

# Melchizedek, the Great Priest-King

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you would turn with me in a Bible to Hebrews chapter 7. If you're looking in one of the Pew Bibles, it's page 1004. We're continuing into the next major section of Hebrews, which goes from chapter 7 through the middle of chapter 10.

And we'll be doing that for the next couple of months. But this morning, we're reading chapter 7, verses 1 through 10. I'm actually going to read the last two verses of chapter 6, starting at chapter 6, verse 19, to see how it leads into chapter 7 and introduces this theme.

So, Hebrews, starting at chapter 6, verse 19, says, 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 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.

[ 1 : 41 ] 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, 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.

One of our commitments at Trinity Baptist Church is to teach what the Apostle Paul describes as the whole counsel of God. In other words, as God enables us, we seek to proclaim and teach all of the different truths that God has revealed to us in all the different parts and sections of the Bible. Now, one of the ways that we try to put that into practice is by preaching through entire books of the Bible, passage by passage. If you've been coming to our church for some time, you've probably noticed that's our regular pattern.

[ 3 : 07 ] And as a result, sometimes I, as one of the preachers, am given a passage to preach that I might not ever choose on my own, like this one. Now, Melchizedek is only mentioned in three places in the Bible.

He's mentioned twice in the Old Testament, and he's mentioned here in Hebrews. This is the only place in the New Testament that he's discussed. So, these next three weeks might be your only chance in a long while to learn about Melchizedek, because he appears so rarely in the Bible.

Now, for some of you, that's pretty exciting. And you're thinking, wow, I want to know who this guy really was. What does verse three mean when it says that he didn't have a father or mother?

What's that all about? And he didn't have a beginning or end of his life. And what's the deal with the tithing and blessing in verses nine and ten about Levi being in the loins of his ancestor? What in the world?

Now, on the other hand, some of you might be thinking, well, those are maybe interesting scholarly questions. But what does this passage have to do with real life and the real problems that I'm facing today?

[ 4 : 18 ] Maybe you're wishing that you were still at home, sitting on a comfortable couch, watching Super Bowl previews, instead of sitting on a hard wooden pew and hearing about some guy whose name you can't even pronounce.

But if that's you, 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16 and 17 says this. It says, all scripture is breathed out by God. Not only is it breathed out by God, it says, but it's useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man or woman of God may be equipped for every good work, so that all of us may be equipped for the good works that God has for us.

And that includes this passage. And over the years, one of the ways that I've been increasingly convinced that the Bible is truly God's word is by looking into passages like this one, that at first might seem difficult or irrelevant and finding rich treasures of wisdom within them.

And so that's my prayer for each of us today, that we would see here in this passage and in the next several weeks, that we would see the wisdom and the glory of God as we look into the figure of Melchizedek and these next few chapters dealing with Jesus as our high priest.

Now, on the surface, this morning's passage is about the greatness of Melchizedek. Verse 4 is a key verse in the center of the passage. It says, see how great this man was.

[ 5 : 54 ] Everything in the passage is about that. Verses 1 to 3 introduce him as a great king and a great priest. Verses 4 through 10 are all about how he's even greater than Abraham. But in the larger context of Hebrews, this passage isn't ultimately about the greatness of Melchizedek.

Ultimately, it's about the greatness of Jesus. At the end of chapter 6, verse 20, it says that Jesus is a high priest forever after the order of, or in the pattern of, Melchizedek.

And so the reason we're talking about Melchizedek is not just because we want to learn about obscure figures from neglected corners of the Bible, but because understanding Melchizedek will help us understand Jesus and appreciate him more.

So seeing Melchizedek's greatness will help us see the greatness of Jesus. So that's what I want to look at this morning, is how does the greatness of Melchizedek point us to the greatness of Jesus?

Now, before we jump into the details, think for a moment about this idea of greatness. On a personal level, is there someone that you know personally that you consider great?

[ 7 : 07 ] Maybe it's a family member or a mentor or a friend, someone who's always been there for you, or someone whose character has been proven through hardship, or someone that you recognize that you wouldn't be where you are today without them and their involvement in your life.

And as a result, you listen closely when that person speaks. You notice the details of how they act. If you get an email from them, you don't just delete it or ignore it, but you read it carefully.

You might even ask yourself, how would this person deal with this situation that I'm facing? Or maybe it's not, maybe there's a public figure that you admire.

Maybe you're a Peyton Manning fan. And you know how many years he's played in the NFL, how many yards he's thrown, how many touchdown passes he's completed, and you're rooting for the Broncos to win tonight.

