

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 1 August 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

A Better High Priest

Hebrews 7:1-10

As we've studied through the book of **Hebrews**, we have seen, again and again, that Christ, the Son of God, is the One who *reveals* God to us. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "***No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared*** (or, "revealed") ***him.***"

Now, why is it necessary for the second Member of the Godhead to "reveal" God to us? More particularly, why did the Son of God have to become *a Man* in order to reveal God to us? The answer is simple: God is "***the invisible God.***" The Scriptures tell us that no one has ever truly heard God's voice, or truly seen His form. Why? Because He has no form! He is not *part of* the physical Creation; rather, He is the *Creator* of all things. God is "transcendent" (meaning that He is totally above, and set apart from, His Creation). God is eternal, all-present, and invisible. We, on the other hand, are finite, extremely limited, and able to see only things in the physical realm.

So, what does this mean? This means that if the all-powerful, invisible God is to communicate with man, He must humble Himself. He must condescend to *enter* the physical universe that He created, and to take on a "voice" and a "form." From the beginning of the world, this has always been the designated role of the *second* Member of the Trinity. That is why John the Baptist said that the only begotten Son of God "declares" (or "reveals") God to man.

Of course, the *ultimate* revelation of God to man was when Christ took on human flesh, and was born into our world as a Man. However, even *before* Christ was born, He was always the Member of the Trinity who revealed God to man. Many times throughout the Old Testament, Christ appeared to men in bodily form so that He could communicate with them.

This morning, we are going to examine one of those times when God (particularly, Christ, the second member of the Godhead) appeared in human form to Abraham. On this particular occasion, He was not called by the name "Jehovah," or "the Angel of the LORD"; rather, He was called by the name "Melchisedec, the Priest of the most high God, and King of Salem."

Why did Christ appear to Abraham in such a unique way, and with such a unique title? That is what we will be learning this morning, in this message which I have entitled, ***A Better High Priest.***

Read Hebrews 7:1-3.

From this passage, there are several truths about Christ which stand out to us. First of all, we see that...

I. Christ is a continual High Priest (vv. 1-3).

Now, before I go too far, I would like to remind you, once again, of *the people* to whom Paul was writing, and of *why* he wrote this letter to them. Paul wrote this letter to Jewish people who professed to be believers in Christ; and he wrote this letter in order to remind them that Christ is **“better”** (or superior) to all the prophets, to the angels, to Moses and Aaron, and to all the forms and rituals of the Judaic religion. Some of these people *professed* to have believed on Jesus, but had not really done so: and because they did not truly know Christ, they were ready to abandon their profession, and to go back to Judaism, as soon as persecution came along. Others of them were truly saved; but they needed encouragement in the midst of their persecution. If *you* were in a situation in which you had to meet for church in secret, or in which your heart skipped a beat whenever you thought you saw someone following you on your way to prayer meeting, you’d need some encouragement, too! You, too, might need to be encouraged with the truth of *who Jesus is*, so that if and when you might have to *give your life* for Jesus, you would be ready to do so without wavering.

With this in mind, let’s take a look at the Old Testament passage to which Paul is referring, and see what we can learn about this “Melchisedec, priest of the most high God.” We read this passage a couple weeks ago; but I would like to return to it, and look at it in more detail.

Read Genesis 14:1-20.

Who was this man named **“Melchisedec,”** who is called **“the king of Salem,”** and **“priest of the most high God”**? Well, many Christians believe that Melchisedec was an actual man who lived in the land of Canaan, in a city called Salem. (They assume that “Salem” is simply another name for the city of “Jerusalem.”) In fact, some Christians believe (as did some of the ancient Jewish rabbis) that Melchisedec was **Shem**, the youngest son of Noah! Believe it or not, Shem *was* still living at this time! At the time of God’s call to Abraham, Shem would have been somewhere around the age of 500! (Shem was the great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather of Abraham.)

