

No Priest But Jesus

By David Harrell

Bible Text:

Hebrews 7:11-19

Preached on:

Sunday, February 26, 2017

Will you take your Bibles and turn to Hebrews 7, we will be examining verses 11 through 19 this morning as we continue to study this wonderful epistle. We will be reminded afresh that there is "No Priest But Jesus," and this is how I've entitled my discourse to you this morning.

Before we look at the text, I must say that as we continue to examine the author's argument concerning the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ through the order of Melchizedek over the Levitical priesthood of the old covenant, I find myself sitting back and just pondering the miracle of divine providence. Just think of what the writer has revealed to us thus far,: to think how God devised a plan to redeem a chosen people before the foundations of the world; how 4,000 years ago he judged the world with a global flood and then 400 years later he revealed himself to a man named Melchizedek, whose name means "king of righteousness," and made him both a king and a priest of the Most High God in a place called Salem, ancient Jerusalem. And then to think that he decreed that in that very place some 2,000 years later the Son of God would become the perfect and final sacrifice that God alone would provide to reconcile sinners unto himself through faith in his Son. And to think how God also revealed himself to another man in that same day of Melchizedek, a man named Abram, and how he orchestrated all of the events of Genesis 14, remember that we studied? How in his divine providence he orchestrated all of those events so that Abram would cross paths with Melchizedek.

What a coincidence. Two men in a world of darkest paganism worshiping God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth. Two men who had no idea that their encounter was planned by their sovereign God. Think about that. Two men who had no idea that God was up to something magnificent, something that was eternal; that what they did on that day would prove many years later the superiority of the priesthood of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, a priesthood that would be superior to a radically different priesthood that God would ordain many years later under Moses. Two men that had no idea that one of them, Melchizedek, would literally be a type of Christ; that his life, his kingship, his priesthood, would prefigure the superior antetype, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would be the final, the perfect, the eternal Priest/King.

Now, what I have just described is essentially the first 10 verses of chapter 7 but then to think of the implications of all of this in my life and in your life, things that are inconceivably glorious. Dear friends, it is my passion, it is my prayer, for you to be able to see this, understand this and apply it to your life because what is being expressed in

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this invincible argument before us reveals such an astounding truth and that is when sinners place their faith in the priestly work of the Lord Jesus Christ, God not only forgives their sin but he declares them righteous, he clothes them in the righteousness of Christ, and welcomes them into his presence blameless with great joy. That is utterly astounding.

My friend, apart from faith in Christ's finished work on the cross, we would have no access to a holy God. No access. "No one comes to the Father," Jesus said, "but through Me." In fact, apart from Christ, entering into the presence of a holy God would be the last thing you would ever want to do because our sin is so inconceivably hideous to a holy God and all sin must be punished. We would just be instantly incinerated if we entered into his presence and our souls would be cast into an eternal hell because our God is a consuming fire. So in light of this, the truths revealed to us in this section of Scripture are exceedingly glorious and I hope you will be able to grasp that in your heart here this morning.

Let me remind you of the context. The inspired writer continues an extensive and extended argument given to weak Hebrew believers in the first century, some of them were respected believers, and they were struggling because of their ignorance and even persecution and therefore they were tempted to fall back into Judaism. That's what they were comfortable with and that's what their friends and family members were urging them to do. They wanted to avoid persecution and so forth so embracing Christianity and Christ fully was a real struggle for them. I'm sure many of their family members were saying, "Leave that Christ cult! Come back! What are you thinking?" So it was very hard for them to abandon the old covenant of works and rejoice in the new covenant of God's grace through faith in his Son, the Lord Jesus.

So the entire purpose of the epistle to the Hebrews is to have the readers ponder the supremacy of Christ and the superiority of the new covenant. So as we come to verses 11 through 19 that we'll look at this morning in chapter 7, I would like to examine these verses under three very simple headings. First we will look at the imperfection of the old order; secondly, the perfection of the new order; and then finally, the practical implications of being able to draw near to God.

