

Christ Community Covenant Church

God has spoken: "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek"

Pastor Dave Scherrer - November 10, 2013

We are drawing to a close on the first half of the book of Hebrews and to the close of this miniseries on Hebrews. I am still completing the planning for 2014 when it comes to the various sermon series but I expect to finish out the book of Hebrews soon. Our Thanksgiving service is scheduled for Sunday November 24th and then we are on to our Christmas season. 2014 is fast approaching. Good news right?!

The book of Hebrews is written to Jews who were struggling with going back into Judaism to avoid being persecuted. Chapter 7 is the tipping point, the climatic center and climax of the book. This chapter launches his great theme of faith that appeals to so many of us. The writer of Hebrews was encouraging these new Jewish believers not to give up but rather to hold fast by faith because **Jesus is better!** And that is a transforming truth for us in the 21st century too.

All along in this wonderful little book or sermon the author has been saying Jesus is better! Better than the angels and creation itself in Chapter 1. Then in chapters 2 and 3 we read that he is better than the great prophet Moses who is the ultimate Jewish hero. He brought them out of Egypt and through Moses the nation of Israel received the Law. But Jesus is better! He was before Moses and his word and life represent a new covenant. Now we have learned in chapter 6 and now 7 that Jesus is even better than the High Priest.

We do not have anyone who compares to this office or status. Perhaps the Pope comes close with the majesty that comes with his religious power and magnificent raiment and huge following. But in the first century when this was written, the High Priest had a status only second to the King.

Now in chapters 5 and 6 and 7 we are introduced to this interesting fellow Melchizedek. Who was Melchizedek? We only have 4 verses that speak to this fellow and then dozens of verses are dedicated to him now in the book of Hebrews. We find the most telling description in Genesis 14:

¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) ¹⁹ And he blessed him and said,
"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
²⁰ and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"
And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.



Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Cathedral of St. Mary's, Hildesheim Germany

Then there is this other reference in the Psalms that Jesus himself quoted as referring to Himself

Psalm 110:4

"You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek."

The name Melchizedek means “King of Righteousness” consisting of two words, *Melek*-King , *Zedek*- This person was also known as the King of Salem meaning king of peace, a title given to a historical person living in Abraham’s time. This is the first reference to the city of Jerusalem.

Not very much is known about this person who suddenly appears on the scene in Abraham’s day. Abraham recognized this unknown priest as one who worshipped the Most High God and freely offered a tenth of his spoils from his battle. Melchizedek offers Abraham wine and bread. That inspires imagery of communion – we remember it from the night Jesus was betrayed:

Matthew 26:26-28

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.

²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

There is something special about this Melchizedek fellow. It helps to know that previous to Moses’ time period sacrifices were offered by the head of the family. The priest was the Father, or grandfather being the oldest in the family line. As the family grew to be a tribe the head came to be the king as well as the priest, so he was the priest/king of their tribe.

But in the days of Moses, priesthood was created from Aaron, Moses’ brother - out of the tribe of Levi - which became the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood order. The law from God through Moses said no king could be a priest, although but he could be a prophet. No priest could be a king, although he too could be a prophet.

Some believe that Melchizedek was a theophany or a Christophany, an early appearance of Christ before His incarnation as Jesus. Those who believe this often recite scripture in Heb.7:3 to support their argument. “Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, *made* like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.”

Here is the important deal on this mysterious man – He is foreshadowing of a new great High Priest *and* King, that is the King and Priest Jesus who comes some two thousand years after Melchizedek. Christ’s priesthood is a whole ‘nother deal!

Christ’s Superior Priesthood – a “Whole ‘Nother” Deal!

Hebrews 7:1-25

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ² 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. ³ 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.

⁴ See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! ⁵ And those descendants of Levi who receive 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. ⁶ But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. ⁸ 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. ⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

¹¹ Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, 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.

²⁰ And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, ²¹ but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:

“The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
‘You are a priest forever.’”

²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ 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.

I think that there are several passages in this chapter that need a careful look:
Hebrews 7:1-4 . . . and again another couple verses;
Hebrews 7:15-17

But it is in this one verse, v 25, that I want us to spend the last few minutes because it has its greatest application with us today. But it is in this one verse that I want us to spend the last few minutes because it has its greatest application with us today,

Hebrews 7:25

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.

Christ is able to save forever (25a)

If we are to be saved forever, we need Christ to intercede for us forever with God. Then what is the implication about what we need saving from? The implication is that we need to be saved from God. Specifically we need to be saved from the judgment of God that burns against all ungodliness and unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). You see God is Holy and under the leadership of humanity, unrighteousness and corruption has scared creation. Each one of us has proven to fall short of the glory of God. And this unholiness is an offence to God.

