

PM Hebrews 7 & 8 "A Better Priest"

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[0:00] Genesis, the book of Genesis chapter 14, a short reading which is relevant to the chapter we will be considering together.

! Genesis chapter 14.!

Genesis chapter 14 verse 17.

Amen.

In our Bibles to the book of Hebrews, the book of Hebrews chapter 7. Amen. But let's start our reading at verse 19 of chapter 6.

[2:30] Hebrews chapter 6 verse 19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God met Abram returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him and to him Abram 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 Abram the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils and those descendants of Levi who received 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 belong 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

[8:23] But the word of the oath which came later than the law appoints a son who has been made perfect forever Amen May God bless to us that further reading of his word Please turn back in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews Hebrews chapter 7 I'd like to look at this passage with you under the title A Better Priest A Better Priest Imagine it's a beautiful day The sun is shining brightly and there's not a cloud in the sky A man is sitting in a dingy room with a heavy thick curtain covering the one window in that room

He sits there admiring the dim light coming from an electric bulb hanging from the ceiling Keep that picture in mind as we turn to this passage together The letter to the Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were tempted to give up on their newfound faith and return to Judaism Persecution may have been a factor By this time the Roman authorities were beginning to see Christianity as a threat to the good order of the empire whereas Judaism enjoyed a degree of official protection Some of the Jewish converts may have been attracted by the colourful ritual and practices which were part and parcel of their old faith

Others may simply have begun to doubt if Christianity was all it was cracked up to be Whatever the reasons the writer of this letter is at pains to point out that for them to return to Judaism would make no more sense than for someone to sit in a room admiring the light of one electric bulb when the sun was streaming outside in all its brilliance The writer argues that in every way Christianity is better than Judaism Jesus Christ is greater than the angels He is greater than Moses the great Old Testament leader who rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and he offers far more than the old religion of Judaism ever could

The passage we are looking at this evening focuses on the issue of priesthood the writer argues that Jesus is a better priest than the priests who were a key feature of Judaism The basic function of a priest was to represent people to God and God to people The priest was an intermediary or go between In chapters 4 and 5 the writer has shown how Jesus is a great high priest exactly fitted to be our representative because when he was on earth he was tempted in all points just as we are yet without sin You see Jesus knows what it's like to be human from the inside although he was and is

God he became man he became a real man he lived an authentic human life Here in chapter 7 the writer develops the theme of priesthood further I'd like to highlight five reasons he outlines reasons why Jesus is a better priest than the priests of Judaism First of all Jesus priesthood is of a superior order Jesus priesthood is of a superior order to grasp this point we need to understand a little of the Old Testament background which would have been so familiar to the original readers of this letter after rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt

[14:21] God made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai that covenant came to be known as the Mosaic or Old Covenant it was a covenant a contract an agreement between God and the Israelites he promised to be their God and they for their part undertook to be his people the Ten Commandments were an integral part of the Mosaic Covenant there were also detailed rules as to how the Israelites were to approach the Lord in worship priests were to be appointed they were required to belong to one particular tribe the tribe of Levi and they were to offer sacrifices for sin these sacrifices were an object lesson for the

Israelites but all sin was an offense against God deserving of death and could be forgiven only if the penalty was paid on behalf of the sinner the priests of the old covenant were God ordained but a fundamental point which the writer of this letter makes is that while Jesus fulfills the role of a priest he belongs to a totally different order of priesthood the old covenant priests were priests in the order of Levi but Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek he belongs to a different and superior order of priesthood what the writer has to say about

Melchizedek here would no doubt have fascinated the original readers of this letter there is evidence that there was a lot of speculation about Melchizedek and who exactly he was in the first century AD Melchizedek is a shadowy character referred to in only two other passages in the Bible he's referred to in Genesis 14 which we read earlier and he's also referred to in Psalm 110 which we sang in the Genesis narrative Melchizedek is described as king of Salem and priest of God most high he met the patriarch Abram when he was returning from success in battle and he pronounced a blessing on Abram blessed be Abram by God most high possessor of heaven and earth and blessed be God most high who has delivered your enemies into your hand in response

Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils he gave him a tithe of the spoils of the battle in doing so he effectively acknowledged that he owed his victory to God and that Melchizedek was invested with God's authority that's all Genesis tells us about Melchizedek he appears from nowhere and then disappears again the writer to the Hebrews comments verse 3 he is without father or mother or genealogy having neither beginning of days nor end of life does this mean Melchizedek was some kind of supernatural being there has been debate about that personally

I suspect not the writer may simply mean that we know nothing about Melchizedek's antecedents or about what happened to him later when he goes on to say that Melchizedek resembles the son of God and continues a priest forever he may simply be implying that Melchizedek never not that Melchizedek never died but simply that we know nothing about his death for that reason it's as if his priesthood goes on and on in that respect he resembles Jesus whose priesthood really does last forever the two other things we're told about Melchizedek also help us to see in him a picture of Jesus his name Melchizedek means king of righteousness righteousness and he was king of [20:08] Salem the place probably which later became known as Jerusalem Salem being from the same root as the Hebrew word for peace shalom king of righteousness and king of peace doesn't that remind you of Jesus who came into our world to bring peace between God and man and lived a life of perfect righteousness it's interesting too that Melchizedek was both a king and a priest in the Old Testament there was a strict separation between kingship and priesthood no king could be a priest and no priest could be a king but Melchizedek is an exception he was both a king and a priest in that way too

Melchizedek foreshadows the Lord Jesus but how do we explain the existence of Melchizedek if he was an ordinary man how was he a representative of true God focused worship in the midst of a pagan society how did he end up worshipping the living and true God we simply don't know there's mystery here perhaps these are questions we can ask Melchizedek when we meet him in heaven the Bible doesn't tell us everything we might want to know but it does tell us all we need to know the essential point we need to grasp is that Jesus is a better priest because he belongs to a superior order of priesthood to make his point the writer uses in verses 4 to 10 a type of argument which would have appealed to his

Jewish readers he points out how Abram gave a tenth of the spoils of battle to Melchizedek Abram was great grandfather of Levi from whom the Levitical priests were all descended the fact that Abram gave tithes to Melchizedek the writer suggests means that effectively Levi and his descendants paid tithes through Abraham through their ancestor Abraham to Melchizedek Melchizedek Levi and his descendants were entitled to receive tithes from their fellow Israelites but through their ancestor Abraham even they paid tithes to Melchizedek that highlights that Melchizedek is a superior order of priesthood and it is to that order that Jesus belongs secondly Jesus is a better priest than the Levitical priesthood because his is an effective priesthood priesthood look with me please at verse 11 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 the writer makes the point that under the

Levitical priesthood perfection was not achievable the very fact that Jesus who was descended from Judah not Levi is not a Levitical priest highlights the need for something more you see the sacrifices of the old covenant did not in themselves secure effective atonement for sin they secured ritual or ceremonial cleansing but the blood of an animal couldn't possibly atone for the sin of a human being in the words of verse 18 the mosaic law in itself made nothing perfect in the words of the hymn not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away its stain all the mosaic system could do was point beyond itself to the one who would one day come and pay the price of sin that one has now come and through him has come a better hope through which we draw near to

[26:06] God through Jesus we do have access to God his sacrifice on the cross does atone for sin it does meet the requirements of God's justice it does assure us peace and reconciliation Isaac Watts puts it well Jesus my great high priest offered his blood and died my guilty conscience seeks no sacrifice beside his powerful blood did once atone and now it pleads before the throne the fact that Jesus is now in heaven underlines the fact that his sacrifice has been accepted and is complete in the opening verses of chapter 8 we read how he serves in the true tent that God set up not man where he is seated at the right hand of the majesty in heaven when he went about his

duties the high priest on earth was never seated in the temple but Jesus is seated at God the Father's right hand because he has accomplished the work he was given to do the work of atonement is complete

Jesus priesthood is effective for that reason but it's effective also because the new covenant which he instigated is transformational not only has the penalty of sin been paid but there is the possibility of real transformational change this is brought out at length in the following chapter under the old covenant the law was an external code it was out there it could not in itself effect behavioural change it was powerless to transform sinful nature it showed people how to live but it could not in itself help them to change but under the new covenant the law of God is no longer an external code it is internal internalized it's in here it's in people's hearts as their hearts are changed by the power of the Holy

