

The Order of Melchizedek

Hebrews 7:1-28

Rev. John Pennylegion

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Good morning. Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is good to be with you. If you're a guest or a visitor, we're glad that you're here, and our desire, our hope is that as you come, if this is your first Sunday, your fifth Sunday, your 105th Sunday, that what you would experience is the grace of God, and that you would know more of his kindness and his love, that you would experience his hospitality and his care for his people, and that you would experience that in the way in which we engage with one another, that you would see humility and love, but that you would also experience that through God's Word, because in God's Word, we see that Jesus is the one who demonstrates God's care for us unlike any other, right, and unlike anyone else, and so Christ is our life, and he's the one that we look to and we turn our attention to, and so this morning, we're going to turn our attention to a passage in Hebrews chapter 7, so if you have a Bible, you can turn to Hebrews 7, and as you're turning there, you'll remember from a few weeks ago in Hebrews chapter 5, the author of Hebrews made this kind of side comment about this man, Melchizedek, right? He quoted from Psalm 110 and simply said, "you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek", and they didn't go into much more detail about this individual, Melchizedek, this strange figure.

In fact, shortly after making this statement, the author of Hebrews said, I have more difficult things to share with you and to talk with you about, but you're not ready for it yet, right? You still need to, you're still taking in milk when you should be eating meat, right? You need to mature, excuse me, a little bit, and so instead of going into these deeper theological ideals, he decided to talk to us about apostasy, right, which is pretty deep, by the way, and also to remind us that Christ is our anchor, right, that he is our hope. But now he's returning to those deeper ideas, those deeper theological doctrines, and he's going to take up in this chapter a longer discussion about this man, Melchizedek. Now, I want to say, if Hebrews 5, that passage about apostasy, is the most difficult pastorally to consider in the book of Hebrews, then Hebrews 7 is probably the most confusing.

So, what we're going to do is we're going to read Hebrews 7, and I'm going to then ask the Lord to help us to have clarity and understanding. So, let's follow along, Hebrews 7.

“ For 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 a tenth part of everything. 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! And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is

testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

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? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

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."

For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. And 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 are a priest forever.'" This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 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. 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, 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. 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." (ESV)

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Father, we ask that you would give us understanding. Your Word tells us that those who lack wisdom need simply to ask, and you will give it. And so I ask, Father, that you would grant us that wisdom, that you would open our eyes, that you would help us, that you by your Spirit would reveal to us the beauty of your Word, and that you would help us to see more of Jesus in it. And so we pray, meet with us, lead us, help us. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

So a number of years ago, I had the opportunity to go to the Sugar Bowl. So the Sugar Bowl is one of the, you know, end of the year college football games, right? It happens right around New Year's Eve. And I got to go to the Sugar Bowl, but I didn't go to New Orleans because this is the one year that the Sugar Bowl wasn't in New Orleans. You remember when Katrina came through and it devastated that city, that they used the Superdome as a place of refuge, a

place of protection for the people of New Orleans. And because the Superdome was being used in this way, the Sugar Bowl was moved to Atlanta. And during this season, during this week when the Sugar Bowl was there, Kat and I were leading a campus ministry event. We used to do campus ministry before we went to seminary. We were leading this college ministry event in Atlanta at the exact same time. And I was in charge of this event. Thousands of college students. I was the administrator. I was making sure everything was in place. And so that meant I looked like I was extremely tired all week long.

And I was. Like, I wasn't getting much sleep. It was late nights and early mornings. And I was drinking coffee all day long. And I looked like I need a shower even after I got out of the shower. And this is what I looked like when I went to the Sugar Bowl. And I walked up to the VIP room. You see, the man who oversaw the Sugar Bowl and the man who oversaw the convention center that we were meeting at was the same man. And so I had gotten to know him a little bit. And so he gave me and a few other people VIP passes. So we walk up to this room, right? And there are these two giant security guards standing on both sides of the door. I mean, massive men. Like, their hands looked big enough that they could crush my skull, right? Like, they were just enormous. And up we walk, right? And we're walking up. And we look disheveled. We look exhausted. We look like we need a shower. And we come up and they look at us, ready to send us on our way. Because we don't belong in that room. But then we held out our pass and they looked at the pass and they looked at us and they looked at the pass. And they stepped aside. And into the room we walked. And they were right. We didn't belong in that room.

