similar way, this passage says Abraham does the same thing, except he gives it to Melchizedek, priest of the most high God. Because again, since Abraham follow the Most High God, it only makes sense he gave an offering to that type of priest.

And the author brings us up to say this in verse five, if you follow along in your Bibles, it says, “And those indeed of the sons of Levi who received the priest’s office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.” In other words, just the summary version of that, is that Melchizedek was greater than the Levites or the priests of the Old Testament, because he didn't just receive a tithe from the people of Israel, he received one from Abraham himself. Get the argument there? His ministry is better because he didn't receive a gift from the Jews. He received one from the father of the Jews, which puts him on a different level.

This phrase, “the lesser is blessed by the greater” in verse seven is a reminder that when they met, Abraham did not bless Melchizedek. It was the other way around. Melchizedek blessed him to show that there was a hierarchy there. And in order of authority, it was Melchizedek first and then Abraham. It was Christ first and then the Levites. And when it said that the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham, That means that even though Melchizedek did not trace his

genealogy to the same place as the Levites did, it didn't matter because he was older. He lived before the Levites were even born. Which is a pivotal point in the passage, because the Jews, remember, this is a Jewish Book, so the Jews put a lot of stock and things like genealogy. We don't do that today because most of you don't even know your genealogy. You go back 100 years, you don't know who your ancestors were. They could go back 1000s of years because everything was based on that under the Old Covenant. So the farther back you went in time, the more prestige you had with the Jews, to the point that they even had a room inside the temple that contained nothing but genealogical lists that dated back 1000s of years, because everything was based on your ancestry. So they would go to that room and say, "Look, I'm a priest, because my name is on the scroll. See, I can serve in this office before Yahweh because my family is connected to Levi." Now the author, what he's saying here, is that even so, Levi's priesthood doesn't supersede this one, because this one is more ancient. Melchizedek is as old as Abraham himself.

I won't read all of verses eight through 10 for the sake of time, it's better just to talk about it briefly, because the idea there is that when Abraham offered his tithe, the tribe of Levi, or the Old Testament priesthood, was doing it through the loins of their father Abraham, because he was acting as their representative. So that what Abraham did, the Jews did, and how he acted, everyone else acted vicariously, and he accepted Melchizedek's priesthood as being superior. The author brings all this up to tell the Jews to tell them that there is no point in putting the priesthood on a pedestal anymore. You shouldn't make such a big deal out of them if you're a Jew, because there's a greater priesthood out there, and it belongs to Jesus Christ. Isn't that a powerful argument? It really makes you think. And we are Gentiles. We didn't grow up under this system. But these people did. And even more than that, scholars tell us that at this point in history, the temple was still around. So they could go and see the priesthood at work. And they could visit Jerusalem and watch it in action, and see them making the sacrifices and see them leading in the music and watch them teach. And it was all impressive to them. The Jews would look at that and miss it and wonder, "Am I making a mistake by letting it go?" This passage says you're not because what you have in Christ is greater than all of those things. Christ's priesthood, goes back to the book of Genesis, not the book of Leviticus. He goes back to a time before the law, so you shouldn't worry about missing anything, if you have Him.

A fourth thing we learned about Christ's priesthood as compared to Melchizedek, is that Jesus, as a priest, changes everything. When you believe in Him, the whole system goes in a different direction. And if you look in verse 11, this has been called the main point of the section because it says "now" and that means "now [in light of all I've said before,] if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood, what further need was there for another?" And the key word there is that word perfection. Like I told you, the priests were given to make you perfect or right with God through the law. The trouble is, they couldn't do that. No matter what they did, they still broke it. So he says that there is no need for another priest to step in and do something about it. That's where Christ came in. Because when Christ came in, he didn't just ask you to keep the law, He kept the law for you. And when Jesus showed up, He didn't just tell you

to do what it said, He did what it said in your place. So in order to be saved, you could look to Him and be forgiven.

