

The Marvelous Mystery of Melchizedek

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 7:1-10
Preached on: Sunday, February 19, 2017

What a joy it is to come together here in this place like this on the Lord's day morning. It's so good to see you all here. I am just reminded even as we sing that God has chosen local churches like ours all around the world to reveal his glory, his infinite wisdom, his grace, and to that end the church is perhaps the greatest of all of his works, the pinnacle of his wisdom. So this morning we come to hear from him through his word and I would invite you to take your Bible and turn to Hebrews 7. We continue to make our way through this wonderful epistle and this morning I have entitled my discourse to you "The Marvelous Mystery of Melchizedek."

Before we look at the text, let me remind you that many believers have very little understanding of Hebrews 7 through 10, and there is probably a good reason for this, a reason why it is seldom taught in churches, and that's probably because it requires a great deal of concentration, a great deal of thinking, and a lot of Old Testament background and, frankly, unless a congregation has a real hunger to devour some of the deepest and most profound revelation of God pertaining to the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, he's simply not going to want to deal with Hebrews 7 through 10. But I know you are not that way so we are going to immerse ourselves in this amazing section of Scripture. It will take us a number of weeks, perhaps months, to get through it but I must say that we will see afresh that this is not speaking of the social justice Jesus of liberal evangelicalism, one who was merely a great teacher, a great example, and a champion of equal rights. Moreover, this is not the Santa Claus Jesus of the prosperity Gospel that can be cajoled into handing out the goodies to those who have enough faith. Moreover, we will see that this is not the second fiddle Jesus of the institutional church that has somehow relinquished his authority to a pope or some magisterial hierarchy in an institution. I might even add that this is not speaking of the smiley face Jesus of cultural Christianity, one that merely winks at sin and wants to be our life coach. Dear friends, this is speaking of the Son of God, the Lord of the church, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Redeemer, the Consummator of all things, the one to whom all authority has been given in heaven and on earth. The King of kings, the Lord of lords, to whom every knee will one day bow.

This morning, we return to a very extended argument that the Holy Spirit is giving us through his inspired writer in this epistle, an epistle that was presented to a lot of new Hebrew believers, a lot of them were weak and then there were potential believers hanging around the church who had not fully committed themselves to Christ for fear of persecution and even out of their own ignorance and, frankly, most all of them had a

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temptation to revert back to Judaism rather than fully embracing Christianity. It was just so hard for them to leave the old covenant of works and rejoice in the new covenant of God's grace that he offered them through faith in his Son, the Lord Jesus.

So the entire purpose of the letter to the Hebrews is to have the readers ponder the supremacy of Christ and the superiority of the new covenant over the old. In fact, in chapter 3 and verse 1, they are asked to consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. Consider means to ponder, to look diligently at Jesus. In chapter 12 and verse 3, he says again, "consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart." And as we come to chapter 7, he is drawing our attention to an obscure but profoundly important story found in Genesis 14, a story that pertained to their beloved patriarch, Abraham, and his encounter with a man who was both priest and king. A priest of the Most High God.

And we're going to look at that in a few moments but I might say that it's true for all of us as Gentiles that it's hard for us to have a concept of a priesthood, of priests and sacrifices, that's just completely foreign to us. We live under the new covenant and so forth but we must remember that we nevertheless still have a great high priest in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we must understand in Judaism the Levitical priesthood was of supreme importance. God set aside the entire tribe of Levi to serve as priests. They alone could offer sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people. They represented God to the people and the people to God. They were a bridge between God and man. It's interesting in the fourth century the Latin version of the Bible called the Vulgate uses the term "pontifex" to translate "high priest," and pontifex means "builder of bridges." That's what a priest was. So Jesus came to build a bridge, if you will, between God and man, man and God. Apart from God doing this, man had no way of drawing near to God yet it is for this reason that we have been created. Now, many false religions seek to erect their own bridge but they will never be able to span the chasm between a sinful humanity and a holy God. But God himself created a bridge that would allow us access in his presence, the only Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

So as the writer of Hebrews expounds upon all these complicated truths about Christ's priesthood, we must remember that this was of paramount importance to the Jewish people in those days, and it should be to us as well because Christ is our only hope. He is our King and he is our high priest, the one who has gone into heaven as our forerunner. He is the very anchor of our souls, the writer has told us. Having made perfect atonement, he now sits at the right hand of the Father. He intercedes on our behalf both day and night. So his priestly ministry is perpetual on our behalf. Without him, we would never be able to cross into glory, right? Instead we would be forever banished from his presence.