And as a result, if you happen to look next to you and somebody else was wearing a Bronco shirt, you would immediately feel a connection to them. Because you have a common recognition of greatness.

[ 8 : 22 ] Or maybe there's a band that you love, or a scholar that you think is particularly insightful, and you read their blog, or you follow them on Twitter, and you post their articles on Facebook, and when their book comes out, you pre-order it on Amazon before it's even released.

And when they're coming to town to give a concert or give a talk, you're one of the first to get a ticket, and you invite a bunch of people to go with you. Because you see their greatness.

You see, recognizing someone's greatness changes your attitude toward them and toward everything else. It reorients your priorities and your focus in life. You can't remain the same when you truly recognize someone's greatness.

Or on a historical level, there are historical figures whose greatness is recognized by whole societies. In American history, that might include George Washington, the hero of the American Revolution, or Abraham Lincoln, the great emancipator, or Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights pioneer.

The birthdays of these men have become national holidays. Monuments have been built in their honor. Their most famous speeches are read and discussed year after year, and social and political movements seek to build on their legacy and honor their achievements.

[ 9 : 39 ] You see, you can't recognize someone's greatness and remain unaffected. The most natural response to recognizing someone's greatness is to live a life in honor of them.

Now, verse 4 says, See how great this man was. To whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils. Now, if you traveled back in time to the first century A.D. when Hebrews was written, and if you asked almost any Jewish person, who do you consider truly great?

Near the top of almost everyone's list would be Abraham. Abraham was the patriarch. He was the founding father of the Jewish people. God called to him.

And God said to him, I'll make of you a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great. God himself promised to make Abraham's name great.

How much greater can you be? And God said, I will bless those who bless you. Whoever dishonors you, I will curse. And in you, all the families of the world will be blessed. Later on, God elaborated on that promise in Genesis 17.

[ 10 : 48 ] He said, I will make you exceedingly fruitful. Kings will come from you. In other words, he's saying you're a royal family. And he says, I will establish my covenant, my promise with you and your descendants to be an everlasting covenant.

To be your God. You know, if you read through the Old Testament, pretty much every promise that God makes to the people of Israel is simply an extension of God's promise to Abraham.

Or an elaboration of it. It all goes back to him. And even during his lifetime, the people around Abraham recognized his greatness. So the Hittite leaders in Genesis 23 call him a prince of God.

Or Abimelech in Genesis 20 says to him, he says, look, all my land is before you. Live wherever you want. Take whatever you want. It's all yours.

Now, one of the displays of Abraham's greatness is found in Genesis 14. We read a little section from there about just before he meets Melchizedek.

[ 11 : 54 ] Now, you might want to flip back there. So let me just outline the basic story here in Genesis 14. Basically, four Canaanite kings, led by Caterlaomer king of Elam, attack the region.

And so they're tearing through the land. They're defeating tribe after tribe and city after city. They're striking fear in people's hearts, carrying off plunder, capturing people, including Abraham's nephew, Lot.

And Lot's family. Now, Abraham was loyal to Lot, both because they were blood relatives, as well as because Lot had joined him in following the call of God in Genesis 12.

So Abraham hears that Lot has been captured and kidnapped by these invading armies. And so Abraham immediately gathers his men, 318 of them, it says, which actually sounds like a big number, but when you're attacking four kings and their armies, that's actually not such a big number.

And he launches a surprise attack in the middle of the night. He defeats the four kings and their armies, recovers all the possessions they've taken, and all the people they had captured, including Lot and his family.

[ 13 : 10 ] Abraham's a powerful dude. You don't mess with Abraham. But you know, Abraham wasn't just powerful, he was righteous. Abraham had promised to be loyal to Lot, and he kept his promise, even when he had to go to great lengths, at great cost to himself.

You see, Abraham could have blamed Lot, because Lot chose to hang out. You can see this in Genesis 13. Lot chose to hang out near Sodom. And Abraham could have looked at him and blamed him for moving to the bad neighborhood, when he could have lived in a better one.

He could have said, you know, you're sort of asking for trouble. But Abraham was a righteous man. And in other words, he was faithful to his promises.

And so he didn't hold back out of fear of these powerful Canaanite kings. He didn't hold back because of how inconvenient and costly it was to go and rescue Lot. He went to great lengths to rescue Lot, when Lot found himself in trouble.

And not only did he rescue Lot, he restored peace and order to the whole region, when it had been engulfed by chaos, through these invading armies. You see, Abraham was a great man.

