

HEBREWS 7:1-11
MELCHIZEDEK pt.1

You may have heard this question before...”As Presbyterians you don’t have people walk up front to accept Christ do you?”

Correct – not a general practice.

“Well then, how do people get saved?”

What is really being asked?

“How do you know or remember when you got saved if you don’t do something like that? How do you know if you’re right with God?”

That is a practice from a tradition that came out of American Revivalism, and it’s neither right nor wrong, better nor worse than other traditions. AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO HEBREWS 7?

In the OT the issue wasn’t “Are you saved?” but rather “Have my sins been atoned for?” Am at one or OK with God? Are my sins atoned for? Atonement = at-one-ment. In the OT, the way that was expressed was through the ministry of a High Priest.

It’s a bit odd for those from a “walk the aisle” tradition to attend a PCA church and not see an altar call. In terms of Christian tradition, the altar call is really not that old. IMAGINE THE SHOCK of a Jew to learn that this Jesus movement had no real life high priest on site serving in a temple. That tradition was thousands of years old. We can understand why some of the audience of this letter were having second thoughts.

We’ve encountered Melchizedek several times and now the author is going to explain who he is. Preface with Psalm 110

Warning: This passage is complicated. I thought about reading it to you in French because it might sound like it anyway. So hang in here. I’m only going to read v. 1-11 – the easy section of the chapter.

Hebrews 7 Living Bible (TLB)

7 This Melchizedek was king of the city of Salem and also a priest of the Most High God. When Abraham was returning home after winning a great battle against many kings, Melchizedek met him and blessed him; **2** then Abraham took a tenth of all he had won in the battle and gave it to Melchizedek.

Melchizedek’s name means “Justice,” (righteousness) so he is the King of Justice (righteousness); and he is also the King of Peace because of the name of his city, Salem, which means “Peace.”

3 Melchizedek had no father or mother^(a) and there is no record of any of his ancestors. He was never born and he never died but his life is like that of the Son of God—a priest forever.

4 See then how great this Melchizedek is:

(a) Even Abraham, the first and most honored of all God’s chosen people, gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils he took from the kings he had been fighting. **5** One could understand why Abraham would do this if Melchizedek had been a Jewish priest, for later on God’s people were required by law to give gifts to help their priests because the priests were their relatives. **6** But Melchizedek was not a relative, and yet Abraham paid him.

(b) Melchizedek placed a blessing upon mighty Abraham, ⁷ and as everyone knows, a person who has the power to bless is always greater than the person he blesses.

⁸ (c) The Jewish priests, though mortal, received tithes; but we are told that Melchizedek lives on.

⁹ (d) One might even say that Levi himself (the ancestor of all Jewish priests, of all who receive tithes), paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham. ¹⁰ For although Levi wasn't born yet, the seed from which he came was in Abraham when Abraham paid the tithes to Melchizedek.

¹¹ (e) If the Jewish priests and their laws had been able to save us, why then did God need to send Christ as a priest with the rank of Melchizedek, instead of sending someone with the rank of Aaron—the same rank all other priests had?

7:25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

9:13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Some of you are thinking, "I got up and came to hear a history lesson about some mysterious dead king with a funny name. How does this relate to us, to me?"

*FRONTLOADED APPLICATION: It is all designed for us to understand that we have a great king and priest.

The author is getting to a central argument of his letter.

Jesus, who is seated at the right hand of the Father, has a high priestly status that is greater than that of Aaron and the OT priesthood. That Levitical priesthood was imperfect and only a shadow and type of the true substance to come – Jesus the true king of righteousness and the heavenly and eternal high priest of his people. And this Jesus is the one who can truly give you a clean conscience before God.

We are not so far removed from the original audience as we might think.

My guess is that some of you are secretly wrestling with the questions, "How can I have a clean conscience before God? I keep blowing it. How can God forgive me...AGAIN?"

Is this all true? Does it matter? Is it worth it? If it let people know that I'm a Christian, that I go to church, that I believe in Jesus – not just God- they'll think I'm crazy. They'll think I'm some weird conservative or some sort of spiritual Jesus freak. They'll put me in with whatever "religious" group they don't like. They may mock me as old-fashioned or unscientific or on the 'wrong side of history'. IS IT WORTH IT?"