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Now, before we read this text, remember that the writer started to explain the high priestly nature of Christ back in chapter 5. He said that Jesus was in verse 10, "designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek." Verse 11, "Concerning him," concerning Melchizedek, "we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." And then you will recall he digressed in order to confront them with various reasons for him making that kind of an accusation and he called them to wholehearted commitment to Christ. Then in chapter 7, verse 1, where we are today, he picks up once again on those glorious truths pertaining to the regal office and the priesthood of Melchizedek and how all of that pictured the Lord Jesus Christ and is now fulfilled in him.

So with that background, let's read the text this morning beginning in Hebrews 7:1.

1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. 3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually. 4 Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. 5 And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. 6 But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. 7 But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. 8 In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. 9 And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, 10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Now, in order to understand what the Spirit of God has to say here in this fascinating section of Scripture, we must not only listen and concentrate very carefully but we must also remove ourselves from our 21st century culture and we need to transport ourselves back 2,000 years to the day of which this audience lived, the people to whom this letter was originally written. But we need to do one step further, we need to go back from there as they were asked to do another 2,000 years, all right? We must go back to the age when the first pyramids of Egypt were constructed, about 400 years after the flood. So in other

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words, we need to go back 4,000 years from today. Can you do that with me? Try to do that in your imagination here, a time when the majority of the earth's population lived in an area that we would now call the Middle East; a time when every imaginable form of satanic idolatry was practiced except in a place called Salem, the ancient name for Jerusalem.

Now, let me give you a little background. In that day, numerous little kingdoms existed, little what they would call or what we would call today vassal states, and they were ruled by a suzerain. A suzerain was basically a superior feudal overlord, if you will. And each of those vassals had to pay tribute or, in other words, taxes to their suzerain or else they would suffer the consequences. So in Genesis 14, we learn about a rather powerful suzerain by the name of Chedorlaomer, who experienced a rebellion by some of his vassal states over which he reigned and this included the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah who, for whatever reason, stopped paying him tribute. So the offended Chedorlaomer assembled his little army and he enlisted the help of three other kings to join him in going after the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah who, by the way, had three other kings join them. So you've got four kings against five here fighting.

So as we read the text in Genesis 14, we learn that they go to battle in the valley of Siddim, which we believe is the large peninsula that comes out into the Dead Sea from the eastern shore in which in that day probably extended all the way across to the western shore near Masada, if you are familiar with your geography there. And as we read the story in Genesis 14, we see that Chedorlaomer's forces get the upper hand, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah flee with their forces; some of their forces, it is said fall into the bitumen pits or the tar pits that were in that area. Others fled into the hill country and so Chedorlaomer and his allies win the battle. He keeps the spoils and they take prisoners captive, including one of Abraham's nephews, a man named Lot who was a resident of Sodom.

Now, one of the residents of Sodom who escaped all of this went looking for Lot's rich and evidently famous uncle, Abram, who would later be Abraham. No doubt this man wanted help. His family had probably been captured as well so he finds Abram and tells him what has happened and we pick that up now in Genesis 14:14. Here's what God tells us, "When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan." So what we have here are some highly trained special forces that Abram had out of his household which would include some of his relatives and others that were relatives of his servants, and they go out after them now.

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Verse 15, "He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus." Now, this is fascinating. Abram was obviously a very wise military strategist. He divides his forces. They do a nighttime raid in multiple directions and then his forces pursue these guys, the ones that survived, over 150 miles over difficult mountain terrain to the north of Damascus, Syria. I have been in that region on a number of occasions. Let me tell you, that is some rough territory which tells me that these were some tough dudes back then. All right? So that gives you a little background.