[ 14 : 25 ] No one could argue with that. But the author of Hebrews says, there's somebody even greater than Abraham. And he picks up on a surprising detail in Genesis 14.

So if you look in verse 18, Abraham's coming home from the battle. And Melchizedek, this guy, appears out of nowhere and comes out to meet him.

And the author of Hebrews points to two unusual aspects of Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek. So first he says, in Hebrews chapter 7, verse 1, he points out Melchizedek blessed Abraham. And verse 7 in Hebrews says, it is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In other words, when one human being bestows a blessing on another human being, it's the person in a higher position of authority or honor who gives the blessing, not vice versa.

So we have several examples in the Bible of parents blessing their children. Now Hebrews 11 mentions Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau and Jacob blessing Joseph and his brothers.

[15:36] So we might say they're passing on their honor, their authority, their good name to their children. We also see God blessing people.

Genesis 1, he creates them in his image and he bestows some of his honor. Some of his authority, some of his name upon us. And sometimes we also see people calling upon God to bless others. Not only directly blessing them, but calling upon God to bless others. As the priests did when they would say, the Lord bless you and keep you. And the Lord make his face to shine upon you. But the point of what he's saying here is that the fact that Melchizedek blessed Abraham shows that Melchizedek was even greater than Abraham. That Melchizedek was bestowing his honor upon Abraham.

And not vice versa. And then he points out that Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils. Now in the ancient world, giving someone a tenth of the spoils was an act of submission and self-dedication.

[16:44] It was a way of saying, I'm yours. So I'm giving you the first cut off the plunder. The top of the heap. And in the Old Testament, God required the Israelites to bring the first ten percent of their produce to him.

As a way of saying, I'm loyal to you. I trust you. And the priest collected it. Now verse 9 comes in here, in Hebrews.

Verse 9 is basically saying, you could even go one step further. And say, not only did Abraham pay a tenth to Melchizedek, but that Abraham, in a sense, acted on behalf of his descendant Levi. Sort of like if your great-grandfather paid all the taxes that you would ever owe in your whole lifetime to the federal government in advance before you were born. That'd be sort of nice. You get a really good refund every year. And now the author of Hebrews recognizes that verse 9 and 10, he's being somewhat speculative. And that's why he says, one might even say.

[17:50] He doesn't say you must say this. But he's saying you could argue that in one sense, even Levi recognized or testifies to the greatness of this guy, Melchizedek.

Okay, so the blessing and the tithing all point to the greatness of Melchizedek. He's even greater than Abraham. So what? And who is this guy anyway? Well, the book of Genesis, as well as Hebrews, tell us two things about who is this Melchizedek that is so great.

So first it says he's a king. If you're back in Hebrews, verse 1 says, Melchizedek was the king of Salem. And then verse 2 says he's the king of righteousness by translation of his name.

Now in Hebrew, Melchi means king and Zedek means righteousness. So he's just using the etymology of the word, king of righteousness. And then he's also the king of Salem.

In other words, the king of Jerusalem. Salem is just a short form for Jerusalem that's occasionally used. And the Hebrew word Salem or shalom, as we might pronounce it today, means peace.

[18:57] So he's the king of righteousness and peace. That's the first thing. Second thing, he's also a priest. He's a priest of the Most High God, of the one true God. But if you compare him to every other priest in the Old Testament, he's a very unusual kind of priest.

And in particular, his genealogy is not recorded. You see, in the Old Testament law, every priest in Israel was required to be descended from the tribe of Levi and the line of Aaron.

And this was a very strict requirement, with no exceptions. After the exile, there was a big controversy. When some people claimed to be descended from Aaron and in the tribe of Levi, but they couldn't prove their genealogy.

Because they lost the records and the whole moving to Babylon and moving back home and all the chaos that was involved there. So they couldn't prove it. And you know what they did? They were excluded from the priesthood. They were not allowed to serve as priests.

Because they couldn't prove it. But here, this Melchizedek guy is a priest of the true God with absolutely no record of where he came from.

[ 20 : 06 ] Or where he went. And it's unusual in Genesis, too. If you read the book of Genesis, it's full of genealogies. Family history records. In fact, the whole book of Genesis has ten sections.

And each one of them begins with, these are the generations of so-and-so. Or this is the family history of so-and-so. So it's very unusual that this important figure appears, who's even greater than Abraham.