Now, *if* Shem were Melchisedec, why would that be important? Because the spiritual lineage of the Messiah had been passed from Shem to Abraham. Some people even believe that Shem *travelled with* Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan, and took up residence in Jerusalem. There, they say, Shem served both as the king of Jerusalem, and as a the priest of the true God.

Those who believe that Melchisedec was Shem view Melchisedec as a “type” or “picture” of Christ. How do they say that he is “type” of Christ? Because we are told absolutely nothing in Scripture about Melchisedec’s father or mother, his ancestry, his birth, or death. It’s as though he simply “appeared” from out of nowhere. Therefore, they say, Melchisedec is a *picture* of Christ, since Christ, being the eternal Son of God, has no father or mother, no ancestry, and no beginning of life, or end of days.

Now, *if* Melchisedec were, in fact, Abraham’s ancestor Shem, it wouldn’t be hard to understand why Abraham paid tithes to Shem. Shem was the member of Noah’s family who had inherited the spiritual “birth right”; and thus, it would have been only right for Abraham to give a tenth of his spoils to the spiritual patriarch of his family. However, there are a few big problems with this idea that Melchisedec was Shem. For one thing, if so great a man as Shem

were living in Canaan, why doesn't the Scripture tell us anything else about this? Secondly, why would the heathen, idol worshipping Jebusites, who inhabited the city of Jerusalem, have made Shem the king and priest of their city? Most importantly, if Melchisedec were Shem, then how could Paul have said that Melchisedec was "***without father, without mother, without descent***"? If Melchisedec were Shem, then we would know *exactly* who his father was, and what his ancestry was! Clearly, Melchisedec cannot be Shem.

Who *was* "Melchisedec," then? He was not a mere man: He was *the Son of God*, appearing to Abraham in bodily form. Paul makes it very clear here in **Hebrews 7** that Melchisedec was "***without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life.***" Now, Paul does say that Melchisedec was "***made like unto the Son of God***"; and on the surface, this might seem to imply that he was *like* the Son of God, but not *actually* the Son of God. However, the word "***like***" simply means that Christ was appearing in a *pre-incarnate* form. Twenty centuries later, Christ would actually be *born* into our race, as the *incarnate* Son of God; but for the time being, Christ appeared to Abraham in a form "***like***" the form that He would take when He would be born into this world centuries later.

Now, there are several things we can learn about Christ in His appearance to Abraham. **First of all, the name by which He is called is powerful.** He is called **Melchisedec**, which literally means "My King is righteous," or "King of Righteousness." (**Read Hebrews 7:2.**)

Does that name "King of righteousness" ring a bell for you? If you've been reading your Bible for very long, it should! Let's see where else in Scripture we can find a name like this.

Read Jeremiah 23:5-6.

In this Scripture, Jeremiah is calling God by the name "Jehovah-tsikenu," which means "The LORD our Righteousness." This is one of the wonderful names by which Christ will be called when He returns to earth to set up His Kingdom. His 1,000-year Kingdom will be a kingdom of true righteousness. Corruption will not be permitted. There will be perfect justice and judgment. His resurrected saints will rule and reign with Him in the earth; and because they, too, we will be sinless and pure, they will be able to rule with perfect justice and righteousness.

Jesus Christ is called the King of Righteousness because He will one day set up His righteous Kingdom on earth. However, this is not the only reason. Jesus is called "The LORD ***our*** Righteousness" because He is the One who saves sinners from their sin, and declares them to be righteous before God. Also, He is also the One who *enables* those who are saved to produce actual righteousness in their lives!

Read 1 Corinthians 1:30.

Read Romans 4:5-8.

Read Romans 8:1-4.

My friend, if you have not been saved, you need Christ's *imputed* righteousness. This means that you need Christ's perfect righteousness to be credited to your moral account book, so that God can declare you "righteous," instead of "guilty." In other words, you need to be saved!

Should you be saved already, you already have Christ's *imputed* righteousness; but what you need now is Christ's *practical* righteousness in your everyday life. Christ can help you to live a clean and righteous life, if you will live your life in a constant state of surrender to Him.

