

Our Melchizedekian Priest, and Perfection Forever

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Preacher: David Calderwood

[0 : 00] My name is James. I'll be bringing the reading this morning from Hebrews chapter 7. We'll be reading the whole chapter together. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham, returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him.

And to him Abraham 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 Abraham, 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, through the, though these are descended from Abraham, are also 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.

[1 : 16] 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.

[2 : 32] 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 I 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.

However, 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.

[3 : 45] 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. But the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.

Well, good morning, everyone. My name's, well, you all know, anyway, don't you? I was too slow, wasn't I? For those who don't know my name, it's David. I'm one of the staff here. Well, the passage we're looking at this morning is hinged around the word perfection. And it occurred to me that perfection is something that we all crave, especially in relationships, and perhaps especially in our homes.

[4 : 48] So I think we crave perfection as husbands, as wives, father, mother, as children. And I think we crave perfection in our wider friendships.

And at work. And even in our leisure pursuits. And I think the source of that is that deep in our innermost being, I think we sense that we're made for something much better than the imperfections we see in ourselves and the imperfections we see in others around us.

The imperfections, in fact, we see at every point in our world. And the problem is, I think, that striving for perfection makes us anxious.

Because as we strive for perfection, and I think in our world today, we fear being judged for imperfection. And I think that may also, then, in part, drive the current focus on the need for resilience.

resilience. We even have got official government people whose job is to pursue resilience in the nation.

[6 : 10] And resilience, I think, is a measure of perfection. Now, back in the day, a long day ago, when you had physical bookstores, does anybody remember physical bookstores?

Oh, a couple, even Simon remembers them. You're older than you think, buddy. Or older than you're prepared to admit, maybe. If you get into a bookstore, a physical bookstore, by far and away, the largest section was always the self-help section.

That has been replaced today by online. Endless online influencers and podcasters who are constantly giving us stuff to help us be better.

Chase perfection or, in the terms of today, I think, help us to be the best version of ourselves in whatever context that is. Now, of course, like everything else we do in life, our measure of perfection is usually individualistic and self-centered.

Recently, just last week, in fact, I saw a lady at the supermarket wearing a T-shirt and I couldn't help because the words were large, but it said, I'm living my best life, don't get in my way.

[7 : 28] And I thought, the two phrases sort of jarred. Her best life wasn't that relaxed for her, I don't think. Then last week in Outback Magazine, I read about a 15-year-old girl, PLC Armadale, and they run a program for their year nine kids, a 28-day program of really challenging outdoor tasks.

And the design of the course, by their own words, is to build confidence and resilience, to make the girls feel confident and comfortable with themselves. Anyway, this girl, when she was asked to report on her at the results of that course for her, she said, I thought it was a really interesting phrase for a 15-year-old.

I used to be really scared of imperfection. It's quite interesting for a 15-year-old girl, isn't it? I used to be really scared of imperfection.

And then she goes on to describe how the course had reduced her anxiety and increased her happiness because, as she said, I've begun to like this new version of myself that appeared during this 28-day program.

Turn it aside again, just thinking more about this perfection. We're very quick to call out and condemn imperfection in others around us, I think. Including those closest to us.

[8 : 59] Now, in part, I think that's probably because that we need people around us to be perfect as a sort of reinforcement or an offset of our own imperfection to give us peace of mind.

So, when they show imperfection, that really unsettles us, unnerves us, and perhaps even disappoints us. And so, we express almost a demand that they get their life in order and become more perfect for us.

But partly, it may also be because if I can point out somebody else's imperfection, then I can actually reassure myself that I'm up the scale a bit in the quest for perfection.

And so, I can build my sense of achieving perfection as I expose the imperfection of others around us. And again, the familiar word is a very common word in our society today.

Anybody who impacts my sense of perfection by their imperfection, we often just call toxic people. And of course, we all know what we have to do with toxic people.

[10:18] We get rid of them, unfriend them, just move away from them. Now, for those who have been struggling to engage with the story of the letter of Hebrews, I think the idea of perfection is a really good point of engagement.

