

Hebrews 7

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[0 : 0 0] There was a time that I think probably a fair number of you can tell from here will remember! that VHS video was the way in which you watched the film in the luxury of your own home. You! would go to the video library and check out the selection, take your pick, hire a video and go home. For those that don't know what I'm talking about, there was a large plastic, typically black rectangle that had some tape inside it and you would either stuff it into a slot on the top of a machine that you would kind of have to lean on to close, but then as it got more technical you'd stuff it in the front and it would kind of mechanically go in, you take your seat on the sofa and enjoy the film. Nobody does that anymore. And nobody does it anymore because VHS has been succeeded. It worked at a time, it did serve at a time to enable us to watch films at home, but it has been succeeded. We don't do that anymore.

And trying to go back to VHS won't work because it's now obsolete. There'll be some quirky person somewhere who has a YouTube channel about how they still produce the films and all that kind of thing, but for most of us in the regular run of things, people that aren't stuck in the past, we don't use it anymore. It has been succeeded. VHS actually won't work. If you own VHS tape, chances are you won't have the machinery to make it work. It has been discontinued. The whole system is now obsolete. The point of the book of Hebrews is that this is how it is, with the old order of religious worship and living in relation to God. Now we're passing the halfway point of the book this evening, so to recap, the book is written or preached.

It's described as a word of exhortation. It is a sermon that is preached to an audience who were ready to walk away from their Christian faith. They had come from a Jewish background, and although they had professed faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, they are being drawn back to the life of the temple and old religious practices. Now the reason for this, the reason that there is this attraction, this drawback to all that was in the past, is because being a Christian is now costly and painful. It's a struggle. It's difficult. They were facing persecution.

They were facing cultural opposition, having their property stolen and vandalized. It was costly for them. And the temptation to slip back into the lifestyle that was acceptable culturally, that didn't bring these things about, and didn't get the opposition from their families and those closest to them, them was significant. Now we know what that's like. We know what it's like to be humiliated among our peers because we follow Jesus. We know what it's like, in some cases, to lose our jobs simply because we name the name of Jesus. And because we name the name of Jesus, we can't go along with certain things that are expected of us. We know what it's like to be rejected by our families because we have come to Christ. There is always pressure in some form or other for us to turn back from Christ and to return to older, easier ways. And this letter of Hebrews is written to plead with those who are struggling in this way not to drift away. And the reason that the author returns to over and over again, all the way through, don't go back, don't go to anything else, because Jesus is better, way better than anything that you may turn to, especially as it was for this first audience, the old structures of old Israel.

And the reason Jesus is better, quite simply, is because his ministry is the only one that actually works. Now I don't mean that the old covenant with the sacrifices and the offerings and the forms of worship that were there didn't work. They did. The people drew near to God through the sacrificial system. But like VHS video, that system has now been succeeded with something better. In this case, it's someone better, namely Jesus Christ, the anointed king, boys and girls.

[4 : 3 7] And so the old is no longer effective. In the coming of Jesus Christ, the old has passed away. And there isn't any sort of quirky, you can still do it on its sort of works version. It has passed away completely. The new has come. It has succeeded the old, and the old is obsolete. And this evening, in this chapter 7 of the book of Hebrews, the author draws our attention to how this works

in relation to the priesthood. Now I mentioned a couple of weeks ago when this topic came up in chapter 5, that the whole idea of priest feels a bit out of step with our day and age. Whether our experience is of a kindly but a bit out of touch gentleman or something more sinister, we don't have a place for priests in our modern life. Typically, they are irrelevant or dangerous. Either way, we don't need them.

We think we've moved on from the need for a priest. However, as we saw back in chapter 5, and we will again this evening, if any of us will see God, if any of us will experience cleansing from sin, know the peace of a clear conscience, if any of us will know the hope of renewal internally and joy in this life and beyond, we need a priest. We need a priest. Not a mere man, but one who will do all that is needed on our behalf to bring us to God and make us acceptable to Him. And that is what Jesus' priestly ministry does.