Because I walked in and every single wall had TVs on it and there were leather couches and all-you-can-eat food and all-you-can-drink drink, right? And people were looking at us kind of side-eyed because everyone in that room was wearing high-end suits and beautiful dresses. Not t-shirts that said event staff. So surely they thought we just snuck in, right? We distracted the security guards and we got in. And any minute now they were going to bust open the door and throw us out. But instead of that happening, the man who was running the event, he sees us at the door and he stands up from his leather couch and he points at us and he waves us over. He sits us with him on his couch and he offers us food and drink. And in essence what he was saying was, they're with me. They don't look the part. And on any other day they wouldn't be in this room. But today they belong here. And you see that's what we needed to get into that room, that VIP room. We need a pass. We need a person. We need someone to vouch for us. Someone or something to be an advocate, to speak on our behalf, to say that we belong. That's what my friends, my friend and I needed on that day. But that's what we're all in need of. And that's what Jesus gives us.

Why Jesus is The Greater Priest

You see that's what we have in Jesus. Look at verse 25 of our passage. It says, "Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them." He makes intercession. He is speaking on behalf of those whom he has saved. And so Jesus intercedes. He is an advocate. And that's what we need. You see what we need is a priest. We need a priest. Now that might seem odd to some of you to hear me say that because after all we're Protestants, right? And we make a big deal about like the priesthood of all believers and how we don't need a human person to stand between us and God, right? We can approach God and we don't need the sacrifices. And I know some traditions call pastors priests, but that's not our tradition.

And so it might seem weird for you to hear me say we need a priest, but that's exactly what we need. But not just any priest. We need the priesthood of Christ. That's what we're in need of. We need Jesus, who is the priest that is greater than the Old Testament priest. And that's what Hebrews 7 is showing us. Hebrews 7 is showing us why Jesus is greater than the Levitical priesthood and the implications that is for us. So that's what we're going to look at this morning. Why Jesus is the greater priest.

And he's the greater priest because he isn't like the Levitical priest. He's better, right? Verse 19 says, because of Christ, we have a better hope. Now that Greek word that we translate better, that Greek word there, it appears more often in the book of Hebrews than all the rest of the New Testament books combined. And that actually shouldn't surprise us by now at this point in the book of Hebrews, right? That we would see this language? Because that's what we've come to expect, right? To hear that Jesus is better, he's superior, he's greater. And the author of Hebrews, it's almost like he knows that we're expecting to hear this, so he wants to justify why he can say it again. And he justifies this claim that Jesus is better than the Levitical priesthood by claiming that Jesus is from a different order of priests, the order of Melchizedek.

We see it in verse 17. "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." So you see, it's that simple. Jesus is greater than the Old Testament priest because he's of Melchizedek. That's it. Simple as that. We're good, right? Sing a hymn, come on up, worship team, right? No, of course not, right? Because that actually kind of muddies the waters a little bit, doesn't it? Because we hear he's after the order of Melchizedek and we're like, well, who's Melchizedek? Right? We know very little about him. In fact, in all of the Bible, he's only spoken of in Genesis 14, Psalm 110, and the eight times he's mentioned in Hebrews. And that's it. And in Genesis 14, when he does show up and he does interact with Abraham, right, from our Old Testament reading this morning, not much is said about him. So let's talk about what we do know.

Well, from Genesis 14, we know he was the king of Salem. He was a priest. He was one whom Abraham had given a tithe, and he gave Abraham a blessing. Now, to us, that doesn't seem like much, right? Just seems like a little bit of details, a little bit of description. But the author of Hebrews helps us to see why these details are actually quite significant. In verse 2, let's look at this. In verse 2, he points to his name. The author of Hebrews points to Melchizedek's name. And Melchizedek's name is the joining together of two Hebrew words, the words for king and the word for righteousness. You see, melech is the Hebrew word for king, and tzedek is the Hebrew word for righteousness. And so, Melchizedek is the king of righteousness. But then the author of Hebrews points to his place, his city, in verse 2. He's the king of Salem. Salem, which was a city that would later be called Jerusalem, was the city of peace. So he's the king of righteousness. He's the king of peace. Then we have this, well, so far we're clear.

