A priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek

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Shabbat shalom to each of you here at CBM, and to those reading this online on my blog or on Facebook, also a hearty greeting.

*Introduction: Tsav*

Today is the Saturday before Passover and it is customary throughout Jewry to honor this day as the Great Sabbath, or *Shabbat HaGadol*. This commemorates the great miracle that happened in Egypt on this day, heralding the Exodus from Egypt five days later. Shabbat HaGadol customs include reading a portion of the Haggadah, which tells the story of the Exodus; it is also customary that the rabbi of the community teaches on the laws of Passover, in preparation for the festival. A survey was taken in Israel some years ago now, in which they found that less than 50% of the Jews believed in a personal God, but almost 90% observe Passover. That may put this in perspective a little.

Now, our parasha today entitled *Tsav*, means *commandment* and inside the 3rd book of Torah, Vayikra, this makes sense. After all the majority of the 613 laws in Torah are found in Leviticus. And like the book’s title in Latin tells us, Leviticus is the book of the Levites, or the priestly book.

Chapter 8 of Leviticus teaches us of the ordination of the priests and a bit of their duties. It shows Moses killing animals and sprinkling blood in appropriate places, and behaving like a priest, although he wasn’t officially one.

The entire chapter filled with ritual and blood and drama is an ordination ceremony that begins the work of ministry for Aaron and his four sons. Numbers chapter 8 highlights when the priests’ duties are fulfilled and they are told to retire, but that’s for another sermon, although I hear you are experiencing some of that at CBM just now. May God lead you well in this time of transition.

*Our role: The role of the priests*

So I’m thinking about priests and about transitions and of course Passover, and I am led to teach you about a couple major things. First is the role of each of you, as a believer, if you are a believer in Yeshua as Messiah. He calls us to be a royal priesthood, according to the shaliach Shimon, Yeshua’s right hand man in the day. (“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A **royal** **PRIESTHOOD**, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God’s* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you *o*ut of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2.9). Shimon would certainly have known all about this, as Yeshua actually ordained him to such a status as is recorded in Matthew chapter 16. You can read that later, but the reference will be important for you to write down. (And Yeshua said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My congregation; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” Matthew 16.17-19)

Yeshua ordains Peter to Gospel ministry, and that means one thing to those men that day. Peter is becoming a Cohen, a priest. Wow, who can do that anyway? Who can make someone who is not a Cohen to be a Cohen?

The only one who can really honestly do that is the Almighty himself. And Yeshua is saying of himself, that that is exactly who he is! What a claim!

He who is questionably a priest anyway, isn’t he? Remember a priest had to come from the line of Aaron, who was a Levite, Levi being the 3rd son of Jacob. Yeshua according to the genealogies was a great, great, great…. Grandson of Judah, the 4th son of Jacob. The writer of Hebrews will make a very clear and very important case for the priesthood of Yeshua, and I’ll explain that just now.

*Yeshua: The great High Priest of our confession*

Melchizedek is a character from the time of Abraham our father. He is also mentioned one time in the Psalms (110.4). And of course, he is mentioned several times in the book of Hebrews in the Newer Testament portion of the Bible. Who is he? And why is he so important?

According to the story (found in Genesis 14), he was a priest of another people, but geographically near Abraham. When Abraham had been successful in battle in retrieving his nephew Lot from his captors, Abraham wanted to demonstrate thankfulness to God right away. He went to Melchizedek, the King of Salem (and by the way his name means “King of Righteousness.”), who promised to stand with Abraham, Melchizedek brought out what we would recognize as Kiddush, that is, bread and wine, and served some of the military leaders in Abraham’s entourage. He also said a blessing over Abraham, which was powerful.

What Abraham did was surprising however. He gave a tithe to Melchizedek and honoured him above himself. In fact, the Bible makes clear that the greater blesses the lesser. So let’s read a bit from Hebrews 7 and unpack it as we go.

“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, 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. 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.” (This doesn’t mean Melchizedek was without parentage, but rather that in the record of Scripture, he just pops onto the scene. He did have beginnings and he did die, but the Bible doesn’t make mention of those events)

“Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. 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. But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. **But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.”** (The key word in the book of Hebrews is ‘better’ and Yeshua is better than angels, better than Moshe, better than… And here we see Melchizedek is better than Abraham because of the tithing)

“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.”** (In other words since Levi was in Abraham, and all the current priests were also there, then the priesthood of today (the Aaronides) is less than the priesthood of Yeshua (Melchizedek) because of the tithing!

“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? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken 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. 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.”** (Yeshua came from Judah and was as such disqualified from being our high priest in heaven, but cleverly the writer of Hebrews gets another order of priests to make this work)

 “For it is attested *of Him,*

 “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER

 ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.” (Psalm 110.4)

“For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment 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.** And inasmuch as *it was* not without an oath(for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him,” (Levites were such not because they swore to uphold anything, but it was simply biological)

 “THE LORD HAS SWORN

 AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND,

 ‘YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER’”);

so much the more also Yeshua has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

The *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Yeshua, 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.

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever.” (Hebrews chapter 7)

So what do we learn?

