

A Priest Like Melchizedek

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[0:00] Heavenly Father, we thank you that your word is not just the truth, but it's powerful to transform lives. So we pray, Lord, that your word tonight would penetrate not just our minds, but our hearts, so that we would be changed and transformed by your spirit.

We pray this in Jesus' name. How can you meet God? It's probably one of the greatest questions you will ever have to answer.

It's such a big question, actually, that all religions are trying to answer that same question. How can we have a relationship with God, and on what terms? How?

So I thought, I was kind of curious, and I wondered, like, what are people thinking about this? You know, like, where are people at with this stuff? So naturally, I decided to Google it, and this is the first link that came up with Google.

How to find God in 13 steps with pictures. Wasn't so helpful. But I guess 278 people thought it was pretty helpful. But what you find is that most religions, you know, and this includes Christianity as well.

[1:10] Most religions actually acknowledge that there's a problem. There is a problem. There is a disconnect. And the problem is that if a God is all-powerful, if God is all-holy, if God is all-good, then how on earth can a sinful and messed-up humanity possibly meet with this God?

How can we possibly have a relationship with this God? You know, agnostics, they naturally believe that this gap between man and God is impossible to breach.

God is so beyond us that he's completely unknowable and he's completely unreachable. You know, other religions, they try and breach this gap in different ways. So, some religions, they try and solve this problem through reincarnation.

So, with each life we live, we get better and better and better and better and better until finally we stop sinning and we are entitled to reach God. You know, if that was me, it would be more than just a few lifetimes.

See, this gap is so wide. And to be honest, for humanity, this gap isn't getting any smaller, is it? See, that's why most religions declare that you need someone that's going to meet with you, meet with God on your behalf.

[2:22] A representative. Someone who can represent both God and man and bring them together. And this representative is called a priest. But this is the thing.

This is the thing about the priest. Not just anyone can take on this role. You know, this representative, this priest needs to be qualified in every way for this task. You know, you just can't get Josh Tate to do it, you know.

He's a good guy, but I wouldn't trust him. I wouldn't be trusting to be a priest. So, this is what I want to show you today. I want to show you why Jesus is the only guy who can do this.

Why he is the best priest over any who have come before him. And that's what we're going to see. We're going to see that Jesus is a superior priest. Not just over the old way, over the old priesthood, but over all religions, over any other person who has ever come before him.

And as we've seen over the last few weeks, Hebrews, the whole book is actually all about the superiority of Christ. In chapter 4, we saw that Jesus is this great high priest who endures the full human experience so that now we can approach God with confidence.

[3:29] And then in the last week, it was a bit strange, wasn't it? But the author kind of takes a bit of a quick detour and actually rebukes the readers for saying, you know, you're getting slack. You're not hearing and understanding the word of God.

You're not taking it seriously. And this week, actually, the author, the writer comes back to explain what it truly means for Jesus to be a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

And why that's important. So let's have a look at this Melchizedek guy. If you're anything like me, when you first looked at this passage, you thought to yourself, who is this guy?

Why have I never heard about him before? You know, I can barely pronounce his name, let alone know what to do with him at all. And you'd be right. You know, he only makes one appearance in the Bible, in Genesis.

And even then, we're not really told much about him. He's a very mysterious guy with a very strange name. But don't worry too much if you're confused. Because really, there's only two things you need to know about Melchizedek.

[4 : 28] First, you need to know that he's a legit priest, that he's a real priest, even if he wasn't a priest that came from the order of Levi. And second, you need to know that his priesthood is even better than the Levitical priests.

Because actually, when the original readers, when the Jews hear that Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek, and not in the order of Levi, this would have been very, very shocking for them. It might have even seemed slightly blasphemous for them. You know, you're probably thinking at this stage, it's a bit overrated, to be honest. It doesn't seem like that big a deal at all. Why should I care?

Well, you need to understand just how entrenched this Levitical priesthood was for the Jews. You know, to the Jews, all of God's purposes for the Jews center around the temple.

You know, the temple was the place where people could meet with God. And the priests were obviously very important with this, weren't they? Because they were the ones that could actually enter into the temple, enter in and actually meet with God.

[5 : 32] And meet with God on their behalf. And in the Old Testament, in God's law, in Exodus 28, Exodus 28 says that priests could only come from the tribe of Levi. If anyone else not from the tribe of Levi wants to be a priest, they can't.

They're a pretender. And we see that God even severely punishes non-Levites who try and do priest stuff. So when Jesus comes, who is not in the order of, not from the tribe of Levi, you can understand why they're going to ask the question, aren't they?

It's impossible. It is impossible for Jesus to be a high priest. You know, when I was young, I loved riding my tricycle. I loved my tricycle.

