

A Better Priesthood

Hebrews: Jesus is Better • Hebrews 7:1 – 8:6 (PART 2)

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It is good to be together this morning, and it is so good to be back in the land of cheese! I am thankful to brother Vermillion for preaching last week, and I am thankful for the opportunity to be away for a few days to attend our daughter's graduation from Freed-Hardeman University down in Tennessee. She is back for another week or so, and we are glad to have Brannon with us as well. And then, this past Tuesday, we celebrated 30 years of wedded bliss! It has been a great week, but it is especially good to be together with God's people this morning. If you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), we are glad to have you with us, and we would invite you to fill out an online visitor card by using the QR code on the front of the bulletin or by going to our website at fourlakeschurch.org/visitor. Or, you can use the cards in the pews this morning – not just if you are visiting with us, but also for special questions and prayer concerns. You can put those in the box on the wall in the entryway or give your card to me on your way out this morning.

We are here this morning to worship God, to encourage each other, and to preach the love of God, the good news that God loves us. Jesus stepped into this world in human form, he died on the cross, he was buried, but then he was raised up on the first day of the week. We obey the good news by believing it, by turning away from sin, by confessing our belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and by obeying his command to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. And we've had many examples this week, starting with an update from the Lord's church down in Niceville, Florida. Sounds like a nice place to live, but they posted online this week and say that "Steve and Scarlett obeyed the Gospel and were born again this morning." So good to see it!

This next one comes from T.J. in Columbia, South Carolina. T.J. says, "Greetings family of the Most High God!! I am a 17-year-old, high school senior and basketball player. After studying the Word of God for some time I obeyed the gospel last night." And then he quotes 1 Timothy 4:12, where Paul says, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." I'm just stepping out on a limb here, but I am guessing that T.J. is on the right up here, but we welcome our new brother T.J. to the body of Christ this week!

We have a quick update from the North Las Vegas congregation, where they say, "Welcome Mykhal Stewart, who obeyed the true gospel of Christ and was added to the church you read of in scripture." Good news from Las Vegas this week!

We recently got a message from the church down in Key West, Florida. This is the church my grandfather helped establish when he was in the Navy back in the early 1940's, this is the place we got to visit last summer, and this is where we sent a huge box of nearly brand new Spanish songbooks last year. They have a thriving Spanish ministry down there. But they say, "Praise the Lord! Sister Mercedes Martinez was added to the Lord's church." Great to see this! We have worshiped in this building. We have attended the Spanish-speaking service down there.

And this last one comes to us from the Lord's church down in Prattville, Alabama, where our own LaVerne Becker is now a member. They posted this week and they say,

We welcome our new sister in Christ, Edwina Yamada, who was baptized this morning! She has been attending with us occasionally for a few years and has been made to feel loved, which helped her make her decision for Christ. She first came at the invitation of Toni Neal, who was a co-worker at Walmart. Becky Shirley has also spent time with her, teaching and encouraging her, and helped her come to her decision. We welcome her into God's family at Prattville.

So good to see this! We share these pictures and these stories to try to illustrate what it means to obey the gospel. We want you to know that God loves you and wants you to be saved. And if you have not yet obeyed the gospel yourself, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside after worship today or reach out using the contact information on the website or on the bulletin, and we would love to study together.

This morning we return to our study of Hebrews, and today we are partway through the middle section of this book, where we focus on the priesthood of Jesus. In Chapter 7, we're learning that Jesus is from a BETTER PRIESTHOOD. We've split this into two parts; we started two weeks ago, and we conclude this morning. In Chapter 8, we learn that Jesus represents a BETTER COVENANT (a new covenant, as opposed to the old covenant). In Chapter 9, we'll learn that as our priest, Jesus serves in a BETTER SANCTUARY. And in Chapter 10, we'll learn that Jesus has offered a BETTER SACRIFICE. And these are some pretty weird terms, aren't they? As Christians, I think most of us are at least a little bit familiar with some of this, but think about this from a worldly perspective. We're talking about priests, and sacrifices, and sanctuaries, and temples, and blood, and covenants. This is so weird! It sounds so barbaric by today's standards, this sounds so irrelevant to those of us living in modern times, and yet, here we are! Today, we return to the rest of Hebrews 7 (and actually continuing into the first few verses of Chapter 8). And it's this section where we look at Jesus as being from a BETTER PRIESTHOOD, the priesthood of Melchizedek.

