

ONCE FOR ALL

Hebrews—Chapter 7

Study 8

A Better Priest

Hebrews 7 is the halfway point and, therefore, a good place to recap some of the highlights of chapters 1-6. One important highlight is the relational experience God desires to enter into with us. God wants to connect with us directly in every way, whatever our circumstances (Hebrews 1:1-2). God loves us and has revealed this love by giving Himself for our sins (Hebrews 1:3). This love compelled God to become part of the human race, forever possessing the form of man (Hebrews 2). In love and hope, God has built us a home where we can find rest and spend quality time together (Hebrews 3-4). His love toward us is based on His obedience, not ours. And the sure promises of His Word, rather than our promises to Him that often fail (Hebrews 5-6). Therefore, Hebrews 1-6 has brought us a better God, becoming a better man, building a better home, inviting us into a better rest and providing us with a better obedience based upon better promises.

So far the book of Hebrews has exploded with freshness and power as we have seen Paul's focus on this "something better" theme. This next chapter is no exception as it delivers yet another intentional transition from human dependence to God—this time from an earthly priesthood to the divine priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Melchizedek—A Pattern of Christ

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "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, remains a priest continually" (Hebrews 7:1-3).

Who was Melchizedek? There have been many speculations about him, but one thing is sure—we don't know. When we come across something in the Bible that is not clear, it is likely because it is not vital for us to know. This is the case with Melchizedek. His identity is not the focus of his inclusion in the book of Hebrews. It is the priesthood of Melchizedek that is important, and that is clearly outlined in the context of this chapter. One reason why Melchizedek is important is because he, as a priest, represents Jesus. (Additionally, he is the king of Salem which represents Christ as King of kings. In these two things, he is a pattern of Christ.)

"Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises" (Hebrews 7:4-6).

This is where Christ's priesthood is identified. He was not of the tribe of Levi, the chosen tribe for the priesthood. Christ's priesthood is before Levi was even chosen to be priest. We find that Christ's priesthood was patterned after Melchizedek, the one to whom even Abraham paid tithe. And because the Levites came from Abraham, then in Abraham the Levites paid tithe to Melchizedek. Because Melchizedek was the first priest and Abraham first paid tithes to him, Melchizedek's is the greater priesthood. We should take note that Melchizedek

NOTES

"God having provided something better for us." —Hebrews 11:40

All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

blessed Abraham. What does the Scripture say about this blessing?

“Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better” (Hebrews 7:7).

Here again, see the “something better” theme that runs through the entire book of Hebrews. Once again it is something vitally better. The priesthood of Melchizedek is without beginning and without end. This is something substantially better because Melchizedek is a pattern of Christ. The conclusion, then is, that Christ offers us a better priesthood than Levi.

Salvation In Christ

“Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him” (Hebrews 7:8-10).

We may derive from these texts that the basis of salvation is Jesus Christ. This is where the New Testament teaches us what it means to be “in Christ.” Theologians call this the “in Christ motif.” Levi, the Bible says, was in the loins of his father, Abraham, when he paid tithe to Melchizedek. Therefore, Levi, though he was not yet living, is accounted as paying tithe to Melchizedek. This is true in the sense that Levi is a direct flesh-and-blood descendant of Abraham.

What this means, in the context of the gospel, is that we have appropriated to us everything that Jesus did. When we are “in Christ,” and we accept Jesus as our Savior, we become His descendants, His children. And, just like Levi, all that Jesus has done is accounted to us as though we actually did it ourselves. The biblical truth that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek in Abraham directs us to an even greater truth that humanity paid the wages of sin and lived the life of obedience in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14; 1 Corinthians 1:29-30).

Jesus Christ is our righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). There is no biblical truth that needs to be repeated more frequently, dwelt upon more earnestly, or established more firmly in our minds than this. Everything Christ accomplished in His life, death and resurrection is accounted to us “in Him.” It is only “in Him” that the entire world exists (Acts 17:28; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). As we accept our position in Him, we are assured that His death and life of obedience are ours. Our obedience springs forth as the fruit of His life and reveals that we abide in Him. Our salvation is not in the fruit; our salvation is entirely in Jesus Christ. If there is no fruit, then there is no faith in Christ. However, we are not saved by the fruit, but rather by accepting our position “in Christ.”

Since this one truth is so vital for our understanding, we will repeat the matter again from the beginning—What Christ did as head of this new family, we do in Him. He is our representative; He became flesh; He became us. He did not become simply a man, He became flesh, and everyone that should be born into His family was represented in Jesus Christ when He lived here in that flesh. Because of this, everything Christ did we are given credit for just as if we did it ourselves. That is, if we chose to be connected with Him, we did it “in Him.” Christ is not a representative outside of us, disconnected from us; but as Levi paid tithe in Abraham, everyone who should afterwards be born into this spiritual family, did what Christ did.