Because this was a letter written to a bunch of Christians with a Jewish background who were also seeking perfection so they could live the best life possible for them in their situation.

and that best life possible for them clearly included how much Jesus would figure in their lives, how much Jesus would shape their lives, how much Jesus would shape their thinking and living.

Especially as they started to realize that the cost of serving Jesus was getting greater and greater and greater and greater, excluded from family, excluded from their local community, excluded from the local synagogue, not able to be part of the society which was built around the Jewish religious calendar, and increasingly the reality of brutal persecution, even death, at the hands of the Roman masters.

So they were trying to work out, well, what is perfection for us? Yes, it involves Jesus, but how much Jesus? The argument of the letter of Hebrews is very simple.

[11:56] Don't be tempted to move away from an all-in identification and commitment to Jesus. That's the argument. Don't do it. Don't be tempted to. Very simple argument.

The answer and the reason, as it were, is also quite simple. Don't do it because Jesus is the perfection you crave.

Right? To put your hope or confidence of acceptance with God in anything other than the perfection of Jesus is to put your hope in imperfection and indeed actually denies the perfection of Jesus.

Jesus. And that takes us into chapter seven, which continues to establish the perfection of Jesus as God's long promised and uniquely qualified high priest.

priest. So here we go. We have to dive into the bit that sort of makes it hard for us. Priests and sacrifice in the Old Testament Jewish religious system.

[13:12] Well, priests and sacrifice were at the center of the Old Testament Jewish religious system. They had a very responsible role. And the role was actually, it was called a mediator.

Mediator is somebody who's in between two or more parties. And the priest's role was to bring dirty, rebellious, sinful people together into relationship with a clean, holy, perfect God.

No mean feat. To do that, the priest's role meant he had to deal with the sin of these dirty, sinful people so that they'd be acceptable in relationship with the clean, holy, sinless God.

And he did that through sacrifices. But also he needed to pray for these dirty, sinful people because he prayed to the Lord for them because he said, Lord, you know the weakness of these people.

You know they can't keep their promises. You know they might mean well but can't deliver. So the priest's job was to pray for his people. And help them in their struggle for obedience.

[14:32] So the argument of the letter written primarily to Christians with a Jewish background is dominated by the background question of which priest will you trust to make you acceptable to God?

But and ensure you make it home safely to heaven. Now from the opening paragraph of the letter Jesus is presented as God's unique or purpose built perfect high priest who has been perfectly successful in his role as mediator.

and that has been set up in contrast to the imperfection and ultimate failure of every other priesthood and indeed the whole Jewish religious system.

That's the contrast that's operating right through the letter. Jesus has dealt perfectly with sin. He knows and understands our situation perfectly. He is constantly praying for us.

He stands ready to help his people be faithful. and ultimately he will lead us home to glory or the word that we've been introduced to us in Hebrews chapter three and four is the word rest.

[15:54] He will lead us home to rest. Now what is rest? It is the enjoyment of the perfection of God from our own point of having been made perfect.

So perfection is everywhere in Hebrews. And the letter is saying we can have absolute confidence before God because of Jesus because the refrain is he's our better high priest.

Chapter four verse 16. So last week we're forever anchored his perfection. That was where the end of Dave's passage from last week chapter six verse 20 18 through 20.

He's that good. Perfection how do you describe perfection except to say perfection is perfection and Jesus is perfection.

So we can be totally confident totally relaxed to as aware just wander into the presence of God as his child. to pick up what Alan said this morning.

[17 : 09] Sorry to kill you Alison. What could be offensive about that Alan? Okay I don't know where that came from I'm so sorry.

Having said all that there's a question lurking in the background for those who knew a thing or two about the Old Testament Jewish religion.

And that question hitherto has been unspoken in the letter but I want to try and bring it out this morning because I think it helps us understand chapter 7. That is how can Jesus be this bigger and better high priest when in fact he's not qualified to be a priest at all?

Now God's law was really clear about two things. God's law was really clear that priests had to be from the line of Aaron and Levi. Clearly our text chapter 7 tells us Jesus was from the line of Judah. So he didn't have that qualification therefore he couldn't be a priest. The other thing that God's law was really clear about was that the role of priest and king had to be kept separate.

[18 : 20] Now surely this means that Jesus being a descendant of King David from the line of Judah and given that he's already been described multiple times in this letter as the king and lord of this world king of kings and lord of lords.