Now remember: The author wanted to bring this up way back in Chapter 5, but they couldn't handle it! They had come to need milk and not solid food. They were infants, and that's not a compliment. So, he takes that detour through the rest of Chapter 5 and into Chapter 6, where he encourages them to grow up. He wants them to get to a point where they can handle the meat of God's word. ****PPT**** Now, just a detour from the detour, this is a picture of our anniversary dinner up at Ishnala this past Tuesday evening. That was one of the most awesome meals we have ever had! It came highly recommended by Silas and Kenna, so we gave it a shot, and we were not disappointed. That was a steak unlike any steak I had ever seen before. This is a meal for two, by the way! But under the two lobster tails we have a 24 ounce boneless rib-eye. Amazing! But to handle a meal like this, you need to do some chewing! This is the real deal. This is something you need to work up to. Everything I've ever eaten in my life over the past 50 years actually led up to this meal right here. Babies don't eat stuff like this. They can't. And that's the issue back at the end of Chapter 5: These people needed to grow up so they could handle what this guy had to say about Jesus, based on Melchizedek.

The reference to Melchizedek, of course, goes back to Genesis 14. Abraham and Lot move into the Promised Land, Lot gets kidnapped by a coalition of foreign kings, Abraham rustles up his own personal army to go rescue Lot, and when they return, they are met along the road by this guy named Melchizedek, who is described as the king of Salem and priest of God most high. Melchizedek presents Abraham with a gift of bread and wine, and Abraham responds by giving Melchizedek a tithe (10% of all of the spoils of war).

Two weeks ago, then, we finally got to the “steak” (in Hebrews 7), and we noted that as our High Priest, the priesthood of Jesus, like that of Melchizedek is PERPETUAL. So, just as Melchizedek pops on the scene with no genealogy allowing him to be a priest under the Law of Moses, so also Jesus is not from the tribe of Levi, but like that of Melchizedek, his priesthood is *“perpetual.”*

We then noted that like the priesthood of Melchizedek, the priesthood of Jesus is also GREATER than the priesthood of Aaron and Levi. And the reason is: Abraham (the father of the nation) gave a tithe to Melchizedek (not the other way around); and since Levi was still in the loins of Abraham (so to speak), it is as if Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek, indicating that Melchizedek is greater than Levi. And the author is making the point that Jesus is like Melchizedek in that his priesthood is greater than that of Levi.

And then we noted that Jesus serving according to the priesthood of Melchizedek is a GUARANTEE OF A BETTER COVENANT. And the reason is: The fact that Jesus is now serving as a great high priest indicates that there must have been a change of covenant. Jesus wasn’t qualified to serve as priest under the Law of Moses, but he is serving as priest; therefore, we must now be under a new and better covenant. We’ll have more on this in Chapter 8, but the argument starts here. Like Melchizedek, Jesus is greater and he has brought with him a better covenant.

Well, we pick up today in the middle of Hebrews 7. We are still in the *“meat”* of the word this morning, and I want us to look at three more reasons why the priesthood of Jesus is better than the Levitical priesthood, based on this comparison to Melchizedek.

- I. So, let’s press forward into verses 23-25, as we learn that the priesthood of Jesus is also PERMANENT (as opposed to those priests who served under the Law of Moses).

And we might think this is the same as what we learned two weeks ago, with the priesthood of Jesus being PERPETUAL (like that of Melchizedek); however, the emphasis here is not on the priesthood in general, but the emphasis here is on Jesus as priest personally. Let’s start today, then, with Hebrews 7:23-25,

²³ The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, ²⁴ but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 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.