So let me read the text. Hebrews 7, beginning in verse 11.

11 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? 12 For when the priesthood is

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changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. 13 For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. 15 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is attested of Him, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." 18 For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

Now friends, this last phrase, "a better hope, through which we draw near to God," must have hit them right between the eyes because that was utterly incomprehensible to them. Like no other people, the Jews knew that they had absolutely no chance of being able to draw near to God. They were all familiar with the history of God giving them his law at Mount Sinai recorded in Exodus 19.

Let me remind you of that. I'm sure they were very familiar, as I know many of them are to this very day, and some of you that may be listening to me this morning that are Jewish, you're very familiar with what happened then, that special inward and outward preparation that had to have been made by the people two days prior to the Lord's arrival. They would have remembered the limits imposed upon the people to avoid any encroachment to the sacred mountain lest they die. They were never even allowed "to touch the edge of it." That's pretty serious. And if they did, they would be put to death; a prohibition, by the way, that extended even to their animals. They were all aware of how the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai in blazing fire, the text says. How smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace. How the whole mountain quaked violently. In fact, the writer of Hebrews later on will tell us in chapter 12, verse 18, there was darkness and gloom and a whirlwind. I mean, it was terrifying.

They would have remembered what happened then. There was a sound of a trumpet that grew louder and louder, piercing the ears of the people, and then God speaks to Moses through thunder. Can you imagine that? The majesty and power of God caused the camp of the Israelites to absolutely tremble with fear. They were utterly terrified at what was happening. There was no chance of drawing near to God and he wanted them to understand that very clearly. They were so horrified that they said to Moses in Exodus 20:19, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will

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die." The writer of Hebrews in chapter 12, verse 21 says even "Moses said, 'I am full of fear and trembling.'"

So God wanted to impress upon them and frankly, dear friends, upon each of us, the sheer majesty and purity of his holiness and the absolute impossibility of a sinful person ever drawing near to him. No one could dare draw near to God and live because sin is too loathsome and God is too holy. The words of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 4:10 were a constant reminder to the Jewish people of this very thing. There we read, "Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb," another name for Mount Sinai, "when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'" And dear friends, down through the millennia, the Jewish people have taught this to their children so the idea of drawing near to God was just unfathomable to them.

So when the writer of Hebrews told them that the former Old Testament law concerning the priesthood is now weak and its useless and has been superseded with a new covenant with a new high priest that offers a "better hope through which we draw near to God," that would have certainly gotten their attention as it should for all of us. Any honest Jew would recognize that the old covenant did not provide access to God. Even their own high priest could only enter into the Holy of Holies one time per year and go behind the veil just for a few minutes.

Let me remind you of what happened that one day a year, Yom Kippur. We read about it in Leviticus 16 where God revealed the precise details of what the first high priest and those who would follow had to do in order to approach him in some small way for just a moment. That day would seem to begin as usual with the offering of a morning sacrifice. The high priest would offer a burnt offering of a one year old lamb and then he would begin to move methodically through the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement. There, we're told, that Aaron first had to remove his normal priestly garments, wash and then put on the special garments that God prescribed. Then he would secure the necessary sacrificial animals. He had to have a bull for his own sin offering, two male goats for the people's sin offering, and two rams, one for Aaron's and the other for the people's burnt offering. Next he would slaughter the bull for his own sin offering and before entering into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the bull, Aaron had to create "a cloud of incense" in the Holy of Holies, covering the mercy seat to veil or literally to dim the glory of God, the Shekinah of his presence that hovered there so that he could enter in, in some small way, to that presence and not be killed.

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To enter the Holy of Holies, he had to pass through three areas in the tabernacle, later on in the temple. First, he took the blood and he went through the door into the outer court, through another door into the holy place, and finally he would disappear behind the veil into the holiest of places. And once there, he had to make his sacrifice quickly. There was no place for him to seat. He had to do it quickly, get out or die.

