

Hebrews 7:11-19

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[0 : 00] 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 the 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 arrives 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. 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. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

[1 : 32] Well, we find ourselves drawing near to the close of our spring series in Hebrews. Our intention is to work our way through the end of chapter 7, by the end of next week, and then enter into our summer series, the middle portion of the book of Exodus.

If you've been attending Holy Trinity for a while, we walked the Israelites from Egypt to the foot of the mountain last summer in the book of Exodus, and we left them there for a while.

It'll be about nine months, and they're clamoring for our return. And so we'll spend this summer with them on the mountain, and then we'll leave them again for the next summer.

But at any rate, we'll pick up Hebrews 8 to the end this fall. So that's where we are as we're exposing ourselves to both testaments over the next few months.

But we find ourselves here in the middle now of a series of three messages that deal primarily with this figure, Melchizedek, and his meaning for the Christian community.

[2 : 55] I want you to take a look at verses 11 to 19. In particular, I want you to see that the bookends of our reading reveal the concerns of the writer at this moment in his letter.

The front end, right there, verse 11. Now, if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood, or on the backside, verse 19.

For the law made nothing perfect. There's the bookends of the reading, and the repetition of this word perfection or perfect in relationship first to the Levitical priesthood, verse 11, and then the law itself, verse 19.

So what is the concern of the text? The writer's concern is to show you and me, the initial readers in particular, the inadequacies of the Levitical priesthood in bringing about perfection.

Likewise, the shortcomings of the law in making anyone perfect. So what does it mean, this word perfection or perfect?

[4 : 34] Does it mean that someone is morally, you know, unassailable? Or by saying that the law is not able to bring about any perfection in us, is it saying something negative about the law?

No, that's not the case. The law of the Lord is perfect. But the law can't make you perfect. In other words, it can't make you complete.

The Levitical priesthood can't put you in the right way before God. Let me see if I can boil down this concern of the writer on perfection and the limitations of the priesthood and the law itself with an illustration.

Let's assume that you're at work and you're charged with making the next hire. Your job is to hire the next individual. And so you interview four, five, six, whatever applicants you are told to take a look at.

And then you speak with some. And then somebody asks you, how's it going? And you say, oh, I've been looking around and she is the perfect one for this job.

[5 : 56] Now, what do you mean by using the word perfect? You mean simply that she's the one who can get us where we need to go.

That's the sense here. When it comes to getting where you need to go, when it comes to standing in a right relationship with God, the Levitical priesthood and the law itself cannot get the job done. And so that raises then the relevant question for today. If those bookends give you his concern, let me put now his concern in the context of a question you and I ought to be asking.

Namely, what are you placing your hope in when it comes to gaining access to God? Let me put it differently. What's your best hope in drawing near to God?

How are you going to get there from here? Now, I'm aware that a lot of people never ask those questions. The foolish ones of the world, they're not going to show up on a Sunday morning to hear an answer to that question.

[7 : 22] They've already decided that it's a useless enterprise to think about getting there from here. But the fact that you're sitting in these chairs this morning is some external evidence that it's a worthy question.

I think it's a great question for those who are not Christians here today in our midst, as well as those who are already Christians. Remember, the writer to the book of Hebrews, this congregation in the early church's history, is comprised of a people who had already given themselves to a gospel message about Jesus.

And yet they had to figure out, how do I go on with Jesus? Let me put it this way.

After setting out with Christ, they're far enough along in the journey where they're wondering, do I go on with Christ?

After making a decision for Jesus at one point in my life, I've got some doubts on the sufficiency of Jesus to continue to be the one that allows me to move forward.

[8 : 57] This is really, then I think, existentially the question that's addressed today and probably makes sense for some of us who are sitting here today. Perhaps you have never made a decision for Jesus.

Your question naturally should be, what superior hope would He give me in gaining access to God? Or, if you have given your life to Christ, no doubt now, under the waves of life, your question might be, what is the superior hope that He continues to offer me?