Perhaps one of the greatest figures in all of Genesis. But his genealogy is not recorded at all. So that's the point of Hebrews chapter 7, verse 3. He says he is without father or mother or genealogy. Now, some people have wondered, what does that mean? Does that mean that Melchizedek was more than human? Was he an angel? Or was he even the Son of God, appearing before he became incarnate?

The problem with that view is that verse 3 says he was resembling the Son of God. It doesn't say he was the Son of God. It says he was resembling the Son of God.

[ 21 : 10 ] It's not saying that he literally was never born and never died. It's saying that he only appears in the Scripture as a living priest. He doesn't appear in any other way.

And in fact, the only other reference in the Scripture to Melchizedek is Psalm 110.4, which says, So it picks up on that theme of a priest who continues without interruption and without any record of his end.

Now, King David in that psalm seems to be talking about a great priest to come who would be like Melchizedek in that he would continue as a priest forever. All right.

Now, we've just gone through a bunch of details about Melchizedek. Okay, but the point of all these details, the point of all this very intricate argument that the author of Hebrews runs us through, is that all these details point forward to the greatness of Jesus.

Jesus is the great king of righteousness and peace. Jesus is the great high priest who lives forever. Jesus is the source of every spiritual blessing.

[ 22 : 27 ] And Jesus is worthy of our loyalty and our allegiance and the best that we have. So the whole point of this passage, it's an invitation to consider the greatness of Jesus.

That even 2,000 years before the book of Hebrews was written, God orchestrated the smallest details of Abraham's life to reveal the glory of his son who was to come.

Jesus is our king of righteousness and peace. I mean, we saw how Abraham was righteous in the sense that he was loyal to his nephew Lot. Lot had joined himself to Abraham, and Abraham had promised to look after Lot.

And so when Lot got into trouble, Abraham went a great length to rescue him. He didn't hold back. He didn't say, it's too hard. He didn't say, I'm busy.

He went to rescue him. And not only did he rescue Lot, he brought peace to the whole region by defeating these kings who were carrying off city after city.

[ 23 : 31 ] No, Jesus Christ is the ultimate king of righteousness and peace. Because Jesus Christ is faithful to all of his promises, even at great cost to himself.

And throughout the Old Testament, God promised that one day he would send a Messiah, a great king who would defeat the enemies of God and establish peace for God's people on earth.

But you know, the problem was, none of the kings of Israel ever lived up to that description. They were all unrighteous. They all, so were the people. They kept turning away from God over and over again.

And so there was never a lasting peace because there was never a true righteousness. But God was faithful to his people again and again. And he was faithful even though his people weren't faithful to him.

And so he sent his own son, Jesus Christ. And Jesus willingly came to be the Messiah, to be the perfectly righteous king. Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life in line with God, in full obedience to God.

[ 24 : 40 ] And on the cross, he died, and then he rose from the grave to rescue us from our greatest enemies, from sin and death and the devil. The message of the Bible is that Jesus Christ, the king of righteousness, who establishes peace for everyone who comes to him and is joined to him.

And if you're joined to Jesus, he promises that he will never leave you or forsake you because he's righteous. He is faithful to his promises. He will not hold back from them.

And so, you know, if you get into trouble or if trouble finds you, Jesus won't give up on you. He won't say, it's too hard. I'm going to just count my losses and let that one go. He will come and find you and bring you home, just like Abraham did for Lot, because he is a righteous king who loves his people. And Jesus is not only our king, he's also our priest. Now, this is the main theme of the next four chapters. So I won't go into as much depth about it today because we'll get to see more about it. But the point is, Jesus is our ever-living high priest. [ 25 : 51 ] And through him, we can draw near to God. And as our great high priest, he bestows every spiritual blessing upon us. In other words, Jesus places his honor, his name upon us.

You know, it's one thing to stand at a distance and recognize someone's greatness from afar. And maybe you cheer them on. Maybe you try to emulate them from a distance. Maybe you recognize something about how great they are. But it's a totally other thing. If someone who is great comes near to you and bestows some of their greatness, some of their authority, some of their honor upon you, and associates himself with you and blesses you. And that's exactly what Jesus Christ has done. He's not only the king of the whole universe, but he associated himself completely with us in becoming human, even to the point of dying on a cross. And when he died on the cross, he took upon himself our sin and our shame so that we might be closed in his honor. This is the greatness of Jesus, our king and our high priest. [ 27 : 11 ] Now, as we said earlier, it's impossible to recognize someone's greatness and remain unchanged. So I want to conclude with the question, what does it look like to live in light of the greatness of Jesus?