Which is what verse 12 alludes to when it says, "For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity, there takes place a change of law also." And what that means is that when Jesus arrived, He didn't change a few priests, He changed the priesthood. He reinvented the system. And when He showed up, He didn't just alter a few rules or a few laws, He altered the law itself. So there is a systematic shift taking place in the way God interacts with the world. Now, before it was primarily through the Torah, now it's through Christ. And to be honest, when it says that the law has been changed here, that's a can be a difficult phrase to interpret, because there's several theories about what this means, some of taking this to mean that the 10 commandments have changed. So that when you are a Christian, you don't have to keep them anymore, and you can do whatever you want go to heaven, that's not what it means. That would contradict so many other verses in the Bible, most of the 10 commandments are repeated in the New Testament. So if you are a Christian, you have to keep them. And there are other ones who have taken this to mean that the punishment of the law has changed, so that if you're on this side of the cross, you can live however you please, God won't judge you, He sends nobody to hell. That's not what this means. There is still a punishment, according to law. But another idea is that certain aspects of the law like the priesthood and offerings and sacrifices have changed. And that's what this is referring to. Because now that you are in Christ, God doesn't expect you to keep all of that now, you can just turn to Him. I mean, what this passage is telling you, in essence, is that the entire worship life of the Old Testament has been radically refocused on the one thing, and one thing only, and that is Jesus Christ and His cross. It's been picked up and taken from Moses to Calvary, to the point that all the external stuff the Old Testament talked about, doesn't matter so much anymore. All the ceremonies and rituals and customs of the Jews are not that important because they should be replaced with thoughts of Him. You know, when you read the New Testament, isn't that surprising how little it says about the temple and the sacrifice and the rituals? I mean, it's amazing how seldom it talks about what you eat, and what you drink, and what you wear, because those things aren't that important anymore. Who cares what you eat, if you don't trust in Christ? Amen. Those things don't make you perfect, He does.

This is important because we can come to a book like Hebrews and there can be a tendency for us to look down on the Jews and despise them and say, how could you ever go back to the law after trusting in Christ? But let me ask you this, have you ever found yourself complaining about external things when you come to church? Have you ever found yourself griping about the building? Because the air conditioning doesn't work over the summer? I've done that. I have literally sweated my way through the book of Hebrews. Have you ever found yourself griping about what people wear in church? Have you ever found yourself judging them for what they eat or what they sing or how they pray. The lesson here is that all those external things are not so important anymore. That's the same kind of things that Jews were digging into. You need to take a cue from that and be humble. And let it go.

And I'm going to move quickly to another thing that we learned about Jesus' priesthood here. There is a lot in this chapter and I am just trying to get through the first half of it. But the next one is that Christ is indestructible, which means He cannot be touched by sin. The author just keeps getting higher and higher and higher here. Or maybe just deeper and deeper in a sense. This one is found in the next section, where it gives us one of the only times in the Bible where it says Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah. The reason the author mentions that is because when these people heard that Christ was a priest, they had a lot of things swirling around in their head, and he's kind of addressing them one by one. One question that would have had is okay, if Jesus is a priest, why does He come from the wrong tribe? I mean, you've already he addressed it a little bit before but you said Jesus is older than the tribe of Levi, and I get that. But it still doesn't answer the question because the Old Testament said the priests were supposed to come from the Levites. I mean, there was a whole order taking place there. Jesus doesn't do that. So how do you explain that issue? And if you look in verse 13, this is how he explains that. He says, "For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe from which no one has officiated at the altar." It's really fascinating. If you read the New Testament, you never see Jesus offering a sacrifice at the altar, do you? Because He was the sacrifice when He died on the cross. Our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. And this is clear still, if another priest arises, according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. And what this is saying is that, yes, Jesus didn't come from the tribe of Levi. And yes, He had the wrong genealogy, if you're looking at it from that point of view, but that's okay. Because His qualifications don't depend on that anyway, they come from the basis of an indestructible life.

In other words, Jesus did not become a priest because he was physically qualified, He became a priest because He was spiritually qualified. The word "indestructible" here refers to the fact that He was physically indestructible, it can refer to that. But if you look back in verse 16, it says that He did not become a priest on the basis of a physical requirement, but according to the power of this. In other words, the idea here is that this is not a physical indestructibility, as much as it is a spiritual one, because He cannot be touched with the powers of sin. The reason Jesus became your priest is because the world and the flesh and the devil have no hold on Him. His soul is indestructible in that sense. In fact, the word "power" here is the Greek word *dunamus*, from which we get the word dynamite. The idea is that Jesus has the power to blow up sin in your life, because He has blown it up everywhere. Sin had no hold on him, it had no grip; He was perfect all His days, He kept all the commandments, which is something the old covenant priesthood could never do.