Then surely given that he can also claim to be a high priest. So in two accounts as it were Jesus could not properly be considered a great high priest.

Dilemma. Enter Melchizedek or as Lachlan introduced him to us a couple of weeks ago Milky Joe. Melchizedek Melchizedek's this mysterious figure who pictures or gives us a sneak peek of the into God's plan for an alternative perfect priest-king figure.

I'll try and unpack that a little bit for you. Last week, two or three weeks ago, in chapter 5, verse 6 and 10, we were introduced to this guy, Melchizedek.

And the writer found Melchizedek back in Psalm 110. 10. And he uses Melchizedek to explain the unique qualification and perfection of Jesus as God's high priest.

[19 : 55] So Melchizedek, as it were, is a sneak peek or a video clip, a real life lesson, as it were, something like that. And it goes like this, I think.

Just as King David, back in Psalm 95, and Alan read that to you this morning, just as King David in Psalm 95 had written of the need for a better rest than the promised land had ever delivered, even under his rule.

Remember, King David was the pinnacle of the life of the promised land. So King David, even then, said, we need a better rest.

We don't have that enjoyment of perfection in God's presence. It just didn't deliver. We couldn't deliver it. And that was discussed back in chapters 3 and 4.

But just as he said that, so also, in Psalm 110, King David wrote of the need for a new and better priest-king figure to deliver that rest to God's people.

[20 : 58] So we need a better rest, and we need someone who can deliver us into that rest. In Psalm 110, David envisages this priest-king figure to who would do that, in the order of Melchizedek.

The same connection at the end of Dave's passage last week, 620. Melchizedek was a sneak preview of God's plan to deliver the perfection of rest or salvation, a sure hope of acceptance before God, and direct access to him forever.

Now, the background, the backstory to Melchizedek is in Genesis chapter 14. We're introduced to Melchizedek, and he was unusually both a king and a priest.

And as you read that story, and you should go and read it, very interesting story. As you read that story, you find that not only was a king and a priest combined, but he was actually a model of both roles, a very good model of both roles.

You'll see when you read Genesis 14 that as king, he was concerned to recognize and honor the Lord. And in Genesis 14, that makes him stand in sharp contrast to another king that was mentioned there, the king of Sodom, who was entirely self-interested.

[22 : 23] And then again as priest, Melchizedek brought God's blessing to Abraham, and in turn encouraged Abraham to be thankful to the Lord for the victory he had just won against all odds.

So the priest was actually doing what a priest was meant to do. He was bringing the clean God and that sinful, rebellious Abraham together. His name, we're told in chapter 7 here, which in Old Testament terms always describes a person's character, highlights his desire to rule his people in

righteousness, and to ensure rest or peace, that's in his name, exists between the Holy God and dirty, rebellious people.

He's there on the job praying for his people, encouraging thankfulness and obedience. He is, in a sense, the model priest.

God, he was really good, but he wasn't the best. But he does give us a sneak preview to the one who would be the best, the Lord Jesus.

Now then, after that, various other things are made to sort of build the point. verse 4, the authority of Melchizedek, because he just bursts onto the scene, and he's not the normal pattern for a priest, but the writer to the Hebrew is saying, well, look, clearly, he was recognized as a priest by one as great as Abraham, the father of all Jews.

[24 : 14] He was recognized and honored as Abraham accepted a blessing from him and offered a tithe to him, which was the legislative response, the entitlement of a priest.

Verse 9, it's an idea, an argument that's not familiar to us, the argument of solidarity. So the argument is this, that Abraham approves and endorses and honors this priestly Melchizedek, Levi, who would be his great grandson because of a principle of solidarity, that is what the father of the race gets, then flows right down through to everybody it comes from.

In that basic argument, the writer says, well, in that sense, Levi has also endorsed and recognized a greater priesthood than what he came from.

But ultimately, so he comes with high validation, but ultimately, verses 3 and 8, the ultimate validation of Melchizedek is from the Lord by the way in which the Lord brings him into the picture unannounced and equally quickly takes him back out.