That's what the text is dealing with today. And it does it by this negative argument at first. Let me tell you, he says something about the Levitical priesthood.

The Levitical priesthood is not your best hope in getting on with Christ. In other words, he actually goes on to argue in verses 11 to 14 that there's something inherently inadequate with the line of Aaron.

Now that's surprising to the reader because many people would have made a decision for Jesus seeing the Levitical priesthood as a type that finds its fruition in Jesus.

[10 : 32] that God set up mediators, but Jesus is even a better mediator. But what he wants to demonstrate here is that the Levitical priesthood itself, the line of Aaron, the order of Aaron, the persons of the priesthood are not a good hope to get home on.

Something inadequate. You can see it there in 11 and following, really through 14 is the center of this point. 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 arrive after the order of Melchizedek rather than the 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 belong to another tribe from which no one has yet served at the altar for it's evident that our Lord was descended from Judah and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about the priest.

What he's arguing is Jesus stood outside the line of Aaron. Why did the writer know that the true priesthood of God would not come from Aaron?

What made him begin to think that we need someone that stands outside the Levitical priesthood?

[12:14] Well, it's just a tiny little line in wisdom literature in the Psalms, particularly Psalm 110, that I think fired his imagination initially along these lines.

I want you to take a look at it. It is one of the most influential Psalms when it comes to an interpretation of the Christian faith.

So just turn over the rustling pages of your Bible or the thumb scrolling of your phone to Psalm 110. You'll see that there is a priesthood that is better for us than Aaron laid out for us according to what the Lord said in verse 4.

Psalm 110, verse 4. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Now that's a surprise if you had to hold your thumb over the word Melchizedek and guess what word would be there instead you would probably say Aaron.

[13:34] But that's the surprise of the text. That the one who was given kingly rule Psalm 110. 1. The Lord says to my Lord sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool.

The one that was given kingly rule which is a promise in accordance with David is also the one who is given priestly role but in way of contrast not according to Aaron but Melchizedek.

This is fascinating to me as a preacher because let me just give you an aside. You need to know Jesus went out on Psalm 110.

1. He left the world on Psalm 110. 1. Everyone was asking him questions about who are you and in the gospels he raises this issue of being greater than David for David himself was looking to the Lord to say something to him.

In other words he hints to Psalm 110 to say you want to know who I am? I'm even greater than David in regard to kingly rule. Jesus went out on Psalm 110.

[14:52] Peter came in on Psalm 110. 1 at Pentecost. He quotes this kingly rule of Psalm 110 when he wants people to become Christians.

He says Jesus is greater than David. He's the fulfillment of Psalm 110. 1 who has kingly rule who now sits at the right hand of God and all enemies are being made a footstool for his feet.

So here it is. Jesus goes out on Psalm 110. 1. Peter comes in and converts people on Psalm 110. 1.

And the writer to the Hebrews says but don't forget there's a whole other sermon in that psalm. That's not the only thing God said from that psalm.

I mean look at the phrasing Psalm 110. 1. The Lord says that forced one sermon that converted people to the Christian faith. But he comes now to his text Psalm 110.

[15:58] 4. And he says that's not the only thing the Lord says because the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

This is a wonderful thing in the preaching of God's word. The writer to the Hebrews had been reflecting on the psalm that Jesus pointed to himself in his kingly rule.

It's a psalm that Peter had saved 3,000 under. And he says this is the psalm that's not only going to get you into the Christian faith. I got a whole message I want to preach to you to keep you in the faith.

The Levitical priesthood was never intended to be your best hope of getting home.

For the word itself says we need someone along the likeness of Melchizedek. Pastor Jay took us through the Genesis narrative of Melchizedek last week.