Verse 16, "He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people." Now, here's where it gets really interesting. Verse 17, "Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High." It's interesting. This is the first time the term "priest" is used anywhere in Scripture. Now, the question is: where did this guy come from? Obviously something supernatural was going on here, right? God had to have revealed himself to this man, Melchizedek, this king, this king/priest. He had to have revealed himself, there were no scriptures. Moreover, God had to have told Melchizedek about Abram and also had to have told Abram about Melchizedek. And it's interesting that this was the first time in the history of Israel when a king simultaneously served as a high priest of the Most High God. Ah, God is up to something, right? God is up to something. Let's see what goes on.

Verse 19, "He," referring to Melchizedek, "blessed [Abram] and said, 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.'" Then it says, "He," referring to Abram, "gave him a tenth of all." So isn't this fascinating? Melchizedek blesses Abram and Abram honors Melchizedek by voluntarily giving him a tenth of the best spoils. And notice both men worship God Most High, El Elyon, which means the sovereign Lord, the possessor of heaven and earth whom Abram also called in verse 22, "LORD," or Yahweh, "God Most High." Yahweh El Elyon, possessor of heaven and earth.

Now, as we will see in Hebrews 7, this was a monumental event in redemptive history, although Melchizedek and Abram, I'm sure, had no idea that God was up to something in their lives. I have to say I can't wait to get to heaven to talk to guys like this and ask them, "What was going on in your mind back then?"

Now, besides Genesis 14 and Hebrews 5 through 7, the only other place in Scripture that speaks of Melchizedek is Psalm 110:4. There he is speaking of the coming Messiah and

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he says, "The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.'" So, folks, what we see here is that Melchizedek is a type of Christ. He prefigured the superior antetype of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let's pause for a moment and I want to make sure you understand this terminology. We see various types and antetypes. An antetype is that which corresponds to or foreshadows a type. We see this in other passages of Scripture. For example, we saw it in Numbers 21 with the bronze serpent, remember, that God commanded Moses to erect as a standard for all the people to look upon and when they would, they would be delivered from certain death after having been bitten by the fiery serpents of judgment, and all of that prefigured and pictured Christ being lifted up on the cross for all to see and find deliverance through faith in him. We see that described in John 3, for example. The innocent sacrificial lamb was a type of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was sacrificed for the sins of the world, John 1:19. And here in Hebrews 7 through 10, those chapters, the inspired writer wants to demonstrate to the Jewish people that this high priest, this king/priest of Salem, Melchizedek, was a type of their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, though Melchizedek was imperfect and temporary, the writer gives five significant ways in which Melchizedek's priesthood typified Christ's who was perfect and eternal, and in each of these ways, he also demonstrates something else that is very important in his argument in his reasoning to the Jewish people and that is this: he is saying that Melchizedek's priesthood was superior to the Levitical priesthood in every way. Whoa. That is a huge statement. That will be his point. This is so crucial for them to understand because, remember, he's saying to them, "Don't go back into Judaism. Leave all of the shadows and the symbols and the types of the old covenant and embrace the new covenant where Jesus Christ is our great high priest according to the order of Melchizedek." By the way, this will set the stage for chapter 8 where there will be a lengthy discussion about the new covenant in his blood pictured in the Lord's supper which becomes a foundation for chapters 9 through 10 where he explains the completed covenant by which we are sanctified through the Lord Jesus Christ, a magnificent discourse on the atonement and why Jesus had to die.

So let's examine these five ways in which Melchizedek's priesthood typified Christ and was also superior to the Levitical priesthood. 1. The priesthood of Melchizedek was royal. It's interesting, the writer tells us four times in two verses that he was a king. In verse 1 of chapter 7, he speaks of him as king of Salem, priest of the Most High God. Chapter 2, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness. Then also king of Salem which is king of peace. Now, for a priest to also be king was utterly foreign to the Jewish people in the Levitical priesthood. The Levites were subject to their kings like everyone

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else. They were not a ruling class. In fact, they were set aside specifically as a first fruit of God or to God for a special priestly service. We see this in Numbers 8, for example. And they were never allowed to be king. So I'm sure those first century Hebrews are very intrigued as they begin to think about this. "Hm," they're probably saying, "you know, it's true. His priesthood was royal." Moreover, in Psalm 110, David described the coming Messiah as one who would be both priest and king. Undoubtedly, some of them would have also said, "You know, Zechariah predicted that the Messiah would have a dual role as priest and king when he establishes his kingdom." Zechariah 6:13, "Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the LORD, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices."