So he's a priest and a king, but because the record doesn't tell us anything else, essentially then he's a priest and king forever. Melchizedek is one who was purpose built as God's savior figure, a king priest with forever authority.

[25 : 52] Perhaps, is it too much to say he was purpose built to give us a sneak peek of the best priest that would be to come, the best king that was still to come? Whatever we want to say about Melchizedek, he does actually give us a sneak peek of Jesus.

He is all that God's people need to be delivered into rest. a king that will rule over them and take them to God, a priest who will deal with their sins and pray for them.

Pray for them rather, sorry. He is the unique, purpose built, perfect priest who would resolve the problem of sin once for all and who would also be a perfect king figure as he looks forward to Jesus, leading his people safely home to glory or heaven.

Now all of that in the first 10 verses of chapter 7 builds to the main point, the conclusion that the writer wants to get to. And if you get stuck on Melchizedek, well then leave him behind at this point. Come with me through verse 11 to 28 because that's where the writer really wants us to focus. He sort of starts to dig into now the various aspects of the perfection of Jesus as our great high priest.

[27 : 14] the conclusion is that God's perfection is won for us and gifted to us in Jesus. Now again, the argument goes something like this.

Since God's rest or heaven is perfection, and since God's people are dirty, rebellious, imperfect, perfect, then how can we achieve perfection such that we will be acceptable in relationship forever with the perfect Lord, perfect God?

Answer, Jesus is just what the doctor ordered. not only was he perfect, which is something remarkable in itself, not only did he show us God's perfection, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father, which is even more remarkable, most remarkable of all, he delivers perfection to his dirty, sinful people in such a way as to guarantee forever perfection for God's people and therefore complete acceptance before the Lord.

Jesus delivers what no other others before him could only point to. That's the argument of verses 11, 12, 13, 14.

So, why does Jesus turn up with a high endorsement that he has as God's alternative priest after the order of Melchizedek when there was apparently a perfectly good Levitical priesthood system already in operation?

[29 : 17] Answer could only be. The only one logical answer because that existing system was imperfect and always anticipated something better coming along to do what it couldn't do, to achieve what it could never achieve.

The Old Testament system could never bring God's people to perfection. verses 18 and 19 sort of flesh out that a little bit.

Talking about the weakness of the law. The law made nothing perfect, but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced through which we draw near to God.

So, how does it work? God's law introduced by Moses was intended to make people aware of their sin or imperfection and to make them aware of their inability therefore to be acceptable in relationship with God.

So, the Old Testament law highlighted the vast gap between dirty sinful people and a clean holy God. The sacrificial system then was God's temporary provision to bridge that gap.

[30 : 47] Allowing dirty sinful people to come and have fellowship with them, but in the context of pretty strict limits because they were mixing as dirty people in a very very dangerous situation as they fellowshiped with the holy God.

So, there was a guardedness, a contingency. Yes, it brought God and people together, but under pretty strict guidelines.

So, you see, at best, God's, sorry, I jumped ahead of my paragraph there. So, add to that weakness the failure of the priesthood itself.

Look at verse 23. So, you get an imperfect system run by imperfect priests. Their imperfection and weakness was obvious.

Every single high priest died. Josephus, the Jewish historian, has done the hard work and he reckons there was 83 high priests from Aaron through to the time of Jesus.

[32 : 08] And guess what? Every one of them died. And then there was thousands of other priests and all of them died too. The priesthood itself was part of the problem of sin.

So, at best, that system could only point people to God's future perfection. It could never deliver perfection. It could make people anticipate perfection. It could make them desire perfection. It could make them cry out to God for perfection, but it couldn't actually deliver it in itself. Jesus is God's purpose-built perfect replacement for that whole imperfect system.

And at every point his superiority is obvious. At every point it is clear that he is perfection and wins perfection for his dirty, needy people.

Verse 16, and then 21 and 24. Verse 16, he has become a priest not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.

[33 : 43] Same idea in 21 and 24. Jesus is God's forever priest because he is God's forever person.

His sinlessness meant he didn't die like every other person before and since. he comes with God's specific backing, God's special oath, which is a really big emphasis there because when God says something it's as good as done.

God doesn't have to back up his promise with an extra promise saying I really will do it. I mean that's what we have to do, that's what kids do, isn't it? I really, really, really, really promise.