You know, I did some research on it and found that under the Old Testament law, there were more than 100 things that could disqualify someone from the priesthood. Remember, we just talked about all those categories. One category was for the priesthood. He gave like 100-something laws on what could disqualify them. And they related to things like what you ate, and what you drank, and whether you touch the dead body or not. But there was very little in there about your sin. Because someone could be an Old Covenant priest, and live so many horrible ways, which is why you have stories in the Old

Testament of the priests, lying and stealing and cheating on each other. You have accounts of them swearing and cursing and committing immorality, there's even one account and the book of Judges, when a Levite cuts up his concubine and sends her body to the 12 tribes of Israel. Remember that? And you read that and you wonder how can anybody do that? Well, the reason he could do that is because his priesthood or his role as a Levite, was based on his tribe, it wasn't based on his character. And the point he's saying here is that with Christ is completely different. The reason this is important is because the priesthood was given to help you deal with the problem of sin. That was why it was created. The Lord set it up to help you get rid of things like your wicked thoughts and your evil deeds. But oftentimes, it didn't work simply because the priests were wicked themselves. So this section reminds you that you need a priest for this reason. And thankfully, that's what you have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This means if you are struggling with sin today, let me tell you what Jesus can do. He can blow up the sin and you can get rid of it. If you're struggling with lust, He can do the same thing with lust. The devil hasn't made a sexual temptation yet that He cannot give you a victory over. He can do the same thing with anger. If you're struggling with fear, he can do it with that, because He has the power of an indestructible life in Him. I find this one so encouraging. Because when you are struggling with sin, the last thing you want to do is talk to someone who is struggling with sin as much as you are. I don't want to go to a priest, if he's having the same troubles I am. What's the point? You don't have to do that in Christ. A friend of mine was helping out at a drug and alcohol rehab place in Los Angeles when someone approached him after a church service, and said he had something to confess, he said, I cheated on my wife 30 years ago. And I never told anybody and that's what led to my life of alcohol abuse. Can you help me? My friend said, I can help you. But I can tell you someone who can get the sin out of your life that is the Lord Jesus Christ. And he's right. Jesus can take care of our sin problem.

And it brings us to one more thing we learn about His priesthood from this comparison to Melchizedek, just to review these other ones. The first one is that He is a king. And second, He is eternal. Third, He is older than the Levites. Fourth, He changes everything. And fifth, He is indestructible. It's quite a list. And then we could stop the sermon there and say, Amen. Because the priesthood was such an important topic in Israel. When a Jew came to faith in Christ in the first century, his friends and family would always come to him and want to know, who is your priest now? Who is the religious leader of your religion? And the author tells him here, when you get that question, you answer it with a named Jesus, because He gives you all of this. He's better than everything the Old Covenant had to offer. And it brings you to one more thing that we learn about him from this comparison to Melchizedek. And we'll wrap it up with this one, and that is that Jesus is accessible. A sixth thing that we learned about Christ's priesthood in this chapter is that He is accessible, or He makes God accessible. Which is my favorite one on the list, because it means Jesus makes it possible for you to come to Him. If all this stuff seems too great and too wonderful and too high for you, it's not. Because He makes God available. And this next section may seem a little repetitive. And that's because it is it brings us around full circle to where we started this. Because after giving us one more quotation from the Old Testament about Melchizedek in verse 17, in verse 18, he goes on to tell you why the law had to be set aside. And that is because on the



one hand, it was weak, and useless, not because it was terrible, just because it could not bring you into heaven completely. Because it says in verse 18, it made nothing perfect. But on the other hand, verse 19 says, “Through Jesus, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. And that's the climax of the whole passage. This is what it's all about. And that is that through Christ, we can do something a law could never completely do. And that is to bring us into the presence of God. Remember, I told you at the very beginning of this, it was the purpose of the law to do that for Israel. The Lord gave it to the Jews so they could see what God is like and come near to Him as they obey the commandments. The issue is that the law often had the opposite effect, because instead of drawing them close to God, it pushed them away. Because every time they disobeyed, it took them further from His presence. So at the end of the passage, the author tells you that Jesus didn't come to do that. Through His work on the cross, He came to bring you nearer to God. Which would have been a blessing for a Jew to hear.

Because approaching God was tricky business under the Old Covenant, it wasn't easy. I told you last time that even the layout of the temple showed you this, because when you came to the temple, it had four courtyards. And each one of them showed you that God was hard to get to. Firstly, at the court of Gentiles was where the non-Jews could go to worship people, like you and me. They were the farthest ones from God, they were always at a distance. And then further you would walk up a flight of stairs and come into the court of women, where Jewish women could go and pray to the Lord and speak to Him because they are closer to God than the Gentiles are. Then you would walk up another flight of stairs and go into the court of men where the Jewish men could go, then you would go up another flight of stairs and come to the court of priests where the clergy gathered. But even within that final court, you had another room called the Holy of Holies, where no one entered except the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement. It contained the Ark of the Covenant, and the mercy seat. And the Shekinah glory of God was there. Because the idea is that you can't come into that, that's off limits to you. No matter how hard you work, you couldn't get in there because you still felt like God was a million miles away. And what this passage is saying is that it's not like that anymore for Christians. Because verse 19, says, “On the other hand, through Christ, there is the bringing in of a better hope.” And that's really an understatement. Because the Torah didn't always bring a lot of hope to the people of Israel; it could be a pretty discouraging book. I mean, you read those 613 laws, and you might think, well, I kept 493 of them. I did okay, in the first half, I broke it in the second half, I worked and worked and worked and had nothing to show for and I tried and tried and tried, still couldn't do it all. But he says, not with Christ. Christ didn't come to make you work for this. He didn't come to make you earn. He came to give you salvation full and free.