Spirit so that they begin to do what the law requires in the Lord Jesus believers have died to sin that doesn't mean to say that we are no longer sinners we remain sinners for as long as we live but we are no longer slaves to sin we are no longer under sin's dominion the Holy Spirit lives within us he makes the things of Christ real to us and he works with us to make us more like him in the words of the Apostle Paul now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end eternal life Jesus is a better priest because his priesthood is truly effective he has made complete atonement for sin and transformational change is possible through the work of the

Holy Spirit thirdly Jesus is a better priest because his priesthood is a perfect priesthood his priesthood is a perfect priesthood when he lived on earth Jesus lived a sinless life the writer emphasizes this in verses 26 and 27 look at what he says it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest holy innocent unstained separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens he is no need 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 what he is saying here is that the Levitical priests were themselves sinners they needed to offer sacrifices on their own behalf as well as on behalf of others that's why they had to keep on offering sacrifices in a ceaseless round day after day they had to offer daily sacrifices for daily sins imperfect priests could not offer perfect once for all sacrifices but Jesus had no sin of his own when he died for sin he died not for his own sins but for the sins of all who would put their trust in him his was a perfect sacrifice a sacrifice that was once for all his is a perfect priesthood fourthly

[32 : 41] Jesus is a better priest because his priesthood truly is eternal again and again in this chapter the writer stresses that Jesus has become a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek in verse 16 he says that Jesus has become a priest not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life by rising again from the dead he exercises an eternal priesthood how different that is from the Levitical priests as the writer of the letter points out they were many in number because death prevented them from continuing in office under the

Mosaic covenant there was a whole succession of priests when one died another had to take his place but Jesus needs no successor because he lives to die no more and because his priesthood is eternal all who trust in him are assured of eternal security consequently verse 28 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 our living high priest ensures that each one of his blood bought brothers and sisters will get safely home to glory he intercedes for us in heaven he cares his care for his people never wavers in the face of all the dangers and difficulties that confront us along the way he looks after our interests and nothing will separate us from his love his very presence at

God's right hand is a living insistence that God's love will not let us go Jesus is a better priest priest because his priesthood is eternal fifthly and finally Jesus is a better priest because his priesthood is underwritten by almighty God Jesus priesthood is underwritten by almighty God in verses 20 and 21 we read 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 writer is making the point that the Levitical priests were as it were born into the role just as Prince William will probably succeed to the throne in due course on account of what we might call an accident of birth so a Levitical priest entered the priesthood by virtue of his descent from Levi but Jesus became a priest on the basis not of descent but on the

basis of God the Father's oath his priesthood is underwritten by God himself his appointment is not subject to change or challenge because it was made by the oath of our promise keeping God who cannot and will not change his mind God and in turn Jesus is the guarantor of the new covenant he will ensure that the obligations of the new covenant are met indeed as we have noted his presence in heaven guarantees the eternal security of all his people we may not be tempted to give up on Christianity in favor of Judaism but I'm sure that if we're honest we would have to acknowledge that we too find our faith under pressure at times it's not easy being a Christian in a secular society it's not easy to be personally committed to an unseen

[38:47] God whom our friends and colleagues readily dismiss we too need to be reminded of our great high priest the Lord Jesus Christ and of the great salvation that he offers to us in the gospel he is a priest in the order of Melchizedek his priesthood is effective it's perfect it's eternal it's underwritten by almighty God himself and on that basis the salvation which Jesus offers each one of us is a copper bottomed salvation so let us hold unwaveringly to the faith we profess and if we have not yet put our trust in this great high priest isn't it time we did let's not choose the light of a dim electric bulb in preference to the light of the sun in all its brilliance shall we pray our father in heaven we pray that we may see something of the wonder of

Jesus priesthood may we trust in him may we commit ourselves to him for time and eternity and may we live in the security of the salvation which he offers because he ever lives to make intercession for us we pray this in his name and for his glory amen