[17:10] I refer you to it. but there's that moment in Abraham's life where he is confronted with one long before we had the Levitical priesthood of one that stood as a priest outside of any lineage to whom even the father of our faith owed tribute.

and so the question comes as we begin to take a look at our psalm again what is your best hope of getting home how will you gain access to God the writer said not through the Levitical priesthood that's inadequate in fact we should have known it was inadequate because there's a promise from God that it comes through the line of Melchizedek and we know that Jesus didn't come through that Levitical line let me put it to you this way there's a time where the insider is the right choice to get the job done and there's a time where you need an outsider to get the job done let me put it to you this way when Matthew and Luke are configuring in their mind how to make

Christians they put Jesus they legitimize Jesus as the way by placing him in the right genealogical line so Matthew opens with a genealogical line that puts Jesus in the line of David in the line of Abraham Luke puts Jesus as the insider in the line that goes all the way back to Adam but that's

how you make Christians says the writer to the Hebrews you want to keep people in the faith when they begin to have doubts I've got another line of argument I'm going to make sure you know that while he may be in the kingly line of Abraham David why he may be in the kingly line of the one to whom all enemies will be made subject you need to know that he is the one precisely because he's not in the line of

Aaron because Aaron can't get it done Aaron could never get it done that's the force of his text the direct line is not always the right line what about you and me what's your best line of hope I've been a pastor now for 30 years I know it's hard for me to believe you probably feel like longer but at any rate here's what I observe over 30 years of pastoral ministry that after a while people begin to long for what they consider to be a direct line not everybody but some they begin to question whether my faith rests solely in connection to

Jesus or whether I might need to find myself in the line this accounts for a great movement of evangelicals sporadically through time back toward the Roman Catholic Church now I'm not going to sit here and denigrate the Roman Catholic Church the Christians within the Roman Catholic Church just as I hope there are Christians within the Protestant Church so just get my point clear there are many who would say I can't stay here anymore I can't keep on with Jesus in this way I am allured to an argument that places him in the direct line and so they look at apostolic succession as that which keeps me in the faith but you need to realize if those are the issues you're wrestling with that the argument here that is meant to keep you in the faith is precisely the opposite

[21 : 46] Jesus is the right line because he stands outside of particular lines I find that to be fascinating this is why at the end of the letter he's going to encourage the reader to go to Jesus who was where outside the camp I keep coming back to this for myself why do I believe what I believe what do I think is my best hope in gaining access to God what is the best hope in going on with God and I keep confronting these truths that all other avenues to God or with God are inadequate the Levitical priesthood itself is inadequate or why would we be given a priest according to the line of

Melchizedek well I pray that this morning this will actually minister to many who are wondering where do I go where do I situate myself for the long run in Christian faith well with Jesus straight to Jesus through faith for all other mediating efforts fall short now this is a great thing for people who are without a good line you know some people stand up in the pulpit and they'll talk about all their own lineage their own heritage oh I've got grandparents who did this and great grandparents who did that and then other people go man that that's just not my experience I got no line well well maybe that'll keep you a Christian this week

I got no line but Jesus didn't have one either in fact I know I'm in a good line because he had no line I need a priest like Melchizedek secondly not only priesthood inadequate to keep you in the Christian faith the law won't do it either and that's where he moves in verses 15 to 17 having done something that was evident on the Levitical priesthood verse 14 you see that he now changes in verse 15 it says this becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek if his first argument to give you a better hope of arriving home before dark dealt with the limitations of the Levitical line this argument deals with the superiority of Jesus in regard to likeness now what does that mean we need someone like

Melchizedek well he goes on who has become a priest not on the basis of legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life now the word legal there you could almost use it just carnal you could almost think of it as external in other words when you had the law the law was in accordance with some kind of external conformity it was an outside kind of thing in other words the law can only get you washed up on the outside it can't actually make you clean on the inside so just as the Levitical priesthood is not a sure hope for you neither is the law indeed we need we need one that's like Melchizedek and what's what's his what's his characteristic well he gives you something by the power of indestructible life the law is able to do things externally but

Jesus can do things internally he has he is life itself you want life then you need someone like that not the law which also has application for so many of us what is your best hope of retaining or gaining access to God it is not be good in order to get good or not be good in order to get the good or not be good in order to gain God not wash yourself up not scrub your hands down not turn over a new leaf because you know if you had to turn over a new leaf you'd have to turn over a new forest you can't do it from the outside in and the law can't bring it to you so many people today trying to gain access to God or retain relationship with