Once inside, he would take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it on the mercy seat seven times. That was the place of propitiation where the justice of God would be temporarily satisfied, that's what "propitiation" means. There atonement was made for the sins of the people. Then lots were cast for the two goats to determine which one would be slaughtered and which one would be the scapegoat that would be driven away into the wilderness. The goat for slaughter, the goat of the people's sin offering was then sacrificed and its blood was taken into the Holy of Holies, applied to the mercy seat as the bull's blood had been before. Cleansing was then made for the holy place, seemingly by the sprinkling of the blood of both the bull and the goat. The entire ceremony of atonement of the holy place was done alone. No one else was there. No one else could see, only the high priest.

Next outside the tent, Aaron had to make atonement for the altar of burnt offering using the blood of both the bull and the goat. Then the second goat, the one that was kept alive, had the sins of the nation symbolically laid on its head and then it was driven from the camp to a desolate place from which it must never return and Jewish tradition has it that the goat was led to a high cliff and then pushed backward over the precipice to prevent him from returning to the camp.

Aaron then entered the tent of meeting, the tabernacle. He would remove his garments. He would wash, put on his normal priestly garments and then the burnt offerings of rams, one for Aaron and his family, the other the people's, was then offered.

It's pretty obvious, isn't it? God says, "You do not get near me as you are." This is what the Jewish people were familiar with. Although by this time in the first century they didn't have the tabernacle anymore, they had the temple in Jerusalem. Every year, the same thing year after year after year, and what they were aware of is that Judaism brought them close to God but it could never bring them into the presence of God. And sadly what they could not understand is how the Day of Atonement foreshadowed, it anticipated a greater permanent cleansing of God's people and of his dwelling place which would ultimately be accomplished by a better priest who offered a better sacrifice.

So here in chapter 7, the writer begins in verse 11 by underscoring, 1: the imperfection of the old order. Notice what he says in verse 11, "Now if perfection was through the

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Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law)." Let me pause there for a moment. Perfection is a term that means "completion," it means "maturity," in other words, "that which brings man to salvation and sanctification." So on the basis of this perfection, the people received the law.

Then he says if that's so, "what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?" Let me stop here. You see, the writer knows that these people are being hammered by their friends and family members. They are saying, "Look, what are you doing with this Christian cult? Don't you know you are saved, that you are sanctified by keeping the law that the Levitical priesthood administers? Don't you understand that? It's perfect. It brings man to salvation and sanctification and all this comes through the Levitical system with all of its sacrifices and ceremonies given to us by God himself through Moses in the wilderness so you need to run from this Jesus of Nazareth cult. You've been deceived. Come back to Judaism." By the way, Orthodox Jews around the world to this day are saying the same thing.

I had the experience on several occasions in Israel to experience the ger chasidim. These are the ones, they wear the big fur hats. Maybe you've seen them, the Orthodox Jews. By the way, they were the most influential of the chasidic groups in Poland prior to the Holocaust. Most of them were killed but there are many alive today and they will be quick to tell you how much they hate Christians. In fact, their common statement is: Christians are worse than Nazis. The Nazis killed our bodies but the Christians kill our souls. And to this day Orthodox Jews do everything they can to rebuild the temple. You'll notice when you get around them, that they stoop over. They are stooping because they're in sorrow because they are without sacrifice because they are without a temple. They stand in front of the Wailing Wall. You've seen pictures of that. I've been there. The reason they do that is because that's as close as they can get to the original Holy of Holies. To this day they remain convinced that the old covenant law is their only hope of salvation and sanctification. It's so tragic. It's heartbreakingly today as it was in the day when the epistle to the Hebrews was written.

But the argument here is this: if God intended for perfection to come through the old covenant law and it's Levitical priesthood, why did he promise to raise up another priest according to the order of Melchizedek? A king/priest that existed long before Aaron and his priestly line? Of course, he's referring to the messianic prophecy in their own Scriptures, and remember Psalm 110:4 that he quotes later on in verse 17, "For it is attested of Him," referring to the Messiah, "You are priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Not Aaron.