They must have also made the connection that Melchizedek was king of Salem, the ancient name of their beloved Jerusalem, that glorious place on earth that God has chosen for himself and his people. Psalm 132:13, "For the LORD has chosen Zion," referring to Jerusalem, "He has desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it." So they are seeing that it was no accident that even before Abraham, God ordained a priest/king in Jerusalem, a priesthood that actually preceded the Levitical priesthood by about a thousand years. Do you see where the argument is going here?

Ah, but they struggled with these things, right? Again, "Why would our Messiah have to die if this is who he really is?" And they struggled with this concept of another covenant that was superior to the one that God gave them. They also struggled with the idea that there was a priesthood that was not only royal but was superior to the priesthood that God ordained for them in the days of Moses. So the writer gets their attention here from the get-go and he keeps piling on these compelling arguments. Melchizedek's priesthood typified Christ and was also superior to the Levitical priesthood, not only because it was a royal priesthood but, secondly, it was universal. We see this in the unique title for God that is used.

Again in verse 1, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God." It's fascinating here because he uses the name El Elyon rather than Yahweh which was the name God used to uniquely express his covenantal relationship with Israel. You see, El Elyon, the Most High God, is the universal name for God. He goes on to say, "the possessor of heaven and earth." The one who transcends all of the earthly boundaries, the one who is above all national distinctions including Jews and Gentiles. In fact, back in Genesis 14:22 when Abraham spoke to the king of Sodom, he used a combination of both the covenant and the universal names of God referring to him as "the LORD God Most High," Yahweh El Elyon.

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Now, folks, the implication of this is absolutely staggering to the Jews. You see, not only must the Jews recognize that a priesthood existed hundreds of years before Aaron but it was also one that was universal, one that would extend beyond the Jewish people to include the Gentiles. They hated the Gentiles. This means that the priesthood of Jesus the Messiah was not restricted to Israel alone, it is universal like that of Melchizedek. Jesus is the Messiah of both Jew and Gentile, not merely Israel.

Now, like Melchizedek, the Levitical priests were priests of the Most High God but unlike Melchizedek, they only represented and ministered to Israel. So the argument is picking up steam here, becoming even more compelling. Melchizedek's priesthood typified Christ and was superior to the Levitical priesthood not only because it was royal and universal but it was, number 3, one of righteousness and peace. Notice at the end of verse 2, he "was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace." Now, this is all we know about his monarchy, what we have read in Genesis 14 and what we read here in Hebrews 7 through 10 but, my, what a testimony. Can you imagine a godly king that ruled in righteousness and in peace? Because he was righteous by God's grace, he was at peace with God, and therefore he also enjoyed the peace of God and he would have ruled in a way to make sure that his kingdom manifested righteousness and peace. My, what a foretaste of millennial blessing here when the Prince of Peace will return in power and great glory and reign in perfect righteousness, when as priest he will stand before God and man in the office of sacerdotal mediation, in other words, priestly intercession. He will do so as King of kings and Lord of lords, to judge among the nations and execute the justice of God upon the peoples of the world.

Now, to the Jews all of this was utterly foreign to the nature of the Levitical priesthood because they had no regal authority as kings. They did not reign in righteousness and peace. Instead they made the sacrifices that God prescribed to them so that they could restore sinful people to a right relationship with God and all of those sacrifices, as we know, symbolized the perfect sacrifice that would one day come in the person of Jesus, the Lamb of God. And ultimately in his atoning work on the cross, sins could be forgiven but even more importantly, the righteousness of Christ could be imputed and imparted. "Therefore," according to Romans 5:1, "having been justified," in other words, having been declared righteous, "by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Aren't you glad that war is over because of Christ?