But then verse 3 comes, and we get a little confused. Because what we're told is that Melchizedek was without father, without mother, and without genealogy. And so now this sounds like Melchizedek just kind of appeared, right? Like poof, there he was, he engages with Abraham, and poof, away he goes, right? No beginning, no end, no mother, no father, no genealogy, no death. That's what it sounds like, right? And so in order to try to understand this, there have been some different ways that theologians have appropriated this. One is to say that this is a Christophany. So it's a big theological term that simply means that Melchizedek is a pre-incarnate Jesus. So before Jesus took on flesh, he actually appeared as Melchizedek. That's one way of thinking about it. Another way of trying to appropriate this is

to say he's an angel. Melchizedek's an angel. That's why he has no mother, no father. Now both of those are wrong. Like, I don't think they're wrong, I'm just going to say they're wrong, okay? They're wrong. And the reason why I would say they're wrong is because Genesis and Psalm 110 in Hebrews doesn't invite us to see Melchizedek as anything other than a human. Now a unique human, absolutely, but a human nonetheless. That's who he is. Hebrews, in saying that he was without father, without mother, without genealogy, is simply acknowledging that we're not told those things about him, which is actually odd in the book of Genesis. Because if you've read through the book of Genesis, maybe you've been doing that recently.

I know some of you are doing read through the Bible plans, right? And so maybe you just finished Genesis like a month ago, and you probably noticed there's a lot of genealogies, right? There's a lot of begettings, right? This person beget this person, and this person's mother is this person, and there's genealogies. And yet we then have this man, Melchizedek, and nothing is said about him. So it's a little strange. But the reason nothing is said about him is because we don't need to know, but also seemingly the author of Hebrews doesn't know. So when he says he's without father, without mother, without genealogy, he's simply saying we don't know these things. And the author is using these, he says, as a way of connecting Melchizedek to Jesus. He's typologically making a connection between Melchizedek and Jesus. But there's more than this, okay? There's more than simply the name, the city, the lack of genealogy. We're also told in verse 4 that Abraham gave him a tithe, and in verse 6 that he received a blessing.

Now both of these the author of Hebrews is pointing to to show Melchizedek's superiority over Abraham. So here's how the logic goes, okay? The logic goes like this. People would give a tithe to the priest, to the Levitical priest, because it was commanded in the law. But the Levitical priests don't exist yet because the Levitical priests come from the tribe of Levi, which isn't in existence yet. And so for Melchizedek to give a tithe to Abraham, it wasn't because the law dictated, or for Abraham to give a tithe to Melchizedek, it wasn't because the law dictated Melchizedek to do it. It's because, or for Abraham to do it. Man, it does get confusing, right? No, so the reason why he's giving a tithe to Melchizedek is because Melchizedek's actually in a place of superiority. And this is further demonstrated by the fact that Abraham is the one who is blessed by Melchizedek, because the author of Hebrews says the one who gives the blessing is the superior to the one who receives the initial blessing. So the logic is like this.

If Melchizedek is superior to Abraham, then Melchizedek must be superior to the tribe of Levi that comes from Abraham, right? He even said they were, Levi was still in Abraham's loins, right? He isn't born yet. So the whole point of this is to show us that Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, more significant than the Levitical priests. So now you might be sitting there going, what does this have to do with Jesus? And the answer is, everything. This has everything to do with Jesus, because the author of Hebrews is making the argument that Jesus is greater than the priests, because he comes from an order that the priests didn't even belong to, that existed before the priests, that existed in superiority over them. I mean, just think about the connections he's making, that he makes between Melchizedek and Jesus.

Melchizedek is the king of righteousness. 1 John chapter 2, Jesus Christ is the righteous one. Melchizedek's the king of peace. Ephesians chapter 2, Jesus is our peace. Melchizedek is the priest king. Jesus is the priest king, right? Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah, from the line of David, so that means he is the king of promise. But the priests didn't come from the line of David. They didn't come from the tribe of Judah. They came from the Levitical priesthood,

right? From the tribe of Levi. And so priests, Levitical priests couldn't be the king because they came from different tribes. They did kingly, priestly things. Sometimes the offices sort of overlapped, but Jesus is the only one who embodies both offices because he comes from the line of David, and he comes from a priesthood that's superior to Levi. Does that make sense? Of course, man.