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So he's asking them: why would God also introduce Abraham to Melchizedek even before he made his covenant to Abraham? This is the argument in Hebrews 7 through 10. Why would he introduce Abraham to Melchizedek even before he made his covenant to Abraham? Before any of Abraham's descendants would become priests in the days of Moses? By the way, the law was given 645 years after God's initial promise to Abraham, 420 years after its reaffirmation to Jacob before he went to Egypt. Then also he's asking: why would Melchizedek bless Abraham and why would Abraham give tithes to Melchizedek, the king/priest, unless Melchizedek was superior to Abraham? I mean, this is a very compelling argument. This is compelling logic. So he's basically saying obviously, God anticipated another priesthood that would come, one that would be greater than the one that he established under the old covenant with Moses, one that would supersede it.

Then he continues. Notice in verse 12, "For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also." This is a reference to the ceremonial law associated with the Aaronic or Levitical system of rituals and sacrifices and feasts and convocations, all of which served as a copy or a shadow of their heavenly counterparts that would be revealed in the new covenant. And he's saying if God changed the priesthood, obviously he changed the law that governed who they are and what they did. He's arguing, therefore, that the ceremonial aspects of the old covenant has been abolished. That's over. It's done with. Obviously the moral aspects of God's law that reflect his holy character remain the same forever. His standards of righteousness never change. In fact, under the new covenant, it's interesting, Jesus emphasized in Matthew 5, remember at his Sermon on the Mount, that God's standard of righteousness is even higher than what was understood under the old covenant because it includes the thoughts, the intentions, the motives of a man's heart, not just his external actions. So he's basically saying here, "Wow, look at the hopeless situation you're in here if you hold to the old covenant." The sacrificial system of the old covenant and the service of the priests could never bring men and women to perfection, which in the purest sense refers to providing access to God. It could never draw you near to God. It's never been able to do that. Only by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, can that ever happen. By the way, folks, that's the good news of the Gospel in a nutshell.

So verse 12, "when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change," in the sacrificial and ceremonial aspects, "of the law." And it's interesting in chapter 8, that this really kind of foreshadows, you might say. He will go into great detail concerning what the change looks like as he describes the characteristics of the new covenant that is superior to and supersedes the old.

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Notice verse 13, "For the one concerning whom these things are spoken," referring to Jesus, "belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests." You see, the priests had to come from the line of Levi. The king came from the line of Judah. So this would have been very assuring to those Hebrew believers that their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, descended from the kingly line of Judah whose descendants had nothing to do with priestly service. He did not descend from the priestly line of Aaron, who was a descendant of Levi, who was a descendant of Abraham, if you remember your history. So heredity had nothing to do with the qualifications of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Son of God.

So the argument is very straightforward. If I can summarize it again, it's basically this: if God intended for perfection to come through the old covenant law and its Levitical priesthood, why did he promise to raise up another priest according to the order of Melchizedek, this King/Priest that existed long before Levi, long before Aaron were ever even born? Well, obviously God anticipated another priesthood, a superior priesthood with a superior priest that would replace the old covenant with the new. And since the priesthood has changed, the law regarding how their services and sacrifices, all of that is changed as well.

Now, to be sure the old system was not perfect because it could never bring people into the presence of God. There was always a veil, right? There was always a veil. So the Levitical or the Aaronic priesthood in the Mosaic law only pictured the perfection that the law required but it could never provide it. It could never provide the perfection, only the person and work of Jesus Christ can do that. When therefore the old covenant, Judaism, and I might add any other religion other than Christianity, alright? None of those things can provide access to God. So the old sacrificial system, you must understand, merely covered sin but it could never ever permanently remove it. A huge difference.