I also need to point out this phrase, “draw near to God.” It is written with a degree of confidence, because it doesn't say through Christ, we *might* draw nearer to God, or through Jesus, we *could do it* if we're lucky. It says you will. Not through your works or deeds or efforts, but through His grace. And that's all. And listen, I know that we talked about a lot of doctrinal stuff this morning. Which is why I've tried to summarize this for you. But I think it would be good here at the end to lift our eyes from the



doctrine for just a moment and talk about a simple application for this. Do you know what this phrase “draw near to God is saying?” Tying it back to the rest of this chapter, it is saying that through Christ and His priestly ministry, you can draw near to everything we have talked about this morning, it can all be yours.

I mean, take the first point about Jesus being a king, and having all power. What this verse is saying is that through Christ, you can have that power. If you need His power to overcome sin today, you can have His power to overcome sin. If you need His help to defeat the flesh, you can have His help to defeat the flesh. He's not holding it at a distance from you. He's not keeping it far away. He's not playing games. So you might get this if you do enough. He's saying it can be yours. Take the next point that Jesus is eternal, because He lives forever, and He has no beginning, nor end of days. It means that through Christ, you can enjoy the benefits of that as well.

You can have a relationship with an everlasting priest. So if you need Him today, he'll be there today. If you need Him tomorrow, He will be there tomorrow. You take the previous point that He has an indestructible life, and can blow up sin. This means that you can have that as well. But the good news is that all of this is yours, through Him. And I have to be honest, and tell you I'm really glad this point ends on that note. Because I know that some of you don't feel close to God today. And I have talked to you about where you are at as a believer, and many of you have said you feel like God feels far away. Can I so tell you something? If you are a Christian this morning, God is not far away from you. He is near. And if you are a believer, this is saying God is not at a distance, He is in your heart. You just need to realize it and live that way.

Next week we are going to look at the rest of chapter seven and see that we are not done with this discussion of the priesthood yet. The author has more to say about it. So come back and join us for that. But for now, in my studies this week, I was reading Pilgrims Progress. And I came across a time when pilgrim encountered Moses on the Road to Heaven. You guys remember that story? And when he did, it says Moses began to beat him and he asked him why. Why are you doing that? To which Moses replied, “because that's all I know how to do.” And the book says Moses would have kept beating him if it were not for Jesus who came and stopped him. Friends, I tell you that because John Bunyan had it right. You have two choices at the end of the day. And that is, you can choose Moses and the beating or you can choose Christ and His peace. The question is, which one will you pick? I hope that you choose Christ today. And we'll talk about that more next time.

For now, let me close in a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, thank You, for the word that we have read this morning. Thank You that we have Jesus, the great high priest, the Eternal One, the alpha in the Omega, the beginning in the end, the first and the last, to come to you with our sin problem. We look at the Jews and we are amazed at what all You did through them for all those centuries, how gracious You were, how kind You were, how powerful your law was in their lives, and how patient You were when they failed. And not only were You patient when they failed, but you brought them the Messiah, a

redeemer in Christ. And now, Lord, we can step into that as Gentiles, as those who come from all over the world, South Africa, America, Canada, the Netherlands, from everywhere, and yet we can receive the benefits of this Jewish Messiah, through your free offer of the cross. Well, we are humbled at that; we don't really know what to say, other than thank you, Lord. I pray that all this study of Him would bring our hearts closer to You. I pray that we would be more thankful and appreciative of the Saviour. And not only that, Lord, if there are any who are lost this morning, I pray that this would show them what they are missing in Christ and that they would be saved. Lord, thank You for this word. And I pray that as we continue to study the book of Hebrews, our eyes would be drawn to more and more things about Him; that this will not fly over our heads but it would penetrate our hearts and change our lives as we glorify and worship the Saviour. We pray all this in Jesus' name, for His sake. Amen.