The author points out, then, that the priests under the Law of Moses were constantly dying. There were more of them, *“because they were prevented by death from continuing.”* And this goes back to the beginning. We think of Aaron, the first high priest, and it almost seems as if God made sure his death was incredibly public. Going back to Numbers 23, God told Moses that Aaron was about to die, he was to strip Aaron of his priestly garments, he was to transfer those garments to Aaron’s son, Eleazar, and then Aaron would die quite publicly on the mountain. And this process would be repeated over, and over, and over again. From the very beginning

of the Levitical priesthood, everybody knew not only that the priesthood itself was temporary, but that each individual priest was temporary.

Jesus, however, because he lives forever, “holds his priesthood permanently.” Under Moses, the priest that helps you today might not be around to help you tomorrow. And if the guy assigned to make sure you are okay with God might die himself at any moment, that’s not a good situation! Jesus, though, **“always lives to make intercession”** for us. He serves **“permanently.”**

I think we understand the value of continuity in other areas of life. Maybe we have a good supervisor at work, things are going well for several years, and then we have a transition (a death, a retirement, a promotion) and everything falls apart. Or maybe we think about a team. We have a good coach, or a quarterback, a change is made, and there may be a sense of chaos for a little bit. The same thing happened under the Law with the Levitical priesthood. Due to death, there was a constant turnover. You might have a good one like Eli, but then his degenerate sons would take over, and the cycle repeats. Jesus, though, serves permanently, uninterrupted.

And this permanent priesthood allows Jesus to **“save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since he always lives to make intercession....”** Several weeks ago, somebody turned in an interesting question that I hope we can look at in much greater detail over the coming weeks, but if I could summarize, someone was asking, “When we talk about making a sacrifice as a payment for sin, exactly who is getting paid? To be redeemed is to be ‘bought back.’ Who gets that payment?” And that is a great question! And if I understand it correctly, we aren’t saved from Satan, but we are saved from God. The sacrifice, then, appeases God. And we get just a taste of this here. As our High Priest, Jesus lives forever to make **“intercession”** for us. We’ve sinned, God has problem with that, and Jesus intercedes. Jesus is the go-between, calming the wrath of an angry God. And this is our greatest problem in life – not trouble with our finances, or trouble with our children, or trouble at work – no, our problem is that we’ve sinned and God has a problem with that. We are lost and need to be saved. And that’s where Jesus comes in. According to verse 25, Jesus (as our priest) **“is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him.”** That word **“forever”** indicates there is no expiration date on our salvation. I bought some strawberries this week that were covered in mold within just a few hours. Not cool! On the other hand, I have some emergency food in my camping gear that is good through the year 2050. Those freeze-dried eggs will outlive me, but they will expire. Jesus, though, is able to save **“forever.”**

And in keeping with the idea that Hebrews was first written to encourage these early Christians to keep on keeping on, let’s note that Jesus saves **“those who draw near to God through Him.”** Drawing near is something we have to do continually. It’s not that we’re saved and coast on out, but drawing near to God is a lifelong process of repentance, the lifelong process of redirecting our hearts toward God. Do not turn back! Jesus is our priest permanently.

- II. As we come to the next paragraph here, we notice that Jesus as a priest is PERFECT FOREVER, as opposed to the Levitical priests, who were flawed.

Let’s notice verses 26-28, where the author says,

²⁶ For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; ²⁷ who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. ²⁸ For the Law appoints men as high priests who are

weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

In verse 26, Jesus (as our high priest) is described as ***“holy, innocent, [and] undefiled.”*** What we’re talking about here is the absence of sin. As our high priest, Jesus is uncontaminated, unstained by sin, unpolluted, pure in every way. He lived among sinful people, he ate with sinful people, he spent time with sinful people, but he never gave in to sin himself. He was tempted in every way, yet without sin (as we learned back in Hebrews 4:15). This is in contrast to those priests under the Law of Moses who DID give in to sin. Those men, before they could offer sacrifices for the people, first had to offer sacrifices for themselves. The priests under the Law of Moses were ***“weak.”*** They were beset with human weakness. Several weeks ago, a friend with some connection to Manitowoc posted a sign, perhaps from a church up that way. In case you can’t read it, the sign says, “Confession today (Saturday) will be until exactly 5:30 PM. There is only one priest available for confession today. Make your confession direct to the point and confess only your sins and offenses. No need to explain why you did it. Thank you very much.” That right there illustrates the downside of having a human priest who is weak. I sense some frustration here! Jesus, though, is ***“perfect forever.”*** And this is one more reason why Jesus is a better priest than anyone who served in the Levitical priesthood, and any other human priest, for that matter. Jesus is ***“perfect forever.”***