The writer of Hebrews describes this in Hebrews 10:1 and following. He says, "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?" In other words, if the sacrifices could only cover sin, and that's all they could do, they could never remove it, that being the case, if the opposite were true, if the sacrifices could remove sin, then they would no longer be necessary because sin would be taken care of, no one would be conscious of guilt and so forth. But he says in verse 3, "But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year." In other words, the opposite is happening. Year by year by year, people are reminded of their sin but they

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can't come near to God, that ultimately they need a Savior, right? Verse 4, "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

So the old system could not take away the sins; it couldn't remove it, it just covered them up temporarily. And even the Jewish people today will admit that they are concerned about their sin. I've talked with them. Their conscience is always accusing them. It is never free from guilt. They are always in bondage to condemnation. By the way, that is true of everyone in every false religion. You always want to ask them, "Hey, how is going with your Mormonism?" or whatever it is, their Islam. "Do you think you're going to make the cut?" That's a phrase I use a lot.

You see, the Hebrews of that day knew nothing of the Apostle Paul's magnificent statement in Romans 8. Remember in verses 1 and following, "Therefore there is now no," what? "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Dear friends, never underestimate the power of an accusing conscience among those who have been deceived and who have never embraced Christ as Savior and Lord. Know full well it eats at them. Some of you were there before you came to Christ. Do you remember what that was like? Suppressing the truth in unrighteousness? It eats at them in the middle of the night when all is quiet. All is quiet except the sound of an accusing conscience. They are fully and painfully aware that all of those sacrifices are not able to silence that conscience and bring them into the presence and fellowship with the living God.

Later on, the writer of Hebrews will address this again in chapter 9, beginning in verse 8, "The Holy Spirit is signifying this," he says, "that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation." Referring to the new covenant and all of its applications. "But," verse 11, "when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."

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Oh, child of God, don't you see how wonderful this is? What an amazing thing. And this is the great passion of the writer to the Hebrews, to help them not only see these truths but also to embrace them so that they can experientially subjectively enjoy the full blessings of the new covenant, the new covenant that was promised in the days of Jeremiah. Remember Jeremiah 31 beginning in verse 31 God says this, "'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD. 'But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares the LORD, 'I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,' declares the LORD, 'for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.'" Oh, joy, what hope we have in Christ, amen?

I'm reminded of that phrase that we sing,

"Guilty, vile and helpless we,
Spotless Lamb of God was he,
Full atonement, can it be?
Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

So he moves from the imperfection of the old order to, secondly, the perfection of the new. Verse 15, "And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek." Now, let me stop here for a minute. It's important, the Greek is very precise. He says, "If another priest arises." In Greek there are two words for "another," one is "allos," the other is "heteros." If it's another of the same kind, they use the word "allos," but if it's another of another kind, a radically different kind, they use the term "heteros." This is heteros.

So, "If another priest arises," in other words, another of a completely different kind, that's the point, "according to the likeness of Melchizedek," verse 16, "who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement," that is a descendant of Aaron, but also a man without disqualifying physical blemishes and deficiencies that they had. In other words, if he comes not on those bases, "but according to the power of an indestructible life." Fascinating statement. No other priest could claim that. He says in verse 17, "For it is attested of Him," referring again to the Messiah, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

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I want you to notice a couple of things here. No other priest could claim a couple of things. First of all, it says "if another priest arises." In the Greek the verb is in the middle voice which is always reflexive and, in essence in Greek grammar, it's saying, "If another priest arises by himself." That's the point. No other priest could do that, right? Only Jesus could do that. Only Jesus could make that claim. And we see this, don't we, in Christ? He raised himself up in the virgin birth as God. And as God, though he was without priestly heritage, he raised himself up to be a priest. As God, the perfect sacrifice, he rose from the grave and so forth. But, secondly, no other priest could claim this phrase "the power of an indestructible life." That's reserved for God alone. In other words, because of his eternal power, he is the one that can provide access for us into the presence of God. Remember in chapter 6, verse 19 and following, he says, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Now, as a footnote, verses 16 and 17 are good for you to keep in mind when you encounter Mormons. Here's why I would say this. I mean, we've all encountered the young Mormon missionaries, you see them riding the bicycles in the little white shirts and black ties and all that type of thing and they pull up to your house or whatever and want to confront you with the truth. And I've been around them, especially I was reminded of this when I came to this text this week thinking it through. I remember one of the ranches that I worked on a number of years ago was a huge ranch, a Mormon ranch, and we would come in with a group of us and we would do the brandings; we would round up their cattle in the mountains and then do the brandings. And a number of the young men that were cowboys were elders and they would be introduced as such and I thought that was interesting. You see, they believe an elder is considered the introductory or the lowest office of the Melchizedekian priesthood. They believe they are elders of the order of Melchizedek which is pretty fascinating. And every person who receives the Melchizedek priesthood is simultaneously then ordained to the office of elder and this happens where you have to be at least 18 years old, I think, and so forth.