In their own way, those were the issues facing the original audience of this letter. So, if you can relate in the least, then listen up to what the Holy Spirit is saying through this letter to YOU.

APPLICATION it is all designed for us to understand that we have a great king and priest. He is big enough to conquer our enemies and great enough to forgive our sins AND cleanse our conscience. THAT IS GOOD NEWS for all of us. Who doesn't have something they wouldn't want to put in a video on the big screen?

"The line between all that we want to be and all that we hate is thinner than anyone wants to acknowledge." Matt Chandler ?? We need a Savior who can bring forgiveness and a clean conscience.

Jump to 7:25 and 9:14 THE KEY TAKEAWAYS

25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

9:14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

REMEMBER THE CONTEXT

Hebrew Christians are having second thoughts about leaving Judaism and their spiritual roots. Perhaps one of the hardest things to understand and deal with is the end of the sacrificial system with a high priest. Rightly so, that was at the core of their faith and practice for thousands of years. It is hard to give up that which is visible and tangible to hold fast to something totally invisible – the sacrificial work of Christ.

** this is one reason why Jesus gave us the Lord's Table – to accommodate our human need to see, touch and taste the reality of spiritual truths.

v. 4 says to “consider / observe / think intently about” this man Melchizedek, so we're going to do that. It's a command – given first to the Hebrew audience, but also to us.

We can see why special attention was given because the teaching of Jesus as a high priest was a new concept. There are no gospel references to Jesus as a High Priest. Hebrews is the primary source for this concept.

It would have been hard for the converted Jew to accept because according to the OT scripture, the high priest had to be from the line of Aaron / Levi, not Judah, like Jesus. Their hesitation and uncertainty were understandable. THUS, the lengthy argument explaining why and how Jesus is superior to the Levitical priest of the OT. The argument will continue later in the letter as we shall see in the weeks to come.

What the author is doing is making the case that Jesus as high priest does NOT conflict with the OT system but rather, He fulfills it. The priesthood of Jesus is better than that of Aaron. It is more glorious, and it is FOREVER.

Through Melchizedek, Abraham is reminded of who gave him the victory – God most High. Thus Abraham offered the tithe.

Melchizedek only appears in Gen 14, Ps 110, then Heb 8x

Psalm 110 text...read as call to worship

1The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at My right hand

Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

...

4The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,

“You are a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek.”

He is a king and priest – odd combination

Gen 14 is the first time the term priest is used in the bible.

The role of priest for the Jews wasn't instituted for another 600 years under Moses. The ancient cultures, such as the Egyptians had them, but not the Jews. Yet here we see that there was a priest of the “God most High” at the time of Abraham. This lays the foundation for accepting a priest other than those from the line of Aaron and Levi.

Melchizedek is treated and presented as a “type” of Christ. **“Typology is God’s fingerprint on history”.** **It is how God weaves into history people and events and institutions that prefigure and reveal the meaning of his kingdom and the unfolding salvation in the life and work of the Messiah – Rayburn.**

There are many such “types” in the OT and they embody aspects of the ultimate truths to be revealed in Jesus. They help us understand the person and work of Christ.

EX: one obvious example is the sacrificial lamb of the OT sacrifice. As John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Here in Hebrews we have Melchizedek presented as a type of Christ – in his roles as priest and king. The name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”. He was also called the “king of peace”. Are there any better ways to describe Jesus?

SIDE ROAD – there was significant discussion of Melchizedek during period of early church. From Dead Sea scrolls.

At time of Hebrews, there was much talk of Melchizedek and how he fit into the storyline of salvation.

v.3 mysterious text – disputed identity

- pre-incarnate appearance of Christ?

- “reference to Shem”

- extra biblical tradition were well known, maybe by audience, so author references those traditions (v.3) to compare him as being “like the son of God” – the author does not confirm or deny identity. He uses the reference to bolster his argument regarding Christ as the ultimate superior priest. (CHAD BIRD)

EX: it’s as if the author is using a movie reference or a reference from a well-known story or literary figure to connect with his audience.