Now, to be sure, the divinely prescribed sacrifices of Melchizedek in his day were no different than those of the Levites in terms of their function. They all symbolized the perfect and final sacrifice that makes men righteous and thereby brings peace to men, but

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the difference between the priesthood of Melchizedek and the Levitical priesthood is that the priesthood of Melchizedek was a superior type of the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ who will one day return as Prince of Peace. The Prince of Peace. Remember in Isaiah 9, that great Christmas passage that we read in verses 6 and 7, "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore." Oh, child of God, with this hurting hope, we continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, right, Psalm 122:6? We pray for the Messiah to return and that time when he will build his glorious Temple and reign in righteousness and peace on the Temple Mount which remains to this very day the most disputed piece of real estate in all of the world. Isaiah 32 speaks of Israel's promised kingdom, how it will be characterized by righteousness and justice and peace, fruitfulness, security. In Isaiah 32:1, "Behold, a king will reign righteously." Verse 17, "And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness quietness and trust forever." One day, isn't it great to know that God is going to answer the prayer that we have been asked to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

So Melchizedek's priesthood typified Christ and it was superior to the Levitical priesthood. Why? Because it was a royal priesthood; secondly, a universal priesthood; thirdly, it was characterized by righteousness and peace; and fourthly, because it was without genealogy. Notice verse 3, "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually." Now, when he says having neither beginning of days, it's speaking of the time of discharging his function as peace, and so forth, but I want you to be careful here. Some people look at this and they say, "Well, this is really, Melchizedek was really the pre-incarnate Christ." Well, no. It says here that he was made like the Son of God. But they say, "Well, you know he's without father, without mother, and so forth." Folks, you must understand this does not mean that he was created without parents, all right? In other words, it does not mean that he did not have a navel. Are you with me? That got your attention, didn't it? It's one of the things we study in seminary. We ask the question: did Adam and Eve have navels? I don't know. Maybe they did. But the point is he did have a navel, all right, he did have parents and he's not running around somewhere today incognito. That's not what the passage is talking about. Rather what is being said here is unlike the Levitical priest, Melchizedek had no predecessor in office. He is the first priest mentioned in Scripture and it's interesting that the Greek idiom expressed here by "without father, without mother," speaks of one whose parentage is unknown as in this case and therefore unrecorded. You see, the Old Testament gives no record of Melchizedek's parents, of his origin, because all of that is irrelevant to his priesthood and that's the point. And it's fascinating that the Greek word "agenealogetos," which translated "without genealogy," is not used to describe anyone else in Scripture. No one

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else. In fact, the term is not used anywhere else in Scripture. And I can go one step further, it is not even found anywhere else in Greek literature and for good reason, it's because everyone has a genealogy, whether it's recorded or not.

So here's why this is so important: for the Levitical priests, genealogy was everything. That was the most important thing. They had to prove that they were descended from Aaron or else they couldn't serve. In fact, pedigree was more important even than purity. Serving as a priest had nothing to do with character, they had no moral or spiritual qualifications, nor were they chosen by divine appointment. It had everything to do with genealogy and also their physical characteristics. In fact, any one of more than 100 physical blemishes or deficiencies would disqualify you from serving as a priest. But not so with Melchizedek. Melchizedek was appointed by God himself, a man who by God's grace, manifested a character of righteousness and peace.

"Well," you say, "but wait a minute, Jesus had a genealogy. It's recorded in Matthew 1 and recorded in Luke 3." Well, that's true but it is traced to Judah, not to Aaron, not to Levi. Like Melchizedek, Jesus had no pedigree to qualify him to be priest because he didn't need one, he was the Son of God. He was God's anointed. In fact, the writer addresses this later on in verse 14 of chapter 7, he says, "For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life." So the point is Jesus obtained his priesthood on the basis of his deity, not on the basis of his genealogy, not on the basis of the law, and his priesthood will never end.