But God in this case is so determined to give us people confidence that he set this path in motion and it will never change.

It is perfect. He adds another promise to it. It's sort of ridiculous in a sense but it's there to tell us how serious God is about this. Jesus comes with God's specific backing and is fit for task.

[35 : 07] He does not need to be replaced. He will never need to be updated. There's no new or better priest to come because he is now in heaven with an endless role continuing daily from heaven to call his people home, to lead them home, to pray for his people.

Verse 27, 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.

Jesus is God's solution. He's never been, never will be part of the problem.

Yes, like other priests, Jesus did die. But unlike other priests, he didn't die as a consequence of his own imperfection or sin.

Jesus died voluntarily as a perfect sacrifice to deal finally and completely with the sins of his people.

[36 : 31] And that will be unpacked more in chapters 9 and 10. Verse 25, Jesus saves us completely. He meets our every need and he never leaves us alone.

consequently, verse 25, consequently, there you go, that's the arguments bringing forward. Given all that's been said, consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost.

Now, that's not a word we use very much, but to save us completely, perfectly, meeting our every need, never leaving us alone.

He has unique power, unique ability, unique desire to deliver perfection to his dirty, imperfect people, making them acceptable to God forever.

And that's a really important thing in there because some people have the power to do good in this world, but don't. They apply their power for their own benefit.

[37 : 44] Jesus has power and ability and authority, all of which has been applied through his own death and resurrection to bring perfection to his dirty, imperfect people so they might be acceptable to God and in turn enjoy the perfection of God, rest or heaven or glory forever.

Jesus does it. He follows through every step of the way of salvation. From in eternity, we're told in other parts of scripture, as he planned this great salvation of horribly dirty people, to the other end of eternity when we're sitting beside him in perfection, enjoying the perfection of God, like Jesus and with Jesus forever.

every step of the way, he's done it, he's followed through. One confession to Jesus in contrast to the old Jew system, one confession to Jesus is enough to bring us to God.

Jesus, only you can do for me that which I know I can never do for myself. I could never deal with my own sins.

I recognize my sin, that which I know about, and I recognize it's far, far worse than even I'm aware of, but all of it I confess to you now and I beg that you will show me grace and mercy and give me perfection confession that's not mine to demand.

[39 : 28] Just one confession makes you a person acceptable to God forever. Put that against the daily burden of sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice.

The worry of it, have I done enough? What if I missed out some sins? What if my sacrifice wasn't quite right? What if the priest didn't offer the sacrifice in quite a right way? What if he did that without his heart being in the right place?

Does my sacrifice still work for me? Anxiety, fear, against one confession to Jesus.

Perfection. Jesus never forgets his responsibility. He never forgets that his people are constantly at risk of failure.

So he's constantly praying for us and helping us in our struggle. And because Jesus' relationship with his father is perfection, therefore it's always real, it's always immediate.

[40 : 45] And therefore his prayer requests to his father are always for our good. and they cover anything required to get us safely through this life and home to heaven to be with him forever.

That's a heck of a lot more broad than my prayers are for the few people I pray for. And it even includes his prayers even include things that might trip us up, which we're not even aware of.

He's going to stop us as it were, picture language, he's going to stop us perhaps, and I won't go down that, it could be misunderstood, it was a non-scripted thing so I'll leave it out. It was ill thought.

Verse 28, I'll finish on this. Since Jesus is God's son, he is perfection. Since he is God's purpose built Messiah, his priest, king, saviour figure, he has won perfection for us, has gifted it to us, and has the power and authority and the means to deliver us in his perfection home to heaven.

Amen. he has done for us what we'd never do for ourselves. So, I finish on this word.

[42 : 22] Back to the start. Where are you looking for perfection? The perfection you crave and so desperately need.

do you think Jesus is the perfection you need? Do you think his perfection is able and willing to meet all your needs?

Very simple way to test your answer in the quietness of your own mind. The evidence of your answer will be, do you go to Jesus for protection and for your needs?

Or are you still searching elsewhere? Why look beyond Jesus?

He is perfection. You can't improve on perfection. So, Jesus is the man you're looking for. Thank you.