This passage doesn't spell out the applications, but I want to point to three other verses in Hebrews that apply some of the themes that come out of this passage. So chapter 4, verse 16 of Hebrews says, Since we have a great high priest, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace.

Now, many of us don't approach God and don't live with confident assurance in God's love for us, but instead, we live in our shame.

You know, if you've last, if you have seen the last two episodes of Downton Abbey, this is Anna's situation, right? She's filled with shame because of a horrible thing that someone did to her. And so she draws back, even from Bates, even from her husband, the person who loves her more than anyone else in the world. And she moves out into her own apartment. She doesn't even want to let him touch her.

[ 28 : 25 ] She lives in isolation and anguish, but her husband Bates pursues her, and he pursues her gently, and he pursues her gradually, but he pursues her persistently because he's determined to win her back, whatever the cause of the shame.

You know, sometimes our shame comes from ugly things that other people have said about us or done to us. And sometimes our shame comes from our own failures, and our own sin. But whatever the source of the shame, Jesus has come as our great high priest to bestow his blessing and a love upon us, to clothe us in his honor and crown us with his glory and his love and draw us near to him.

So if you are crippled, if you feel hindered by shame, consider the greatness of Jesus, our high priest, who has not drawn back from us, but has drawn near to us.

Through Jesus, you and I can approach God with freedom and confidence, and we can live before the world, not in shame, but in freedom and confidence of knowing his love for us.

[ 29 : 42 ] Second verse, chapter 13, verse 5. Keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have, for he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

When we recognize the greatness of Jesus, that he has promised never to leave us and never to forsake us and never to abandon us, temporary things like money and possessions and worldly status begin to fade into the background of our lives.

They become secondary, just means to the end of loving Jesus and loving his people. And so if Jesus is our righteous and faithful king, it makes sense to tithe, to give 10% of our income as an expression of submission and loyalty to Jesus, our king.

As Abraham did to give honor to Melchizedek, as the people in the Old Testament did under the Old Testament law. So whether it's giving to the local church or giving to missionaries or giving to the poor in the name of Christ, we're saying, Jesus, I give you the first cup of what you've given me because my first priority is to see your greatness proclaimed in all the world.

Third, chapter 13, verse 15. Through Jesus, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

[ 31 : 16 ] The third response to the greatness of Jesus, to draw near to him, to surrender and give ourselves to him. And third, to acknowledge him publicly.

You know, whatever we recognize as great, the most natural response is to acknowledge that person to others, to praise them.

It's the most natural thing to do. You know, if you're a Broncos fan, sometime today, you're going to express your loyalty to your team. You're not going to sit and watch the game completely silent, pretending that you don't care at all who wins.

You're going to express your admiration and your love for that which you think is great. And when we recognize the greatness of Jesus, the natural response is not to keep it to ourselves.

Now, there's no need to be obnoxious, but the natural response is to publicly acknowledge Jesus and to tell others about his greatness and to invite them to consider his greatness that we have seen and experienced.

[ 32 : 25 ] So let us consider the greatness of Jesus, our great king of righteousness and peace, our high priest who lives forever. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that in your word, Lord, even in small portions of your word that we might be tempted to neglect.

Lord, that we see your greatness and your glory revealed in this person of Melchizedek. We thank you, Jesus, for how you arrange that to display your glory, to display not only your kingly authority, but your faithfulness to us as our high priest.

Lord, we pray that you would open our eyes to your greatness and, Lord, that we would respond appropriately to you, knowing that you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, there's one more thing about Melchizedek that the author of Hebrews doesn't mention, and that's when Melchizedek came to Abraham, he brought out bread and wine to refresh him after the battle, and he blessed him.

And this morning we come to the Lord's table, and at the Lord's table, Jesus Christ, our great king of righteousness and peace, our great high priest, our representative, offers us bread representing his body, and a cup representing his blood as visible signs of his promise and his blessing upon us.

[ 34 : 30 ] The message that we proclaim here is that Jesus has not held anything back from us. He gave us himself when he died on the cross, and when we are joined to him by faith, he promises that he will never leave us nor forsake us.

So if you're a Christian here today, if Jesus Christ is your king and your high priest, take the bread and the cup, eat and drink, and be assured of God's promise and his love and his faithfulness to you.

And as you take it, offer yourself to him in a fresh way. If you're not a Christian, if you're not sure who Jesus is, we're glad you're here today.

Instead of taking the bread and the cup, use this time to consider what they represent, to consider what it would mean for you to trust this Jesus.

With those who are helping to serve communion, come to the front today. Amen. Amen.