III. Before we wrap it up this morning, let’s look at one final lesson from this section, as we move into the first paragraph of Hebrews 8, and as we note that Jesus, serving in the likeness of Melchizedek, participates in a A MORE EXCELLENT MINISTRY.

Let’s take a look at Hebrews 8:1-6,

¹ Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ² a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. ³ For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. ⁴ Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; ⁵ who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “SEE,” He says, “THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.” ⁶ But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.

I love that this preacher actually tells us that he is getting to the main point! And the main point is: You know all of those benefits outlined in Chapter 7? All of these are fulfilled perfectly in Jesus, ***“We have such a high priest,”*** he says. And according to verse 6, ***“He has obtained a more excellent ministry.”*** In between these two statements, the highlight is that Jesus’ ministry is better because he’s now serving in heaven. He’s serving, not in an earthly temple, but in the ***“true sanctuary,”*** not on earth, but ***“in the heavens.”*** Jesus, in fact, has ***“taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”*** No human priest can say this. Jesus is better. We think of how cool it is to have friends in high places. We have a friend in the highest of all places.

When we were in Tennessee last week, we drove by the main bank downtown Henderson. Back when we were engaged, my wife was adopted by the family of the woman who was the president of that bank. My wife babysat her children. Well, when it was time for us to buy a house in Wisconsin, we had to send a down-payment, and the bank in Janesville wanted a cashier’s check. Well, that was a problem! We were poor college

students in Tennessee. We had the \$2,000 (or whatever it was) in checking, but we needed it in the form of a cashier's check. Well, we walked into the local bank through those marble columns, and just as we walked up to the teller, this woman (the bank president) walked up behind us, and without even knowing what we needed, she said to the teller, "You do whatever these two kids ask you to do!" That bank took a risk, converting our personal check into a cashier's check. That's the value of having friends in high places. So also, Jesus, as our priest is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. His ministry as a priest is *"more excellent"* than any other. He's not serving with incense, and lamps, and dead pigeons, but Jesus serves at the right hand of God. The Law of Moses was a shadow; Jesus is the light. The Law of Moses was a copy; Jesus is the original. Jesus is better!

Conclusion:

I know we've looked at some meat in God's word this morning. But as we back away from it, we may not understand everything there is to know about Melchizedek, but I do think we understand that Jesus' priesthood is better. That's awesome! But I hope we never forget that we really do need a priest. We need a go-between. In that passage Elijah read for us earlier (from Nahum), we were reminded that God is avenging and wrathful. He punishes those who are guilty. We need a priest to speak up for us, and thankfully, Jesus is that priest. The Lord truly is good. So, if you are aware of sin in your life, if you know there's something wrong that needs to be fixed, take that to the Lord, but do it on his terms (as we noted at the beginning of our study this morning). We have an advocate. We have a representative in heaven. Our role is to believe the message. Our role is to turn away from sin. Our role is to humble ourselves before the Lord, calling out to him to save us, and we make that appeal to God through the act of baptism (according to 1 Peter 3:21), and he has promised to save us. What we believe about Jesus is incredibly important. Melchizedek tells us that Jesus is a better priest.

Before John leads us in a song to prepare us for the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and all-powerful God, the one and only true God above all others. This morning, we confess that we have sinned and that we do, in fact need a priest. Thank you, Father, for sending Jesus. Thank you for his perfect sacrifice, and thank you for the work that he continues to do. We pray that we would be willing and able to follow him more faithfully. We pray for the courage to share.

We come to you today through Jesus, our Savior and Priest, the great King above all others.
AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com