Now, what else can we learn from Christ's appearance to Abraham? We've learned that His name, Melchisedec, means "My King is righteous"; but what about His title, "*the king of Salem*"? What can we learn from that? Plenty! You see, the name "Salem" comes from the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means "peace." Not only is Jesus the King of Righteousness: He is also the King of Peace.

Does this truth strike a chord in you? If you know Christ as your personal Saviour, it *should* strike a chord! Jesus Christ is the *only* One who can bring peace; and every true child of God knows this from personal experience. It isn't just *political* peace that Jesus brings (although He certainly *will* bring political peace to earth one day, when He sets up His Kingdom): it is *personal, inner* peace that He gives. Isaiah wrote of the coming Messiah, "*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*" Jesus Himself said, "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*" When a sinner lays down his arms, admits that he is a sinner who can't save himself, and places His faith in Jesus Christ, Christ comes into that person's life, and gives him a peace that he never had before. It is a peace that the world cannot give. It is a peace that only God can give! Do *you* have the peace that Jesus Christ, the King of Peace, gives?

What else can we glean from this account of Christ's appearance to Abraham? Is there more that we can learn? Yes, there is. We can learn something about **Christ's high priestly duty**. At the end of **verse 3**, Paul says that Christ "*abideth a priest continually*." In other words, because Jesus Christ is *eternal*, with no beginning of days or end of life, He is an *eternal* High Priest on our behalf. He never "clocks out" from His job. He is *always* "on duty" for you and me! This is exactly what David was talking about when He wrote about the Messiah in **Psalms 110:4**.

Read Psalm 110:4.

Remember back in **chapter 5** when Paul quoted this verse? Do you understand this verse even better now? Jesus Christ is called a "*priest forever after the order of Melchisedec*" because He *is* Melchisedec! He is the only One who has ever belonged to this priestly order. He is the only one who *could* belong to it, because He is the only One who is *eternal*. He is in a class all of His own. The priests of Old Testament Israel were all from the order of Aaron; and they all died. In contrast, Jesus Christ is from the order of Melchisedec; and He is a "*priest forever*." He is our ever-living, ever-abiding, eternal High Priest!

Now, this brings us to an important point. Paul is now ready to launch into a new thought, which he will continue to expand upon into **chapter 8**. The thought is this: *because* Christ is a "*priest continually*," He is therefore a "*better*" High Priest.

II. Christ is a better high priest (vv. 4-10).

(Read verses 4-10 again.) Over the next couple chapters, Paul gives his readers five reasons why Christ is “better” (or “superior”) to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament. In **verses 4-10**, we have just read the *first* of those five reasons. The first reason is simply this: Christ is “*better*” than the Levitical priesthood **because Levi tithes to Jesus Christ!**

Now, maybe that statement doesn’t make much sense to you. Maybe some of you are not “connecting the dots.” Thus, I am going to pause for a minute, and give the Scriptural “backdrop” for what Paul is saying.

First of all, who were the Levites? **The Levites were the priestly tribe.** Only the descendants of Levi were allowed to be priests. This means that they were the tribe **that received tithes from the all the other tribes of the children of Israel.** That was their God-given privilege, because of their service to the Lord. One tenth of all the harvest of the children of Israel went to the tribe of Levi. In return, the Levites served as priests in the Temple, and offered up the people’s sacrifices to God for them.

Read Numbers 18:21, 26.

The fact that the Levites collected tithes from the rest of the people of Israel shows that God had placed them in a superior position. Of course, the Levites were not *morally* superior to anyone else; but in their *office*, they were superior. They were “superior” in that God placed them in a position of spiritual leadership and authority.

So then, if the Levites were in a position of spiritual authority over the other tribes, and if they therefore had the right to receive tithes from them, what would it mean if their ancestor, Levi, paid tithes to someone *even greater than himself*? It would mean that the Man to whom *Levi* paid tithes is superior not only to Levi, but to all his descendants, as well!