In order to understand more about that, our author has mentioned this enigmatic figure of Melchizedek. And here in chapter 7, we're told why this comparison is made. Melchizedek appears in three places in the Bible. In Genesis 14, in Psalm 110, and here. And because our author, chapter 5, verse 6, has used Psalm 110, if you look back to chapter 5, verse 6, you'll see there that he has quoted Psalm 110, that quotes the name of Melchizedek. He then goes on to explain what this means. Chapter 5, verse 10, he mentions his name again. And by this stage, we're thinking, who's that?

Who's this? Okay, go on, tell me more. Tell me more about this shadowy figure from the Old Testament and the relevance for what we're talking about here as it relates to this issue of priesthood. But then the author took the detour that we went on last week. He mentioned Melchizedek. We're thinking, oh, interesting. Come on then. But then he says, no, you've become dull of hearing. Remember? Willfully disinterested. You don't want to learn. And so he's rebuked us for that. He's rebuked the audience for that. He said, you won't be able to understand what I've got to say about him because you're kind of willfully rejecting what's going on here. But the good news is, in the course of a week since last Sunday and this Sunday, we've got our act together. So now he's ready to explain. Verse 1, this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him. And to him, Abraham apportioned the 10th part of everything. Melchizedek is introduced here in order to make two points about the priestly ministry of Jesus. That's what he's doing here.

And those two points are this. Jesus is a different order of priest. He is a different order of priest. When you think of the old covenant priests, Jesus is a different order of priest. Point number one. [8 : 12] When his hearers heard that Jesus was a priest, chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Hebrews, there would have been a problem with that. Priests in the old covenant had to be descended from the line of Levi.

Aaron and Moses were descended from Levi. But Jesus was from the line. He was from the tribe of Judah. That was not a priestly line. Look at 7 verse 14. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah. And in connection with that tribe, Moses said nothing about priests. Also, when Psalm 110 talks about the Messiah as both a king sending forth his scepter, ruling in the midst of his enemies, but also as a priest, these two offices were normally kept separate. The idea of a priest king was unheard of.

Indeed, Saul was judged by God in the Old Testament for trying to combine those two offices. They didn't go together. So the author is explaining here how this is possible in the person of Jesus. And he points to Melchizedek to make the point. Look at verse 2.

He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness. And then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. 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. See how great this man was, to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils. Here is a man, he is a priest, who was both the king of Salem, that is, Jerusalem, and priest of the Most High God.

[9 : 47] He was king and priest. He is a different order of priest. And the way that he is described is supposed to be a picture of the Son of God.

Even the way that the text works in the Old Testament is supposed to point us to the Son of God. But the language here has led to confusion about who Melchizedek really is. Some in the early church said that he was an angel.

Others suggested that he was an incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Still others said that he was a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. But when the author of Hebrews tells us that Melchizedek was without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, he is referring to how he appears in the biblical text, in the Old Testament. Melchizedek had parents. He was born and he died. But we're not given that information in the text. He comes out of nowhere in Genesis 14. There's no genealogy. We don't know where he's come from, who his father and mother are. There's a sense, therefore, in which he doesn't have father and mother. And we move on from him without any mention of where he goes after that.

[11 : 01] He can't be an Old Testament appearance of Christ, because here in verse 3, 7 verse 3, he is compared to Christ. Do you see that? He is resembling the Son of God. Plus verse 15, he is described as another priest in Melchizedek's line.

Again, the point that Hebrews is making is that Jesus is a priest in a different order. And it is a superior order. That's what the author is at pains to show here.

Melchizedek is greater than Abraham. Even though Abraham was given the promises of God, because, verse 6, Melchizedek blesses Abraham, and verse 7, the greater blesses the lesser. This is why Abraham paid tribute to Melchizedek in the tithe. Melchizedek is greater than Abraham. So do you see, Jesus belongs to a different order of priests.