And I remember working cows with one of the cowboys and some of you remember because, Mike, you were there and you probably know some of the men that I'm talking about here, but I remember we were in some very treacherous places and if you were to slip and fall, it might be a while before you hit the ground, and when you're on a horse, that's a little scary. And he was talking about that and I was teasing him because I had asked him about this elder stuff and I said, "Well, what are you afraid of? You've got the power of an indestructible life." He said, "What do you mean?" "Well, you're an elder of the order of Melchizedek and it says in Hebrews 7 that you've got the power of an

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indestructible life." And he kind of laughed and he said, "I don't have any idea of what you're talking about." I said, "We'll talk about it later." I was just, you know, spitting in his soup a little bit. You know, he may continue to eat it but it will never taste as good as it once did, right?

So later on we were goofing around and at supper we got to talking about this a little bit more and I asked him about that and kind of gave him and talked about the Scriptures a little bit. It was obvious he has no idea. Most of them don't. They don't have any idea what Scripture teaches. They've been brainwashed. They're clueless. And I asked him, "Are you also able to save forever those who draw near to God and will you always be able to live to make intercession for them as an elder?" Well, he didn't know what I was talking about so I took him to verses 24 and 25 that we have here in chapter 7, jumping ahead a little bit. Notice what it says in 7:24, "but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." And I asked him, "You're an elder of the order of Melchizedek, can you do that?" And he kind of laughed and I forgot exactly all he said but he was a little uncomfortable so we began to chat. I didn't want to make him feel uncomfortable but I did want him to think.

You see, folks, no man, no priest, no pope, can do that. Only God can do that. And as we come back to our text, the writer continues in verses 18 and 19 to contrast the imperfection of the old with the perfection of the new. Notice what he says in verse 18, "For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness." The term "setting aside" means "to dis-annul or to repeal something that has been well established." In fact, it's a term that is used when the Greeks would talk about repealing some kind of important document, a law, a treaty or whatever. So what he's saying here is the entirety of the sacrificial system and the Levitical priesthood has been set aside, it's been repealed, it's been done away with because of its weakness and uselessness. Boy, this is pretty straightforward stuff. And to be sure now, it did what God intended it to do. It revealed the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. It revealed his standard of righteousness, one that we could never attain. It revealed sin but it could never remove it.

That's the problem, therefore it could never provide access into the presence of God so day after day, month after month, year after year, sacrifices had to be made for the expiation of sins, in other words, taking away guilt through the payment of a penalty and the offering of an atonement. But it could never remove sin nor could it remove the bondage of sin, man's proclivity, his tendency to sin, and it could not remove therefore the guilty conscience of sin. But what is utterly amazing in the atoning work of Christ on

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the cross, there is both substitution and satisfaction of God's offended holiness. It's the amazing truth of the cross, something far greater than expiation than just taking away guilt took place at the cross. There was satisfaction. There was propitiation. There was appeasement. So Jesus' atoning work on the cross brought literally a change in God's attitude towards the sinner so that he moved from being at enmity with us to being for us and, therefore, he can welcome us into his presence because we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. And the old order could do none of this.

Verse 19, again, "(for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." And, oh, how I long for any precious Jewish people listening to my voice this morning to be able to experience this better hope through which we can draw near.

