

SERMON
SERIESAND WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE
TO PLEASE HIM, FOR WHOEVER
WOULD DRAW NEAR TO GOD
MUST BELIEVE THAT HE EXISTS
AND THAT HE REWARDS THOSE
WHO SEEK HIM.

HEBREW'S



26

HEBREW'S
VERSE BY
VERSE STUDYLET US DRAW NEAR IN
*Faith***SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 7:11-19**

To better understand why the order of Melchizedek is greater than the Levitical priesthood.

Read the Text:

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? 12 For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. 13 For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. 15 This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." 18 For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. (Hebrews 7:11-19, ESV)

Study the Text:**A Greater Priesthood**

In Hebrews 7:1-10, the author identifies Melchizedek and lays out the various reasons why he is greater than Levi (Heb. 7:9-10). Now, in verses 11 through 19, the author will outline why the entirety of Melchizedek's priesthood is greater than the Levitical priesthood. Below is a breakdown of some of the key details and concepts in this passage.

THE END GOAL OF HUMANITY

Verse 11 presents a technical term found only here in Hebrews, but used elsewhere to denote a major aspect of the Christian faith: "perfection" (Gk. τελείωσις). The Greek underlying word is the source of our English term "telos," meaning "an end goal." Simply stated, the end goal for humanity is a kind of "perfection," or probably better understood to mean "completion or fulfillment." God, in other words, is in the process of perfecting with the end goal of bringing humanity to completion, specifically in Christ.

The Bible elsewhere speaks of “sanctification,” the process by which we are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:22; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Th. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2). This sanctifying process leads to our completion. This is God’s goal for us. And thus, verse 11 becomes very important to understanding the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood. The old Levitical priesthood not only failed to accomplish this task, but was never able to do so to begin with, thereby necessitating another priesthood to eventually succeed it.

A NEW PRIESTHOOD MEANS A NEW LAW

This new priesthood also means a new “law” to come with it. Verse 11 connects the Levitical priesthood's inability to bring about God’s ultimate goal for humanity to the Mosaic law as a whole, which is mediated by the Levitical priesthood. The Mosaic law was never capable of bringing about perfection in the people of God, and for a number of reasons (which Hebrews will continue to cover for the next several chapters). This means that, at the bare minimum, prioritizing Mosaic practices in the New Covenant is misguided at best and misleading at worst. The Mosaic law was to serve as a “shadow” of the “substance,” who is Christ (Heb. 8:5, 10:1; Col. 2:17). The substance, however, has come. The idea of repeating these practices, in light of the reality they point to as readily available to us through the Spirit, is absurd.

The Pharisees of the first century believed the Law of Moses was immutable. The thought of letting go of such practices was unheard of. Yet, this is what prompted Paul to encourage first-century Christians in light of such cultural pressures: “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:16-17). Imagine you are given a picture of the Grand Canyon. You look at this picture every day because it's so beautiful. You are consumed by the thought of being there, seeing it, and experiencing its beauty. But then, imagine you actually *arrive* at the Grand Canyon, where you now have access to the real thing. How absurd would it be if, instead of marveling at God’s actual creation, you continued to go back to the picture of it? So too is it absurd to revisit the Jewish feasts that pointed to Christ when the actual presence of Christ is now available through His Spirit.

That the priesthood of Jesus Christ is not the Levitical priesthood means that Christians living in the New Covenant also live under a new law, which is exactly what verse 12 communicates. Those things that pointed to the coming Messiah no longer carry any function, but that which they anticipated has arrived.

AN APPOINTED PRIEST

Verses 13 and 14 confirm that Jesus Christ’s priesthood does not require a legal bloodline. The “one of whom these things are spoken” refers to Jesus (Heb. 7:13). Jesus belonged to another tribe of Moses, Judah, which was never permitted to serve at the altar, and this is made explicit in the following verse as well (Heb. 7:14). That Moses never permitted Judah to serve as a priest is of no consequence to the New Covenant, but the New Covenant is mediated by a different law under a different priesthood.