Well, guess what? That is precisely what happened! Levi, the father of the priestly tribe, did, in fact, pay tithes to someone greater than he: and that Person was the Son of God! When did this happen? Paul says that it happened on that day when Abraham gave his tithe to Melchisedec. As we’ve already seen, Melchisedec was none other than Jesus Christ in a per-incarnate form! This means that Levi, and all his descendants, paid tithes to the Son of God *through their father Abraham*. This makes Christ superior to Levi, and to all his priestly descendants. **(Read Hebrews 7:9-10 again.)**

Now, a lot of Christians have trouble understanding this teaching that “Levi paid tithes to Christ through his grandfather Abraham.” Why do we have so much trouble grasping this? Probably because we have absorbed so much of the thinking of our modern society. As Westerners, we tend to think of ourselves only as “individuals,” with our own completely distinct identity. We place little, if any, value upon obedience to our fathers; nor do we think of ourselves as being “identified” with our fathers, or of participating in their deeds in any way. In other words, we are not a “patriarchal” society. We don’t give much thought to what our “fathers” did or didn’t do, or to how their actions impact us today.

However, I have a “news flash.” It so happens that God is a *very* patriarchal God; and mankind, the crown jewel of God’s creation, is also patriarchal. Whether we like it or not, that is the plain fact. For example, in **Romans 5**, Paul says that we were all “*in Adam*” when Adam sinned: therefore, we all sinned with him! We have inherited his sin nature. We may not understand this truth, or like it; but it’s true, whether we like it or not. We were in our father *Adam*’s loins on the day when he sinned; and thus, we participated in his sin, and received the curse of death that God pronounced upon Adam. An old seventeenth-century New England school primer put it this way: “In Adam’s fall we sinned all.”

Are you understanding this better now? Just as *we* were in our *father Adam*’s loins on the day when he sinned, and participated in his sin as a race, so *Levi* was in his great-grandfather *Abraham*’s loins on the day he paid tithes to The King of Righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ! This means that Levi paid tithes to Jesus Christ, through Abraham. Thus, Jesus Christ is superior to Levi, and to the entire priesthood that sprang from him!

Now, let’s read **verse 6-7** again, and see if we can wrap our heads around this teaching. (**Read verses 6-7.**) Who is this man “*whose descent is not counted from*” Levi? It is Christ, the Son of God! In His humanity, Jesus was not a descendant of Levi; He was a descendant of Judah. So, then, if Jesus (who was *not* a descendant of Levi) received tithes from Levi (through Levi’s grandfather Abraham), and blessed him, this means that Jesus is superior to Levi. Why? Because someone who bestows a blessing upon someone else in a position of superiority to that person. In Old Testament times, a “blessing” was a serious thing. A blessing was bestowed by someone who had the spiritual authority to do so. This is why Paul said, “*Without all contradiction* (in other words, “there’s no denying the fact that...”), *the less is blessed of the better.*” Levi and his descendants were the “*less*,” and Christ is the “*better.*”

The fact that Melchisedec (who is Christ) “*blessed*” Levi shows that Christ is superior to Levi. The fact that Christ “*received tithes*” from Levi also shows that He is superior to Levi. However, there is still one more way in which Christ is superior to Levi. You see, Levi and his priestly descendants all died, and thus were not able to carry on their priestly offices anymore. In contrast, Jesus Christ has an *eternal* priesthood, because he is the Ever-living One. Though He died, He rose again the third day: thus, He is our High Priest continually!

(**Read verses 8 and 9 again.**) In **verse 8**, Paul says that “*here*” (in other words, “here and now,” or “at the present time”) men who die receive tithes. In other words, he’s saying, “To this very day, there are still Levite priests in the Temple who are collecting tithes from people; **but**, these Levite priests all die eventually. Yet, “*back there*” (in other words, back when Christ appeared to Abraham) Levi paid tithes to the One who “*liveth.*” In short, Levi paid tithes to the “Ever-living One”—the Son of God. **Therefore, Levi is inferior to Christ.** He is inferior to Jesus Christ, because he *paid tithes* to Christ; because he received *blessing* from Christ; and because he and all his descendants *are dead*, whereas Christ ever lives.