[27 : 07] God to to to to follow to follow are you kidding me who are you kidding you know yourself better than that you know you have no power within yourself to live in conformity to a righteous law put down let me put it to you this way what's your best hope of gaining access to God what's your best hope of keeping on with God it isn't the law you're gonna need life indestructible!

life there's the irony of the text isn't it the first half in regard to the weakness of the Levitical priesthood he calls in the outsider the second half the limitations of the law he says you need something that's internal and in Jesus you have them both let me let me put it all together this way in Jesus he says because he's now concluding 18 and 19 this contrast for on the one hand a former commandment set aside because of its weakness and uselessness the Levitical priesthood the law itself was temporary to begin with and not intended to save it could never make anything perfect on the other hand a better hope is introduced through which we draw near to God and what is that better hope?

through which we draw near to God is it not the Lord Jesus Christ? in Jesus you have a better hope than the one Aaron's line offered through the Levitical priesthood in Jesus you have a better hope than the one the law ever will give you in Jesus you have the one through whom you gain access to God for the first time in Jesus you have the one through whom you always have access to God there is no better pathway for your life than Jesus there is no other mediator you need but Jesus there is no word you are to keep except Jesus so if you're here today a non-Christian wondering how to gain access to

God there is only one mediator the Lord Jesus and if you place your faith or trust or reliance or dependence on him he will bring you to the father into a right relationship he will bring you to perfection he will be the one who can get you where you need to go and so I would call upon you today on the simple raw exposure to the word laid out for you today if you're asking the question what's my best hope of getting out of this life and remaining in a right relationship with God it's simply depending on Jesus to do all the heavy lifting for you no other person comes between you and God no other institution needs to come before you and God no other mediating influences come between you and

God there's one and he's the one that gets you in he's the one that keeps you in once in with God don't think you go on with yourself Lord help us if we walked out of here every week thinking I had to keep the law well let's say I did I'd still fall short I can fulfill the law as he gives me his spirit and enables me to love God and my neighbor as myself I can in some measure be fulfilling that call I can never be completely keeping that call I need Jesus notice the text how it closes through which we draw near to God if your sins are weighing you down today you have a hope that is indestructible through whom

[32 : 24] Jesus death you can draw near to God that's a good day isn't it coming into church feeling all the weight of guilt and sin and wondering how does this ever get relieved before I stand in the presence of God almighty only the fool never asks that question only the fool says oh if there is a God we're going to have a long talk when I see him what kind of idiot are you you who walk this earth no more than six feet above the ground for a short period of some 70 years and the wind going to blow on you and take you away you you you want a long talk with God give me a break don't be foolish give yourself to

Christ and you can stand in the presence of God draw near not only for your sins but your your concerns concerns a lot of people here today have started out with God but you've got some concerns you got some stuff in your life that you're wondering wow he saved me but can he handle this do I need do I need another way do I need okay I got Jesus but what's going to really get me through with my spouse with my children with my job with my health I mean having come to him is he really sufficient I'm beginning to have doubts I decided for him but I'm beginning to doubt the sufficiency of him and what the writer has said here is where else are you going to go there's not only no other media there's nothing you can do by the works of your own hands that are going to make it all right but you have Jesus who comes in the line of Melchizedek who actually standing now at the presence of God ready to intercede for you so if your prayers are hitting the ceiling and bouncing back and you're wondering do

I walk out do I give up do I go on this text is clear say your prayers in the name of Jesus who stands not only as an advocate but an intercessor continue to stay there draw near to him our heavenly father as we think of this text today we come with hearts filled with a lot of things that deal with life and so help us now to make sure that we don't put our hope in the wrong things we want to hope in

something that's sure that who can actually get us where we need to go so we pray now that even
as we sing we would draw near to Jesus and oh
Lord may you draw near to every heart that comes to you in faith in Jesus name amen to to