You know, three wheels. So much stability, you know. I don't even need a pedal and I can still stay on it. I felt untouchable on that tricycle. Until one day, someone suggested to me, you should check out a bicycle.

It's so much more effective than a tricycle. They can go faster. They can turn quicker. But to me, this was madness. How can two be better than three?

[6 : 38] You know, I wasn't the smartest child in the world, but even I could do the maths. Three is better than two. But after much skepticism, after much debate, I finally changed to a bicycle sometime last year.

So, you know, I totally get why the Jews are asking the question. Because if everything I had ever known about priests was so dramatically overturned, you know, I'd be searching for answers too. So the writer, he wants to show them that Melchizedek is a legit priest and not a pretender. Have a look at verse one there in your Bibles. This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High.

He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him. And Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means king of righteousness. Then also, king of Salem means king of peace.

Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever. Now, the author, he's taking all of this information here from Genesis 14.

[7 : 43] And the thing you need to see here is that Melchizedek is doing two roles. Can you see that there in verse one? He's a priest and he's a king. So what the author is trying to do here, he's trying to show these Jews that even the scriptures say that Melchizedek was a real priest.

Even the Torah says that. And the author, he's actually trying to do something very significant here. He's saying that you shouldn't be surprised at all that Jesus is a priest because actually, Melchizedek, he resembles Jesus.

Look at what his name means in verse two. His name means king of righteousness and king of peace. Sounds a lot like a guy that I know who's described as the king of righteousness and the prince of peace, isn't it?

And in saying that Melchizedek doesn't have a beginning or an end and so he remains a priest forever, it's almost like the writer's making out that Melchizedek's some eternal being, some heavenly being.

But I don't think that's what he's trying to say. I reckon the author's just trying to say that he resembles Jesus' eternal nature because in the Bible we only ever encounter Melchizedek as a priest.

[8 : 50] We don't see him in any other role, in any other place. So he remains a priest forever in the eyes of the readers, if that makes sense. Okay, so we know that Melchizedek's a real dude.

His priesthood is legit. But more than that, Melchizedek is even better than the Levitical priesthood. Have a look there at verse four. Just think about how great he was.

He's talking about Melchizedek. Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder. He's saying here, this is what he's saying. He's saying, hey, Melchizedek, he's so great.

This guy is so great. He's even greater than Abraham, the father, the greatest figure in Israel's history. Why? Because Melchizedek blessed Abraham.

And verse seven says, the lesser Abraham is blessed by the greater Melchizedek. You guys with me so far? Is this making sense? All right. So if Abraham, the father of all Israel, acknowledges then that Melchizedek's a real priest by giving him the tenth, then verse nine says, by extension, Levi, the son of Abraham, who is an Israelite too, he acknowledges it as well.

[10 : 00] All right. Take a deep breath. That's pretty intense stuff. Oh, I think. Well, to me it is. So this is where we're left with so far. We're left with that Melchizedek is a real priest and that his priesthood is even better than Levitical priesthood.

So let's move on and see why that is. All right. Now, I want you to put yourself in the shoes of an Old Testament Jew here. Imagine that this is where you lived, which is on the slide.

This is where you lived. A big campsite in the wilderness. You know, it looks a little bit like Belgrave Heights Convention Center. It's a great place.

And, you know, at the center of the camp, at the center of a camp, God lives in that tent. That's where God lives. Imagine this. And to stay within a pretty close proximity of the campsite, to stay within the campsite around the tent, you would need to observe some very strict rules of purity and cleanness.

Imagine that you couldn't eat pork. No pork belly. No pulled pork. No char siu. None of that. And even then, the closest, the very closest you could get to God was by going into that courtyard bit around the tent.

[11 : 19] And actually, only the priest who would represent you could go inside the tent. And then, only the high priest could enter the very holy of holies and meet God directly right in the tent.

And before doing so, the high priest who would need to take a really long bath to cleanse himself, they would need to offer sacrifices to God under very controlled circumstances.

That's the way we would meet God. Through this high priest as your representative. So think about this. Would you be happy with this arrangement? Would you be happy with this type of access to God?

Well, that's actually what life would have been like under the old priesthood system. Think about, if you were a Gentile back in that day, where would you be? You'd be somewhere like here.

So far out, you know. But if you think about it, given how unworthy humans are to meet God, it's actually a pretty decent temporary solution.

[12 : 17] It's pretty decent. And God graciously gives this to his people as a temporary solution. But you know what? I wouldn't want this forever. And that's what the author is trying to say here.

Look at verse 11. See, his point is, is that if the Levitical priesthood was really perfect, if this was really the best way to do things, then why does this need replacing?