And he is the true Melchizedek. The one who really is without father, according to his humanity. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and without mother, according to his divine nature.

[12 : 06] He is eternal, before and beyond all things. And his priestly work is carried out by one who is a true king of righteousness. And who brings us real peace.

The question is, do you know this man? Do you know him? Do you know the righteousness that he offers?

That is a status before God that you cannot earn, but that he freely grants. So much of the ambition that drives how we live our day-to-day lives flows from a desire to make ourselves acceptable. Whether it's to our bosses, or our peers, or to the world around us. We want to be acceptable. We want people to say, yes, I want to be with you. I accept you. And that is a relentless thing that drives us, and drives us, and drives us.

Because we always have to measure up. There is always someone else that we have to be acceptable to. In Christ, we are accepted. Not by mere mortals.

[13 : 09] Not by bosses, peers, or the world around us necessarily, but by the God of all the earth. Because at the cross, all of our failure and unrighteousness that marks our lives is taken by Jesus.

And in this great exchange, his righteousness is credited to us. At the cross, we have the king of righteousness, bearing the curse of the unrighteous, so that we could receive his righteousness, and be reconciled to God.

Our eternal priest, who is on a different order, goes into the presence of God on our behalf. He covers our sin and our failure.

And so then, he gives us the peace that our hearts are longing for. Do you know this peace? Do you know the peace of God that flows from peace with God?

You see, when we have received his righteousness, we are reconciled to God. We are at peace with God. The hostility that exists between us and our maker is gone.

[14 : 28] And so we receive his peace. It is a peace that transcends all understanding. Because the truth is that we can experience it when the circumstances of life suggest that we really shouldn't experience peace.

When you get the diagnosis. When you lose a loved one. When you get the redundancy call. Now, in Christ, these things will still be shocking, but that shock will often be accompanied by a peace. And we find it hard to understand. And we find it hard to describe or to explain. But it is undeniably our experience. And I know that many of us this evening know what that feels like.

But that is what's on offer. Through this priest of a different order. Christ brings us righteousness and peace because he is a different order of priest.

Reading on, that means also that he belongs to a different level of priesthood. A different level of priesthood. That's 11 to 22. Here the author shows how the Melchizedekian is superior to the Levitical.

[15 : 38] The Melchizedekian priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood. Look at verse 11. Now, if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood, for under it the people received the law, what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?

The recipients of this letter were considering going back. But if perfection, if men and women, boys and girls, could be changed to be fit for God, if that were to be found back in the Old Covenant with its priests and its forms of worship, why then did David in Psalm 110 speak about this other order of priest?

Because, our author argues, the Levitical system was always designed to be temporary. Just as Aaron's priesthood is superseded, so the laws associated with it have been changed as well.

Verse 12. This priesthood couldn't bring people to perfection before God, so the point he's making is that it must have been intended to be temporary. The Old Testament speaks again and again of the necessity of the New Covenant.

It was always looking forward. One author has said this. If someone who knew nothing of the Christian faith, or Judaism, or the history of the church, were given a copy of the Old Testament and they read it carefully, their first question would be, well, where's part two?

[17 : 06] It's always pointing forward. And part two is the new and better priesthood of Christ. And here, in this complicated passage, the author is showing this by contrasting old and new, making different points from Psalm 110, verse 4.

So look at verse 15. Christ's priesthood has superior power. Verse 15. This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.

For it is witnessed of him, you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Jesus arises in the likeness of Melchizedek. And in contrast to Aaron, his power doesn't come from a law concerning his ancestry, but from an indestructible life.

The Levitical priests served for a while and then they died. That's why, verse 23, there needed to be so many of them. Jesus is a priest forever.

His priesthood is eternal. And so he annuls the weak and powerless commandment of the old VHS priesthood. Superior power.

[18 : 22] But it's also founded, do you see, verse 20, on a superior promise. It was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath. But this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him, The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, you're a priest forever.