Paul’s message is clear. He is reminding those who were weary and wavering that there was nothing for them to go back to in the Judaic religion. To whom else could they go? Jesus has the words of eternal life; and He is the Christ, the Son of the living God!

Now, perhaps you are thinking, “Pastor, I’ve heard some great doctrine this morning; but I’m not a Jew, and I don’t need to be convinced that Jesus Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood. So, how can I apply this passage to my life?” Well, try this. Remember what Paul said in **verse 7**? He said, “***Without all contradiction***” [in other words, “It only stands to reason that...”], ***the less is blest of the better.***” In other words, Paul is saying, “Those who are *superior* give blessings to those who are *inferior*.” I think we can find application in that statement, brethren! The application is this: if you want blessing in your life, then it must come from the Lord! Since He is superior to you, *He* is the one who gives you blessings. Blessing isn’t going to come from any other source. **Furthermore, there is a condition for His blessing in your life.** God doesn’t just hand out blessings to you automatically, regardless of how you live your life. God blesses *obedience* and *faithfulness*.

Christ appeared to Abraham, and blessed him, because Abraham lived a life of faith and obedience. The fact that Abraham gave his *tithe* to the Lord as soon as he realised who He was shows Abraham’s godly character. Christ didn’t *have* to say, “Umm...I just blessed you, Abraham. I just granted you an incredible victory over the armies of Elam, with only 318 men. Don’t you think you ought to show your gratitude by giving me a tenth of all the spoils that I just gave you?” The Lord didn’t have to coax and prod Abraham. He knew that Abraham would give back a portion of the spoils to Him; and therefore, He granted Abraham the victory that day, and blessed him, to boot. On one occasion, the LORD said of Abraham, “***For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD.***” What a commendation! Though Abraham was far from perfect, he lived a life that was overwhelmingly characterized by obedience to and faith in God.

Are *you* living a life of consistent obedience? If not, then don’t expect God to bless you! Do you periodically “take time off” from God and His Word, and indulge in the things that *you* want to do, instead of that which pleases God? If so, then don’t expect God to bless you!

You may plan, and scheme, and work hard, in order to find success in this life (and God may even *allow* you to have *material* “success”); however, without obedience and submission to God, you won’t have *true* blessing. Why? Because true blessing comes from God: and God rewards *obedience*. You may make money; but it is as though you are putting it in a bag with holes. You may bring it home; but God will blow upon it, and make it fly away. You may eat and drink; but you are not filled. You *will never be satisfied* until you start living your life in complete submission and loving obedience to Him. Christian, put Christ first in your life!

Conclusion: We’ve seen this morning that Jesus Christ is a *better* High Priest. He is superior to Levi. He is superior to Aaron. He is superior to Moses. He is superior to all the angels of heaven. He is superior to all the prophets. **And He is superior to you and me.**

My friend, if you’re not sure that you’re saved, I am here to tell you that you will find salvation in no one else but Jesus Christ. He is Salvation. He is Righteousness. He is Peace. He is the one and only High Priest. He is the only one who can bring you safely to the Father. Won’t you “put on” His imputed righteousness today? Won’t you receive His salvation? Won’t you trust Him as your only High Priest?

If you are saved, this message applies to you, as well. You are anchored to Christ; and He is sitting on the throne in Heaven, interceding to the Father for you. He is your High Priest; and He has already reconciled you to God. **However, never forget that He is superior to you.** *He* is the One who gives blessing. If you are attempting to find blessing in your life without submitting to and obeying Him, you will not succeed. Follow the example of faithful Abraham, and give Him what rightfully belongs to Him!