Well, he adds yet a fifth reason why the priesthood of Melchizedek typified Christ and was superior to the Levitical priesthood, not only because it was royal and universal, characterized by righteousness and peace and without genealogy but, fifthly, because it was eternal. What is at the end of verse 3, "having neither beginning of days nor end of life." Again, "beginning of days" meaning the time of discharging his function as a priest, "nor end of life." Remember, the end of Aaron's life is recorded but not Melchizedek's. "But," it says, "made like the Son of God." Obviously he was not the Son of God, the pre-incarnate Christ, but made like the Son of God, "he remains a priest perpetually." Again, Melchizedek was a mortal man but in many ways he resembled and prefigured the Son of God. And even the silence of Scripture pertaining to his birth and his death and his genealogy was a type that resembled the eternal priesthood of Christ. By the way, if Melchizedek was still alive today, and I've heard some people think that he is, bizarre as that might sound, he would no longer be a type that prefigured Christ but he would share in the realities of the superior antetype and that would be absurd. In fact, it would be

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blasphemy. It's interesting later at the end of verse 8 we read that Melchizedek "lives on." That's why some wacky people come up with this idea, "It says right there, he lives on." These guys are looking for Elvis too, you know, it's that kind of mindset that some people have. But the point is because God gives no record of his death, his priesthood is eternal. That's the point.

Now, with this radically different understanding from the Levitical priesthood, the Jews, I'm sure, were kind of reeling. In fact, it's interesting when you think of his priesthood being eternal, we know that the Levitical priests could not serve until they were 25 years old and then they could only serve for 25 years. So I would have been retired a few years back, right, if I were a priest, so to speak. So they served from age 25 to age 50 so their priesthood was temporary. This priesthood is eternal. None of them, as it says in verse 3, remained a priest perpetually. Again, later on in verse 24 of chapter 7 we read, "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."

Well, it's fascinating, isn't it? God established the Levitical priesthood during the wilderness wanderings under Moses at the giving of the law and the Jewish people rightfully celebrated all of that but little did those people know who first heard this epistle to the Hebrews, little did they know that their beloved Temple and their beloved Jerusalem was about to be destroyed at the hands of the Romans. This epistle was written between 67 and 69 A.D. and the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. In fact, the Jewish historian Josephus tells us that 1.1 million Jews died, no doubt many of the people who first heard this letter died when that happened, and then 97,000 were captured and enslaved by the Romans.

So there you have this extended argument and he's going to go on from here but the point that he's trying to make is this: dear friends, the priesthood of Melchizedek typified Christ and it was superior to the Levitical priesthood because it was royal, it was universal, it was characterized by righteousness and peace, it was without genealogy and it was eternal. I should say, it is eternal. But if this isn't enough, notice what the writer says to bolster his argument even further in verse 4, "Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils." Now, you have to ask the question: why would Abraham do this? He didn't know Mel, right? He didn't know who Mel was. Mel hadn't done anything for him. Folks, the reason Abraham did this is simply because the Spirit of God gave him discernment to recognize that this was a priest of the Most High God. Again, something supernatural was going on there. We don't know all of the details but it had to have happened something like that. And think of what this means to the Jewish people that are considering Christ. They are having to say to

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The Marvelous Mystery of Melchizedek

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 7:1-10
Preached on: Sunday, February 19, 2017

themselves, "If our great patriarch Abraham had to pay tithes to Melchizedek, his priesthood is superior to ours. What's going on here?"

Verse 5, "And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham." And you will recall when the Israelites entered into the Promised Land, none of the land was given to the tribe of Levi because they had a special role to play as priests of God and so they received their inheritance through the giving of God's people and one of the tithes, one of many of the tithes of the Old Testament went directly to the Levitical priesthood for their support and that's what he's reminding them of here in verse 5.

"But," he goes on in verse 6, "the one whose genealogy is not traced from them," that is, the descendants of Abraham, "collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises." So he says, "But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater." And the point that he's making here is since Melchizedek received tithes and blessed Abraham, Melchizedek is greater than Abraham.

Verse 8, "In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him." Now, this is a powerful argument. It's a bit complicated. Let me try to explain it to you as clearly as I know how. What he's saying here is before the Levitical priesthood even came into existence, those priests who existed in the loins of Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham. That's the point. Those priests who themselves received tithes, paid tithes to another priest and therefore they supported another priesthood, making it therefore superior to theirs.