This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. The Levitical priesthood. The old order of things as regards priests receive no special affirmation from God apart from what it said in the law. But Christ was made a priest by an oath. The Lord, verse 21, swore an oath to his Messiah King, his eternal Son, who having risen everlastingly from the dead is a priest forever.

And he put his word of promise on this appointment. For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

God won't change his mind about this. This priesthood will last forever because the unchanging God has put his word on it. The righteousness that he brings, the peace that he brings, you can have confidence that they can be yours and they can be yours forever because God has put his unchanging word on it.

[19 : 53] Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant. We'll hear more about that next week, Lord willing. But for now, we need to understand the security, the security that this gives the follower of Christ.

This is the pastoral point, I think, that's being made by taking us back to this ancient priest king. What is the point of telling us all about the details of this priesthood and about Melchizedek?

It is in order that we know the security of being in Christ. Because of his superior priesthood, Jesus is the guarantor of our salvation.

That is, he underwrites the cost of it all. In fact, he is the guarantee of it because he has paid the price in full. And describing how far this salvation reaches, do you see the author uses this lovely word, verse 25.

He says that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost. Jesus saves utterly, completely, perfectly. [20 : 56] When Christ saves us, there is nothing left to be done. Nothing. He does it all. And because he lives, verse 24, he can intercede for us.

He's interceding for us now in the heavenlies. He is our eternal priest. The living Lord. He stands in heaven in the presence of God and he pleads our case.

When we sin, he says to the Father, I have dealt with that sin. And he says that on the basis of his perfect sacrifice. 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.

He has no need, like those high priests in the old order of things, 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. Christ doesn't need to offer sacrifices daily. Why not? Not for himself because he has no sin. And not for us because he did this once for all when he offered up himself in our place.

[22 : 08] Our salvation is secure because no sacrifice for sin remains. If you are in the Lord Jesus through faith this evening, you have received his righteousness, you are at peace with the God of all the earth, and you are secure, and you are secure forever.

On the cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied for every sin.

On him was laid. And that's why we can say, here in the death of Christ, I live. Look at 25. This is the song of those who, do you see, who draw near to God through him.

If you haven't come to God in repentance for sin and faith in Christ, your mediating priest, you have none of this. You don't have the righteousness, you don't have the peace, and you don't have the security.

You'll be looking to other things, to experts, to techniques, to trends, to fix the problems that beset your life apart from God, the God who made you for himself. We know that our lives don't quite work.

[23 : 26] Or when they do, they don't work the way we want them to for long enough. That's because we have a fundamental problem. It's not that our lives aren't ordered enough. It's not that we aren't exercising enough, or eating the right way, although those things are good things to do.

Our fundamental problem is that we are separated from the God of life. And the only way to be reconciled is through someone who has the power and authority to bring us into his presence and make us acceptable to him.

Jesus, and only Jesus, is such a priest. if you haven't come to Jesus, come to him this evening.

You can do it in your seat. You can say, sorry for the way that you've lived your life in his world. Ask him to forgive your sins.

And he will credit his righteousness to your account. He will give you peace with the one who made you. And you will be secure in his hands.

[24 : 35] And if you have come to him, many of us, most of us, allow this chapter to remind you this evening how secure you are.

When you fear your faith will fail, remember that you're not saved because of the strength of your faith. All the way through the passage, the focus is on Christ.

His priesthood is permanent because he continues forever. He makes intercession for you. His sacrifice is a once for all offering.

When you fear that your faith will fail, it is his work that keeps you. And it is his work that picks you up when you fall. And his work that will see you through to perfection and glory.

There are lots of things. That face us all tomorrow morning, even this evening when we leave here, even in the context that we're sitting here now, and our minds are elsewhere because we're worried about things, we're anxious, we're stressed.

[25 : 48] In Christ, whatever it is, in Christ you are secure. don't go anywhere else. However hard the wind might be buffeting in your life this evening, he really will hold you fast.

let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.