A DIVINE PRIEST

Further separating these priesthoods is found in verses 15 and 16. Jesus Christ, who is “like” Melchizedek for the reasons mentioned in the previous lesson, is further distinguished from the Levitical priests as one who has “an indestructible life” (Heb. 7:16), language consistent with deity. Jesus has already been described as “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,” one who “upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

He is further “indestructible.” That is not to say that Jesus’ humanity did not die. The deity of Jesus, however, did not, and indeed *cannot* die. It is not that the deity of Jesus “died” when the humanity of Jesus died, but

that the dead humanity of Jesus was caused to live again on account of the inability of the deity of Jesus to die. Humanity does not change Jesus at the Incarnation; rather, Jesus changes humanity through His Incarnation. And this brings us back to how verse 11 began: the end goal of God for humanity is to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, which means becoming immortal. And only a divine priest can accomplish this, further setting this priesthood apart from the Levitical priesthood.

AN ETERNAL PRIEST

Jesus is not only an indestructible priest, but an eternal one as well (Heb. 7:17). His priesthood ushers in a new law, which causes the “former commandment” (that is, the law of Moses) to be “set aside” in order that a “better hope is introduced,” one in which we are able “to draw near to God” (Heb. 7:18-19). We can draw near to God through Jesus, our high priest, because we can draw near to Jesus Himself, who is God.

What About Now?

The major takeaway from this text is that both the new priesthood and the new law that accompanies it allow us to do what the previous law and priesthood did not: *draw near to God*. In Christ, our divine, indestructible high priest, we are able to draw near to God in a way that the people of God previously could not. Beyond that, the burden of the Mosaic law is no longer foisted upon the people of God, a law that even the previous Jewish generations could not uphold (Acts 15:10). Instead, we believe the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for us (Acts 15:11). That isn't to say that the law does not reveal the heart of God for his people. It is to say, rather, that the law should never be weaponized against Christians as a standard to “measure up to.”

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 7:11. Was perfection attainable through the old priesthood? What does this reveal about the need for the order of Melchizedek?

2. Read Hebrews 7:12. What is necessary to accompany a change in priesthood?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 7:13. Who is this speaking about? Which tribe was Jesus from? Did that tribe ever “serve at the altar?”

2. Read Hebrews 7:14. How does verse 14 bring clarity to verse 13?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 7:15-16. On what basis has Jesus become a priest? What was not required for this?

2. Read Hebrews 7:17. Who does “him” refer to? What verse is quoted here?
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Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 7:18. What former commandment is set aside? Why?
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2. Read Hebrews 7:19. Why is this new law of the new covenant called “a better hope?”
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Discuss the Text!

Session 17 Discussion: A New Law

In this passage, the author of Hebrews explains why Christians no longer observe the law of Moses as the Israelites did. Often, non-believers criticize Christians for choosing to obey some Scripture (primarily New Testament commands) while disregarding Old Testament laws (such as mixed fabrics, stoning, etc.), but this misses the point of Hebrews 7:11-19. We are no longer bound by the law of Moses because that law belonged to the Levitical priesthood. Our high priest, however, does not belong to that priesthood, but to the priesthood of Melchizedek, and with the new priesthood comes a new law. Talk as a group about what this means for Christians today.

1. Icebreaker: When you think of “the law of Moses,” what’s the first thing that comes to mind?
2. Do you ever feel like you have to “earn” God’s love and favor?
3. Do you ever feel other Christians are spiritually inferior because they do not practice the same spiritual disciplines as you? How do you fight against this?
4. Would other people describe you as “religious?” Why or why not?
5. Do you think grace is enough, or are Christians obligated to do their part?
6. Kid Talk: Have your child think about a time when mom was out of town, and only dad was present. Now have them imagine a time when dad was out of town, and only mom was present. Ask them about the differences (e.g., “mom makes sure my lunches are always packed, and dad doesn’t,” “dad lets me stay up late, and mom doesn’t”). Now, make the comparison to the old priesthood and the new priesthood, and how each one has its own “law,” things that they emphasize that the other doesn’t.

Takeaways:

1. The old priesthood could not sanctify a person; the new priesthood can.
2. The new priesthood entails a new law, rendering the law of Moses “obsolete” (Heb. 8:13).
3. Jesus Christ is the divine, eternal, indestructible high priest of the order of Melchizedek.