Let’s see what this means with reference to vicarious suffering. It was not that Jesus Christ came from outside, simply stepping into our place as an outsider; but by joining Himself to us by birth, all humanity was brought together in the divine head, Jesus Christ. He suffered on the cross. Now the whole family in Jesus Christ was crucified. “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead,” or as the New King James says, “All died.” (2 Corinthians 5:14, KJV). What we want in our experience is to enter into the fact that we did die in Him. But while it is true that Jesus Christ paid the whole price, bore every grief, was humanity itself, yet, it is also true that no man receives eternal benefit from that except he receives Christ and is born again. Only those

who are twice born can enter into the kingdom of God. Those who are born in the flesh must be born again, born of the Spirit, in order that we may avail ourselves of what Jesus Christ did in the flesh, that we may really be in Him.

The work of Christ is to bestow the character of God in us; in the meantime, God looks upon Christ and His perfect character instead of upon our sinful character. The very moment that we let Him empty us of self by believing on Jesus Christ and receive Him as our personal Savior, God looks upon Him as our personal representative. He then does not see us in our sinful condition. Instead, He sees Christ. It is important that we understand the gospel significance of being “in Christ.”

A Change in the Law

“Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law” (Hebrews 7:11-12).

Here we come across a statement declaring that the law has been changed. It has been the longstanding position of most gospel-believing Christians that God’s moral law is still valid this side of the cross. Murder, stealing, bearing false witness, etc., is still sin (Romans 3:31; 1 Timothy 1). Hebrews 7:12 is a reference to a law other than God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments. This is clear as we consider the context both of the text in question as well as the entire book of Hebrews. Both the priesthood of Levi, as well as the sacrifices connected with the sanctuary, were ordained by God in what is known as the ceremonial law. All of these sacrificial laws pointed to Christ, the true sacrifice and High Priest. His life, death and resurrection, as well as His ordination to the heavenly priesthood, fulfilled these ceremonial laws. This is the law that was nailed to the cross. The ceremonial law with its corresponding sacrifices, sabbaths, new moons and special rituals are no longer binding upon believers (Colossians 2:14-17; Ephesians 2:15).

“For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies: ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (Hebrews 7:13-17).

Here we see a clear comparison made between two priesthoods. One was from Levi and the other from Melchizedek. One was spoken by Moses and was based on fleshly or carnal lineage. The law given by Moses only allowed the descendents of Levi to serve as priests. The other pointed to Christ who, though He came from the tribe of Judah, fulfilled the description of Melchizedek having no beginning or end, but possessing an endless life. Again, there is a lot of curiosity surrounding Melchizedek, but we should be content to know one thing—that God has allowed Melchizedek a place in the Bible if for no other reason than this. What greater purpose could there be for someone’s life than to be a type of Christ?

“For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God” (Hebrews 7:18-19). Here we see in a stronger way what is meant by the earlier “change” of the law. It is nothing less than a disannulling or canceling of the law. This of course can never be said of God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments. We do not, even as saved believers, make “void the law” that says thou shalt not kill, “God forbid” (Romans 3:31). This is the clear teaching of the Scriptures, especially in Hebrews where we find more devotion to the fulfillment of the ceremonial law than anywhere in the New Testament.

Once and For All

“And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: ‘The Lord has sworn and will not relent, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”),’ by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:20-25).

Praise God! If you will affirm with your own words these wonderful truths that we have just read, they will begin to take root in your heart and life (Romans 10:9-11). In these words there is salvation power. Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost! Say it again and again, and let your heart become saturated with hope. This is the word of the living God, the living priest, not a carnal, powerless man. Get the focus off yourself. Whether you have failure or success, forget those things and get your focus on Christ (Philippians 3:13). We stand immovable by faith in Christ. True, we are not good enough, our history is too imperfect to enable us to stand before a holy God. Our only hope is Jesus both now and for eternity. Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. We dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

“For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever” (Hebrews 7:26-28).

Did you hear what Paul just said? Take this one truth just as it reads because it is stated no less than seven times between chapters 7-10. Jesus made a one-time sacrifice for all sin, for all people. Once, just say that word—once. Say it again—ONCE! Jesus made the sacrifice once, and it is now complete. It was a complete sacrificial atonement that Jesus made on the cross, and it remains complete. There is nothing man can add to the sacrificial atonement of Christ for the remission of sins. We cannot re-enact it, duplicate it, or do without it. All God asks is that we personally accept what Christ has done, once for all.

Summary

Each one of us has a destiny to be acknowledged and lived out in Christ. We have been given the gift of salvation, purchased by the blood of Jesus. The sanctuary service of the Jewish nation, with the priests, offerings, and ceremonies given in the law of Moses, pointed to the ultimate sacrifice and priestly work of Jesus Christ in heaven for us. Jesus Christ is the one-time sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. He died for all, leaving no man, woman or child out of the circle of God’s great love. And He continues, even now, to shed this love abroad by Jesus’ constant intercession on behalf of all those for whom He has given His life.