As best as I can tell from scripture, he was a real person – King and Priest in Salem at time of Abraham. Later his name and role are co-opted by David in Ps 110.

v.4ff How Melchizedek is greater than Abraham and Levi.

How is Jesus a greater priest? Not from Levi / Aaron

He is better because he is from the order of Melchizedek, who received tithes from Levi via Abraham. **When Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek it was as if Levi and his descendants were doing so, thus showing the superiority of Melchizedek to Levi. This is a biblical principle of “CORPORATE SOLIDARITY”.** Abraham represents his descendants, i.e. Levi / Aaron. The same principle is a key aspect of salvation – Jesus represents us and we have corporate solidarity with him.

“Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek via Abraham”

The greater blesses the lesser, so Melchizedek is superior to Abraham (Levi).

Abraham is blessed by Melchizedek. Who must he be??

Abraham gives him a tithe. Who is this guy? He outranks Abraham and Abraham knows it.

This sets the scene for a non-Levitical priesthood of an order so great that he blesses Abraham. God blessed Abraham in Gen 12; now Melchizedek does so in Gen 14. This is one remarkable guy.

How do we tie him to Jesus?

Hundreds of years later his name comes up again- the only other time in the OT in Psalm 110

A passage picked up Jesus in Matthew 22

David as king refers to the LORD (Yahweh) speaking to the lord (Adonai), the only one greater than the King – a future king that David looks up to. “A priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Remember- Let scripture interpret scripture
2000 BC Melchizedek is with Abraham
1000 BC – David refers to Melchizedek
60 AD?? Author of Hebrews connects the dots to show the superiority of Christ.

Abraham had been called by God to be a blessing – Gen 12:3 – but here, it is Melchizedek who blesses Abraham.
Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, Levi, and even David. He was king of Salem (Jerusalem before David was) and was a “type of Messiah or Christ)

Jesus is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The whole argument is this - Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, Melchizedek is greater than Levi; Jesus’ priesthood is according to the order of Melchizedek and therefore Jesus is greater than the priesthood of Levi and Aaron and the Old Testament priesthood.

TURNING POINT AND THE HINGE QUESTION...

v. 11 – If the Jewish priests and their laws had been able to save us, why then did God need to send Christ as a priest with the rank of Melchizedek, instead of sending someone with the rank of Aaron—the same rank all other priests had?

That is exactly what you’ve been thinking all morning, right?

Why the need for a superior priest???

The Levitical priesthood is temporary. Jesus is eternal – one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus.

Here’s what just happened: the Scriptures, this book that we read from every week, just said, “If you and I could be made right by obeying the Law, then why did God send Jesus?” That will be topic of the rest of the chapter.

As I mentioned a few weeks ago, the original audience is probably hearing from family and friends who are saying, “Come back to Judaism. Come back to your roots. We have a high priest from the line of Levi.”

This won’t mean much to us in our culture, but the audience was being told by the author that they have a Better Priest from a superior order – that of Melchizedek.

For us today, this is a reminder of our spiritual roots in the OT.

Read it, and look for Jesus in its pages.

We can’t really understand all that Jesus is if we don’t appreciate what He fulfills from the OT.

The laws and sacrifices of the OT were never meant to show us how to be saved. They were pointers to Jesus.

He is eternal and He is able to bless us.

He ever lives to intercede for us, and his sacrifice for sin was final.

We go through the week warring against the world, the flesh, and the devil so it’s good to come together and celebrate and remember that Jesus forgives and cleanses from all sin.

The bible and the book of Hebrews are not moral stories that teach a moral lesson about how we need to go out and be good nice people. Hebrews is about the One ultimate prophet, priest, and king who saves, redeems, renews, and restores.

When it comes to our fight against sin, we need a priest who is eternal, compassionate, sympathetic, and powerful.

To drive this point home with his audience, the author compares Jesus to Melchizedek.

“If right standing with God could occur because of good book keeping, we’d be worshiping Moses and not Jesus.”- Philip Yancey – What’s so amazing about Grace?

But we do worship Jesus because he alone can bring atonement, forgiveness and peace with God.

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