Yeshua is our Great High Priest, not because he came from Judah, but because He came from Melchizedek’s order. He is a forever priest. He is the one who hears us and who cares for us. He lives to make intercession for us. He saves to the uttermost. Glory to His name! Baruch hashem!

*And what about you?*

The topic in Tsav seems so remote to us as 21st century people, doesn’t it? Priests and tabernacles, oils and ephods, 7-day ordination separation duties, and old old Old Jews. But if you have been listening, you learned like I did that The Almighty who made Yeshua a priest forever according to another order, other than Levi, is also making you into a priest, in a way.

There are a few parallel words in Exodus chapter 28.

“Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me — Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons. You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. You shall speak to all the skilful persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me. These are the garments which they shall make: a breastpiece and an ephod and a robe and a tunic of checkered work, a turban and a sash, and they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister as priest to Me.” (Exodus 28.1-4)

Three times in those four verses you hear that same phrase, “That he may minister as a priest to me.”

So priests have a job, to mediate between the people and God and between God and the people.

That’s why we celebrate that we have Yeshua now who is the only mediator between God and men. No man needs to do it for us any longer. No man can do this any longer.

But listen to this text from a very obscure text in Rav Shaul’s letter to the Roman believers. After he tells the Romans:

“For I say that Messiah has become a servant to *t*he circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises *given* to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written,

 “THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES,

 AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME.”

Again he says,

 “REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE.” And again…“ (Romans 15.8-10) He says this odd phrase, but is an exact parallel to our text in Exodus and Leviticus today:

“I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Messiah Yeshua to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that *my* offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 15.15-16)

I say it’s odd because this is the only time in the Newer Testament that the word *priest* is used in verb form, just like we see in Torah today. And what we are as the Body of Messiah, here at CBM, and at Faith Lutheran last night in Sugar Land and at Second Baptist and at… you name it, wherever the Gospel of Messiah is proclaimed, we are to function as priests, if you will all of us together, reaching a lost world, bringing them to God and bringing God to them. We together are a witness and a holy one at that, of the Holy God.

We in the messianic community have a responsibility to serve as that royal priesthood, that holy nation, to our own people. And if you are Jewish and here today (or reading or listening online) I urge you to hear these words, to consider Yeshua, our Great High Priest, who alone went into the Heavenly Tabernacle, made without hands, and secured our eternal kipporah, our eternal forgiveness and atonement. Consider and receive Him as Savior and Lord; He is our Messiah and the One who lives to intercede, and to cry out on our behalf. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Then when you also join Him, and believe Yeshua died for your sins and rose from the dead for us all, then you can join us and make a clear proclamation to the world of God’s eternal message of hope and joy, of forgiveness and salvation.

That’s why I’m here today. To help you all see the priesthood of all believers, that is, that we all together, are a priesthood to the world, and to ask you to continue to pray for our work in Sydney, Australia and around the world. Quick story: Last week one of our women was sharing at a church in Idaho, like I am out in Texas. Melissa met Ruth, whose Christian neighbour brought to hear another Jew speak about Messiah. Long story short, Ruth prayed with Melissa that morning to believe and confess Yeshua as Messiah and Lord. Melissa called her dad on the phone, who also is a believer, and said, “I have someone here who wants to tell you something.” That’s in house buzz words for “I just prayed with a person, and they are going to tell you about it.” Sure enough Stewart answered the phone, and heard Ruth tell him that she had just accepted Yeshua as Messiah. How great is that? It’s even better… Stewart is also a Jews for Jesus missionary and was actually on the pulpit at the time of the phone call. And Ruth shared using the speakerphone with the entire congregation that she had just gotten saved. Spontaneous applause broke out as you can imagine. I love that story. I have many others I want to tell you, but I’ll let the newsletter do that. Would you please fill out the white card you received on entry, the one with my picture on it, tear the stub off, and begin to fill out the larger card. I won’t think it rude for you to write while I finish speaking. Please fill out the card completely, especially your email, so we can tell you stories quickly and you can pass them on via forward to many like this one.

If you are giving financially to Jews for Jesus today, please put the amount on the front of the card when you fill it out so we can receipt and thank you. I really appreciate that.

I have a resource table as usual up the back, and really want you to get the book entitled, “What the rabbis know about the Messiah” by Rachmiel Frydland, of blessed memory, The cover is on the screen just now. We ran out of them on this trip, but if you want one, just pay for it up the back, along with any other book, like my testimony, or the calendar, music you want, and without shipping charge, we will get it to you right away. I loved Rachmiel, a holocaust survivor, a Yeshiva bachur, and a holy messianic mensch. He died in 1984 in Ohio. His book is a classic and you have to have it in your library, for sure.

By the way I also have a credit card machine now, so you can use your card, a check, or cash to pay for things.

Rabbi Richard, thank you for your friendship in Messiah for over 30 years. Patsy, keep looking after the man; he turned 69 on Wednesday, which is also my wife’s birthday but she is much younger. He is a golden friend and a holy representative of Messiah’s body in Houston to a world that so desperately needs to see Yeshua.

Rabbi Ron and all the rest of the staff, all the volunteers who make this place such a good place I thank you as well. To everyone, be His priests to the world that so needs to know Him. Keep doing what makes Yeshua happy; have a blessed Pesach next week, remembering the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and have a Shabbat shalom as well today.