I'm glad you have such confidence in me. So, but if that weren't enough, actually there's more because the order of Melchizedek is demonstrably better than the order of Levi because in verse 23 we're told that there were many priests, and there were many priests because they kept dying, right? Because they were natural men. They had to die. And so their time in office concluded, but Jesus's priesthood is forever. It's forever because he lives, because death wasn't strong enough, and because the tomb couldn't contain him.

What This Means For Us

So do you all see how amazing this is, the connections that the author of Hebrews is making? I mean, think about all that we've just talked about, right, in just these few minutes, moving quickly through it, right? The theological connections, the argument that's being made. I mean, this is pretty cool, isn't it? I mean, it's pretty remarkable, and now you have all kinds of fodder for your next dinner party, right? Just pull this out the next time you're sitting around with your friends, you know, talk about Melchizedek. But seriously, though, I could imagine that some of you are now wondering, though, okay, this is great, this is interesting, this is fascinating, Penny clearly nerded out this week, but what does this mean for me? And that's an important question. That is an important question, because we can have all the theological knowledge in the world, and it may not influence our heart, or our hands, or our minds at all.

So what does this mean for me? Well, that's how we're going to end the implications of this, what this means for us. And in verse 26, what we're told is that it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest. And then the author of Hebrews describes what he was like, what Jesus was like, holy and innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. What he's saying is Jesus was without sin. Now think about the Old Testament priests. They had training, they had knowledge, they had skill, they knew exactly what sacrifices were to be offered, they knew when they were to be done, but they still failed, and they faltered, and they made mistakes, and they sinned, like you do, like I do, right? Those priests needed to be forgiven, and to ask for God's grace, but not Jesus. He is holy, and innocent, and without sin, and what does he do with his holiness, and his innocence, and his sinlessness? He uses his sinlessness for sinful people. That's what we see in verse 27, he offered up himself, he went to the cross, he offered up himself, he made sacrifice, and he did it once. He offered one sacrifice, because the sacrifice of Christ is so great, that's all we need.

We don't need more sacrifices, we don't need the blood of bulls, or of rams, we don't need the temple rebuilt in Jerusalem, and to return to the Old Testament sacrificial system. No, because the blood of Christ is sufficient, that's all we need. He is greater and better than any other offering that has ever been given. You see, the author of Hebrews says in verse 11, that if perfection, perfection or that word could mean maturity, if it could be attainable by the Levitical priesthood, we wouldn't need Jesus's sacrifice, but it wasn't attainable by them. But Christ sacrificed, in verse 25, he is able to save to the uttermost. That word for the uttermost, it means to the fullest extent, that he is able to save completely, he is able to save forever.

So y'all think about that. Your sins, the sins you confessed earlier in the corporate confession, the sins you confessed in the silent confession, the sins that are that are in your life that are

evident to everyone around you, and the sins that you kept keep hidden, all of those sins, if you are trusting in Christ, if you are resting in his sacrifice, those sins are forgiven. He saves to the uttermost, to the fullest extent. That's what he does. The Old Testament sacrifices, they covered sin, but they didn't wash them away. They need sacrifices to be offered again and again and again, but Christ sacrificed his blood, it makes us whiter than snow. And y'all, if that wasn't enough, this great priest makes intercession for us.

And so we return to where we began, that Christ is our advocate who stands before the Father, and he speaks on our behalf, and he doesn't claim that we're perfect or that we gave it a good try. No, instead he claims his perfection and the work he has done on our behalf. He intercedes, and he says that he has given his life for us. He declares that we belong to him. He has provided a way for us to approach the Father. You see, friends, we do need a priest, and that priest has come, and that priest has offered himself, and he has done what no one else could do. This holy and innocent one, this one unstained of the order of Melchizedek, this priest forever, he is the one we need, and he is the one who has been given. He is the priest who saves, even you, even me. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you. Thank you that you have given us exactly what we need. You've given us our great high priest, Jesus, who has lived and died and risen again, who has offered up himself as a perfect sacrifice so that our sins would be forgiven, so that we would be washed whiter than snow. And so we pray, Father, that we would turn to him, that we would fix our eyes on Christ, and that we would look to him and him only, approaching you with confidence, knowing that he intercedes for us. He is our advocate who declares that we belong to you. And so, Father, fill us with thanksgiving. Turn us to you, and help us to cling to Christ, our great high priest, in whose name we pray, and God's people said together, Amen.