That's the point, isn't it? This is not the best way of functioning. So it did need replacing. And so because of this, we should be looking for another priest to come. One who won't come in the order of Levi.

Because that way didn't work. And actually, the Old Testament itself, it foreshadows that a new way is coming. And that it's going to be so much better than this old way. We saw it in our first reading

today, actually, in Psalm 110 that Gillian read for us.

And in that Psalm, King David, he's talking about the rule of a Messiah, the king. But the interesting wrinkle with that Psalm 110 that our passage brings out is that this king would be a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

[13:39] And you need to have the back of your mind that this is written about 1,000 years before Jesus. So this was always God's plan. And when Christ comes then in verse 14 from the tribe of Judah, the tribe of kings, it should be screaming out to you that this new priesthood has come, which has replaced the old way.

Have a look at verse 15 there. And what we have said is even more clear. If another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of regulation as to his ancestry, but on the basis of the power of indestructible life.

See, the difference in this new priesthood is that priests are not chosen on the basis of what your surname is, but they are chosen on the basis of qualification.

You know, it's kind of like when I apply for a job, right? Everyone wants to apply for a job. Everyone wants the job. And the person that gets this job based on their qualification, that's always a better way to hire than just employing the boss's son, isn't it?

You know, we hate it when that happens, that type of nepotism. So who better then to represent us than the only human who has lived such a perfect life in every way that they live forever?

[14:54] And even when you killed this perfect person, he was so good that death couldn't even hold him so that he rose again. See, Jesus' priesthood, it's not on the basis of having Levi as your surname, but verse 16, it is made on the basis of the power of indestructible life.

So the author, he's slowly trying to convince us, isn't he, to take the third wheel off the tricycle. The old Levitical system, that was never the final solution. Verse 18 says that the former regulation is set aside because it was weak and it was useless, for the law made nothing perfect.

And now a better hope is introduced by which we draw near to God. See, the old way, it was good. It was a good way to do things, but it was imperfect. And now Jesus, who is the perfect priest, now that he is here, he has completely changed the way that humans meet God.

He has so fundamentally changed and altered the terms of how humans can meet God that now we can truly draw near through him. So let's see how this is possible.

And in this last section, we're going to see three ways, three reasons why Christ's perfect priesthood has dramatically altered the way we relate to God.

[16:11] Firstly, because Christ's priesthood is an unchanging appointment. It is an unchanging appointment. Look at verse 20. See, Jesus, the perfect priest, he's the perfect priest because God has guaranteed on oath that he will always be a priest.

God has sworn it and nothing can change it. And what that means for us is that if Jesus is always going to be God's choice for priests, we don't need to look anywhere else to meet with God.

We don't need to find new ways to meet with God. Because sometimes, I don't know if you're like me, but sometimes we Christians, we love to look for this next new thing. We love to discover this next new fad to discover intimacy with God.

So we drive down Blackburn Road, we go into Courant, and we look for the book with the smiley face on the cover. The book that's going to show you how to revitalize your relationship with God. You know, I remember when I was a new Christian, you know, I thought, okay, now I'm a Christian. Now I'm in with Jesus. Now I'm going to get these deep, fresh revelations from the Spirit. You know, I'm going to really carry it up and do something crazy, whatever that means.

[17:36] So I thought, you know, I'm going to get closer to God by speaking in tongues, having these deep spiritual experiences. But actually, I don't need any of that. I don't need to seek any of that out because in Christ, I can already draw so near to God.

I can meet with Him so intimately because Jesus is not just the perfect high priest, but He's God Himself. So as I draw near to Him, I'm already as close to God as I can get.

And you know why this is so awesome? It's awesome because now my intimacy, my relationship with God, it doesn't just depend on feelings. Because this is the dilemma.

The dilemma is I know this stuff. I know this stuff in my head, but I just don't feel it. I don't feel it in here. You know, actually, God can feel kind of distant. It doesn't feel near at all.

But this is what I need to know. I need to know that Jesus meets with God continually on my behalf. That He transcends my emotions. So even when I'm feeling low, even when I'm feeling distant from

God, I can actually rest in the assurance that it doesn't matter.

[18 : 44] Because Jesus enters in for me. So I can keep running to Him over and over again, regardless of how I feel. Second reason why Christ's priesthood is better is because it is an eternal intercession.

Verse 23. Now there have been many of those priests since death prevented them from continuing in office. But because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood.

Therefore, He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him because He always lives to intercede for them. Another one of the problems with the old way is that the priest would die. And we couldn't count on the same guy to get the job done. You know, I feel like one of the realities in life is that there is no permanence. Nothing is permanent.