And likewise, any Catholic friends, Roman Catholic friends. You know, if you're in Roman Catholicism, you're still locked up in the old covenant system of works. You've got your popes, you've got your bishops, you've got your priests. You don't understand what it is to embrace the new covenant of God's grace and the high priesthood of Jesus Christ. In fact, think about it with Roman Catholicism: the primary act of worship in Roman Catholicism is the Mass, the eucharistic sacrifice, right? Made on a real altar by a real priest, a ritual Roman Catholics believe is redemptive and literally brings remission of sin which, by the way, is just a profound blasphemous corruption of the Lord's table. They say in the Mass Christ is actually immolated, which means sacrificed. He is killed. Christ becomes, in their language, "the most holy victim," actually present in flesh and spirit and divinity in the bread and wine even though it appears still to be bread and wine. The Roman Catholic catechism quotes Vatican II. "As often as the sacrifice of the cross by which Christ has been sacrificed is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out." Folks, I thought Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished." You see, in truth Roman Catholic Mass is a repudiation of the promises of the new covenant. It's a false sacrifice to a false Christ on a false altar by a false priest all of which is defended by Roman Catholic apologists. Do you know how they defend it? On the basis of the old covenant which according to verses 18 and 19 is that former commandment that must be set aside because of its weakness and uselessness, for the law made nothing perfect, and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope through which we draw near to God.

Now our time is almost gone. Let me close by giving you just some practical implications of being able to draw near to God. Dear Christian friends, we need to celebrate this. You know, there are no more unapproachable, shaking, violent, smoky mountains, right? I mean, there are Smoky Mountains but you understand, not that kind of smoky mountain at Mount Sinai. No more veil that we need to fear. No more veil that keeps us outside of

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God's presence. Instead because of his priestly work, we have access to God. We have a better hope through which we draw near to God.

And what does this practically mean? Think of what the writer of the Hebrews says in chapter 10 and verse 19, he says, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." A reference there to the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit as Paul talks about in Titus 3:5; the washing of water with the word that Paul talks about in Ephesians 5:26; the idea of enjoying the Spirit's sanctifying work in us whereby he gradually conforms us evermore into the likeness of Christ so that we can enjoy more fully the intimate fellowship that we have with the living God so that we can experience that soul-satisfying joy of living in his presence until some day we're actually in his presence.

So practically, dear friends, because Christ's death, if you've placed your faith in him, because his death has removed your sins, there is no need for you to walk around condemning yourself all the time like some of you do. You get around other people who, it's like their crusade to mock your life and to make you feel bad about yourself and all of your sin, right? We all know people like that. And because of this, some of you revert back to some works righteousness system. You may not even know you're doing it. Think of those who in subtle ways try to do penance, voluntarily punishing yourself to atone for your sins. You know how it works. You've got this imaginary scale of justice in your mind and when you do some bad things, "Oh, I'd better do some good things to get it to go back this way so God's going to be impressed with me." Folks, God is never going to be impressed with you because of what you do, only because of what Christ has done.

Or you have a weak conscience that holds you to non-essentials producing legalism. Your faith isn't strong enough for you to be able to perceive your full liberty in Christ so you surround yourself with self-imposed restrictions and you stay miserable all the time because you're worried that you're going to violate one of your little rules or rituals. Guess what? You make everybody around you miserable too because they're always on duty around you, afraid that they're going to do or say something that's going to offend you.

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Well, child of God, because of Christ we have a better hope through which we draw near to God therefore we can honestly say, "Yes, I have sinned. I continue to sin but there is therefore now no condemnation because I am in Christ Jesus." Amen? There is the truth of it all.

Let's pray together.

Father, we give you praise for these eternal truths that speak so directly to each of our hearts. And I pray that if there be one that knows nothing of this great joy of being able to have intimate fellowship with you, all because of Christ I pray that by the power of your Spirit you will bring conviction to their heart that they might trust fully, completely, in the finished work of our great high priest, the Lord Jesus. For it is in his name that I pray. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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