[Garden and garbage illustration]

Christ can save us forever from the wrath of God because he intercedes forever with God. He continually puts himself between the Father and us as an asbestos shield against his white-hot anger against sin. In Hebrews 10 we read, "We know Him who said, '*Vengeance is mine, I will repay*.' And again, '*The Lord will judge his people*.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Until we get this firmly and clearly fixed in our minds, hardly anything in the book of Hebrews will make sense. The major problem in the world and in our lives is *not* our troubled marriages or our wayward

children or our financial pressures or our failing health or our cultural degeneration. The main problem in the world—everybody's problem—is we are at war with God and we need to be reconciled and make peace to God. That's the main problem.

And the Biblical answer is priesthood. And specifically the superior priesthood of Christ. The reason there are priests in the Old Testament is that priests are needed to intercede for us with God. They enter the holy place where we are not allowed to go. And they take sacrifices for us so that our sins will be forgiven. All of that Old Testament priestly system was meant to teach us about our sin and the holiness and wrath of God and the inescapable judgment that is coming on us. And the point of it all was this: God has made a way to get right with God. He established priests in the Old Testament, and then he provided his Son, the final High Priest.

So the reason for all this talk about Christ's relation to Melchizedek in verses 1-24 is because the eternal, superior priesthood of Jesus is our only hope of eternal salvation. We do not have two Gods – one of the Old Testament and a different God of the New Testament. God's love and His judgment for unholiness never changes. There is only one hope for sinners like us. We must have a faithful high priest, who will intercede for us forever. We need a king of righteousness (verse 2). We need a king of peace (verse 2). We need someone without beginning and ending (verse 3). Someone who has an indestructible life (verse 16) and will never die and need to be replaced (verses 23-24). We need someone greater than Abraham and Moses and greater than Levi—something like Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham, (verses 6-7) and who received tithes from Abraham. We need a new and greater priest. All the Old Testament priesthood could do was point toward the One superior priest (after the order of Melchizedek, [Psalm 110:4](#)), whose sacrifice of himself and whose eternal intercession would guarantee eternal salvation for all God's people.

He always lives to make intercession for us (25c).

Romans 8:34

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Interceding is talking to God the father on behalf of someone. Maybe you have heard the term 'intercessory prayer.' That simply means I lift up someone to the throne and beseech God on their behalf. So if Jesus is interceding with God on our behalf, he is praying for us always.

What Then Might He Be Praying?

Well, it says that he is able to save because he intercedes, that is, because he prays. And it says that he is doing this forever. What do we need forever in order to be saved? Let's just stay with this verse to answer that. We need to draw near to God through him. "He is able to save forever *those who draw near to God through him*." This verb here, "draw near to God," is in a tense that indicates present continuous action, not a single action in the past. It is not saying: God is able to save those forever who once drew near to him, but who go on drawing near to him. If we do not go on drawing near to God we have no warrant for thinking that we are being saved by the Lord Jesus.

We see him pray for us again in his High Priestly Prayer in John 17

John 17:11, 15

¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Jesus did not go to heaven after His earthly ministry and 'take a break' from His role as eternal Shepherd to His people. "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by *His life*" (Romans 5:10).

If when humble, despised, dying, and dead, He had the power to accomplish so great a work as reconciling us to God, how much more may we expect that He will be able to keep us now that He is a living, exalted, and triumphant Redeemer, raised to life and interceding on our behalf before the throne. Clearly Jesus is still very active on our behalf in heaven.

After Jesus ascended to heaven and was seated at the right hand of God the Father ([Acts 1:9](#); [Colossians 3:1](#)), He returned to the glory He had before His incarnation ([John 17:5](#)) to carry on His role of King of kings and Lord of lords—His eternal role as the second Person of the triune God. While this old earth continues to be “won” for Christ, Jesus is the Advocate for Christians, meaning He is our great Defender. This is the intercessory role He currently fulfills for those who are His ([1 John 2:1](#)). Jesus is always pleading our case before the Father, like a defense lawyer on our behalf.

Jesus is interceding for us while Satan (whose name means “accuser”) is doing that very thing, *accusing* us, pointing out our sins and frailties before God and to us in the middle of the night. But the accusations fall upon deaf ears in heaven, because Jesus’ work on the cross completely paid our sin debt in full; therefore, God always sees in His children the perfect righteousness of Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross, His righteousness (perfect holiness) was imputed to us, while our sin was imputed to Him at His death. This is the great exchange Paul talks about in [2 Corinthians 5:21](#). That took away forever our sinful state before God, so God can accept us as blameless before Him.

“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)).

This eternal intercession and eternal salvation are for those who draw near to God through Christ (25b).

God bids you come!

Is it not a wonderful thing as we approach the holidays and the advent season to know that God bids us come? That this great, holy God of righteousness and judgment says, “Draw near to me through my Son, your High Priest. Draw near to me. Draw near to me.” This is his closing invitation this morning: “Draw near to me through your High Priest. Draw near to me in confession and prayer and meditation and trust and praise. Come. I will not cast you out.”

For Christ “is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”