I hate that. I hate it because every time I get something good happening in my life, it just never seems to last. I don't know if you can relate to this, you know. Every time I start to get comfortable in my friendships, I get comfortable with the world, something just seems to happen.

[19 : 51] You know, a good friend moves away, someone gets sick, relationships break down. And, you know, we've been reminded of this quite recently in a very confronting way through all these terror attacks that have happened all around the world.

But you know what? In a world with so much uncertainty, we can rest because God has made permanent what is most important. Because Jesus lives forever, because he cannot die, it means we can always count on him to intercede for us before God.

And because of this, now I can have so much confidence in security of my own salvation, regardless of what happens to me in this life. And this is the sweetest news for me, especially in my worst weeks.

You know, to be honest with you, the last week for me has been a real struggle. In moments of bitterness, in moments of spiritual dryness, I need this assurance that Jesus lives forever to intercede on my behalf.

And when I'm at my worst, when I'm at my very worst, I desperately need to know that Jesus will get me all the way home. He will see everything through to the end, right up till I die.

[21 : 02] He's able to save us completely. See, it's not like the Catholics where we're constantly worried, we're constantly looking for this human priest to absolve our sin every time. No, because Christ is our high priest who lives forever.

I know that his very presence in heaven, the very presence that he, the very fact that he lives is proof of my forgiveness. So I can draw near to God. I can draw near to Jesus so closely by faith. I don't need anything else. And lastly, Jesus is the perfect priest because he performs a once and for all sacrifice. Remember that under the old system, the priests had to offer sacrifices over and over and over and over again.

And these sacrifices, they could never stop because they were offered by someone who was just as much a sinner as we were. And all these priests, they're just sinners like us.

So what that means is that their representation for us is compromised. That's what sets Jesus apart, actually. Look at verse 26. Such a high priest truly meets our need.

[22 : 13] One who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people.

He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness. But the oath which came after the law appointed the son who has been made perfect forever.

So now these sacrifices, they can finally stop. Because Jesus, the perfect human, the human who endured the full experience of human suffering and temptation and yet did not sin.

Well, he has given himself as the perfect sacrifice that covers all sin. And you know what's the amazing thing here about Jesus' sacrifice?

The amazing thing is that this sacrifice, it wasn't for himself because he was perfect. No, it was offered for us. And that actually reveals something very significant about the heart of God.

[23 : 27] See, all this talk about priests, sometimes we get the impression here that God is very distant, isn't he? He's an angry God that only permits me to meet with him, only if we're good enough.

But because Jesus is the priest that offers the perfect sacrifice entirely for our sins, it means that God doesn't just permit you to come to him, but he desperately wants you to come to him. And I think this is what actually separates Christianity from all other religions. You know, the God of every other religion says, you clean yourself up, you live a better life, and then maybe you can come to me.

Not the Christian God. This is what our God says. He says, I want you to come to know me so badly. I want you to have a relationship with me that I'm going to do everything for you so that you would come.

I'm going to offer down the perfect sacrifice. Actually, I'm going to give what is most precious to me. I'm going to give you my son. I'm going to do everything for you. Why? Because he's not a strict God that merely allows you in, but he so desperately loves you and he wants you in.

[24 : 35] And as I place my trust in Christ's sacrifice, which covers all of my sin, once and for all, actually, I don't encounter a scary God at all. I encounter a God who delights in me, who invites me to draw nearer and nearer and nearer, who wants to hear from me in prayer, who wants to talk to me through his word, because this is what he's always wanted.

He's wanted you in a relationship with him like a father to a child. So now I don't need to prove anything to God. I don't need to bring anything to him. God doesn't want my stuff.

He doesn't need gifts. He doesn't need offerings. He doesn't need sacrifices. He just wants you. So now you can approach him with all the mess, all the complexity, with all your selfishness, because God has already accepted Christ as the perfect sacrifice.

This is what the old way cannot give you. This is what no other religion can give you. A God that wants to draw near to you so badly. You know, I reckon if we truly knew what it costs God to achieve all of this for us, man, we would run to him so much more than we do.

And that's what Hebrews is trying to say. Don't drift. Don't drift away from God, but draw near.

Come near to him. Because God is not unknowable. God is not beyond us.

[25 : 55] Actually, because Jesus is our high priest, God has become so intensely knowable. And that's my hope for us all, that we would draw so near to God so often, because that's what he loves.

So let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have sent Jesus as our great high priest, the perfect priest who intercedes for us always, who offers the perfect sacrifice so that we can truly draw near to him.

So we pray that by faith we would continue to draw closer and closer through your son. We pray that you would give us the strength to do this. And we pray and we know that you can do all of this and exceedingly more.

In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.