Furthermore, I can see in this that the writer is making a very clear point and I've hit on this several times and the point is simply this: something supernatural was at work in this unlikely encounter between Melchizedek and Abram. I mean, there is no indication that they knew each other personally. They may have, Scripture doesn't say, but what we do know is that Melchizedek knew that he should bless Abram and Abram knew that he should freely and generously give to Melchizedek out of the very best that he had which, by the way, is a picture of how we should give. We should give out of desire, not out of duty.

So the point here is without question the one who blesses is superior to the one who receives the blessing. So Melchizedek is superior to Abraham which means the priesthood of Melchizedek must also be superior to the Levitical priesthood that

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descended from Abraham. That's the argument. You see, friends, God ordained the Levitical priesthood for the old covenant, the covenant of the law, but he established and ordained the priesthood of Jesus Christ for the new covenant, this covenant of his grace. So Melchizedek is the type of the superior antetype that he prefigured. So it's a compelling argument. In fact, I remember once when I was in Israel talking with some Jewish believers and they were talking about how compelling this was for them. Isn't that interesting? Some 2,000 years later the Spirit of God continuing to use his letter, his word.

So as we wrap it up this morning, we can better understand now what the writer was saying back in chapter 5, verse 10. Remember he says there Jesus' "designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Concerning him," in other words, concerning the glorious truths of his regal office and priesthood and how all of that pictured Jesus Christ and was fulfilled in him, "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain," as you all can attest, right? You know, your brains are probably about to explode here with all this information. "But," he says, "it is hard to explain because you have become dull of hearing." Folks, I hope you haven't become dull of hearing because these are magnificent truths and what the Spirit of God wants us to do is ponder the glories of our crucified, risen and exalted Redeemer. This is the hope, he says, that we have as an anchor for our souls. And my, don't we all need to be safely tethered to truth and have some stability in these days.

Now, I want to leave you with some practical application and this is always a challenge when you come to a text like this, right? So let me give it to you this way. Dear Christian, never ever neglect those portions of Scripture that seem unimportant or difficult to understand. Never do that. How many times have you read through Genesis 14 and just kind of blow by it and think, "That was weird." Because you see, dear friends, even in those obscure stories like that in Genesis 14 where you've got the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah rebelling against Chedorlaomer, you've got the kidnapping of Lot and his family, the rescue of Abram and the encounter of this priest king Mel-whoever-he-was, even in all of that, God had a purpose, right? He was up to something and too often we read these profound sections of Scripture, these pieces of divine revelation and we have kind of this ho-hum attitude rather than saying, "Lord, for some reason that I may not understand, you have revealed these truths to me. Help me see how this fits into your glorious plan of redemption."

Beloved, we need to study, we need to preach, we need to preach the whole counsel of God, right? Please, don't be a one string banjo. It gets really tiring. Don't limit yourself to a few favorite doctrines. All Scripture is inspired by God, right? All of it is profitable. All you parents, all you Sunday school teachers, when you're teaching the little kids these

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things that you may think they don't have a clue, I mean, I was taught about all this when I was little boy. I still remember the flannel graphs. One of my teachers, a little Swedish lady, I can remember her teaching me about all the Old Testament things. Now, I didn't have a clue back then really what all was going on but, do you know what? The Spirit of God began to use that. So don't ever underestimate the power of the word. Don't ever neglect looking for the staggering intricacies of his sovereign plan in redemption, all of these pieces that sometimes boggle the mind and stir the soul fit together.

So look for those things and celebrate those things. And also remember even as Melchizedek and Abraham had no idea that God was going to use them in such a way and that 2,000 years later you've got a bunch of Gentiles sitting in middle Tennessee studying about the glorious priesthood of Christ and how all of it... even as they didn't know what God was up to in their life, may I say to you, you may not know it but God is up to something in your life as well. He's up to something in our life as a church. We are all part of this glorious organism, the body of Christ. We are all part of God's plan of redemption and we need to celebrate that every day. And how exhilarating it is to know that God orchestrates every event in history to accomplish his plan, even stories that happened 4,000 years ago. What a testimony of God's sovereignty. I hope that you will rest and rejoice in these great truths and celebrate the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for your word, for the power of it. I pray that by the power of your Spirit, you will help us to see it clearly and compellingly and, above all, that we might celebrate it and apply it to our lives to the praise of your glory and certainly for our joy. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

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