“Book of Hebrews – Chapter 7”

Jesus – our Holy Priest forever

[ Series Title ~ ‘In Christ Alone - Towards spiritual maturity!’ ]

Or

[ Jesus … Simply The Best! ]

9.30a.m. Sunday 30 April, 2017

Delivered by Senior Pastor Marshall Muller @
the Laidley Baptist Church (Qld).

Introduction:

We continue in our look at the Book of Hebrews – this week we visit Chapter 7.

But first a quick summary thus far. The writer of Hebrews is issuing a warning to Jewish believers in the first century AD who, because of persecution/peer pressure, are about to make a poor decision to go back to the older superseded Law of Moses, rather than continue to follow the more superior New Law of the Messiah under which they have been saved by grace through faith.

The preceding Chapters in Hebrews show us that they are true believers in Jesus Christ. But here we find them attempting to make a decision to go back to the old ways of Judaism (the rules, festivals etc.) in order to ‘stay alive’.

We already discovered in the earlier Chapters that Jesus, as the Messiah, is more superior to Moses, more superior to angels, and more superior to the Law of Moses to which they want to return. Why would you want to go back to an inferior system or an inferior state? It’s the equivalent of going back to renting after you have purchased your own home. It doesn’t make sense. That’s why the writer of Hebrews is showing them the error of their impending decision. And if they make that decision, they will certainly suffer physical death in the catastrophe that is coming in AD70 with the total destruction of the Temple and its systems. So he
urges them on to maturity in Christ. There is no other option other than to regress and stay baby Christians. Not much of an option!

This week the writer wants to give them the ‘meat/solid food’ that he spoke about in earlier Chapters. He speaks to them about a mysterious priestly character in the Old Testament called Melchizedek. Melchizedek isn’t spoken of much. You don’t even hear many sermons about Melchizedek. So today’s message will help you understand him and why he is being spoken about in the New Testament epistle of Hebrews.

_Let’s read through Hebrews Chapter 7 together_

**Let’s pray ...**

*Gracious God & our Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us the best – Jesus. May we learn more about his finished work for each of us. We give thanks for your generosity in bestowing eternal life upon those who by faith have believed in Jesus, our great High Priest forever. Teach us this morning from your Word. Let our hearts be re-assured of your love towards us as your children.*

_We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen_

**The Priesthood of Melchizedek**

The writer of Hebrews makes 3 comparisons based on the Old Testament record of the character of Melchizedek. The Bible has very limited revelation concerning Melchizedek. He is only mentioned in the Old Testament in 2 passages. One is historical (Genesis 14:18-20) and the other in a poetical record in Psalm 110:4. The historical record in Genesis 14 he suddenly appears on the scene and then quickly disappears. There is no record of his birth, life, death or anything else about Melchizedek. So, from the Old Testament we have a limited portrait of this mysterious person named Melchizedek.

Based on that limited portrait, the author of Hebrews makes some comparisons, and the resemblances he makes are fairly extensive.

**Comparison 1 – Melchizedek & Jesus (v1-3):**

From this limited portrait of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, the writer points out 6 similarities between Melchizedek and Jesus.

**6 similarities between Melchizedek & Jesus:**

The **first similarity** is that Melchizedek was a priest-king. He was the King of Salem, also known as Jerusalem (Psalm 76:2). The last part of his name ‘zedek’ was
a Jebusite dynastic name. Years later when Joshua came into the Land, he fought against the King of Jerusalem called Adoni-zedek (Joshua 10:1).

Not only was Melchizedek the King of Salem, but he was also the priest of God Most High, making him a king and a priest. His name and his title characterized 2 things about his reign – he ruled in righteousness (which is what his name means); and he ruled in peace (which is what Salem means).

Now these 2 characteristics are mentioned about another future king, the Messiah Jesus and his reign. We find it in Isaiah 9:6-7 - For unto us a Child is born … and the government shall be upon His shoulders … He will reign on David’s throne.

The 2nd similarity (v1b) is that Melchizedek’s priesthood is one of blessing, in that he blessed Abraham. This is also revealed about Jesus’ priesthood later in this chapter in Hebrews.

The 3rd similarity (v2) concerns the giving & receiving of tithes. The giving of tithes was a recognition of superiority. When Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, he was recognizing Melchizedek’s positional superiority. The fact that Jesus functions as a Melchizedekian priest shows his superiority over any other priesthood.

The 4th similarity (v3a) is that Melchizedek was an independent high priest as is Jesus. What I mean here is that when he appears the text only states that he was a priest of the Most High God. There is no mention of lineage (no mother or father) or genealogy. As far as his priesthood is concerned, ancestry was not important in establishing his claim to priesthood. His appointment to the priesthood was independent of human relations.

This was not true of the Aaronic Order/Priesthood (the Levitical Order) because unless you could prove you were of Aaron’s line, then you were disqualified from the priesthood. You can read about this in Numbers 16-17. When the Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon, many ‘claimed’ the order of priesthood, but some could not prove they were direct descendants of Aaron … and so they were disqualified (Ezra 2:61-63; Nehemiah 7:63-65).

In the Old Testament, lineage was important, but not here for the Melchizedekian priesthood. Thus, we have no beginning or end, no record of birth or death. These events obviously occurred but there is no record of them.

The 5th similarity (v3b) between Melchizedek & Jesus is that the Melchizedekian priesthood was timeless. There is no beginning or end mentioned of his priesthood. If you were a Levitical priest, your priesthood had a definite beginning and end. But
with Melchizedek we don’t even have a record of him being succeeded by another
priest in office. That’s why verse 3 ‘states resembling the Son of God, he remains a
priest forever’. His priesthood was timeless – no beginning or end. Whereas the
Levitical priests could only serve between the ages of 25 & 50 (Numbers 8:24-25).

The 6th similarity (v3c) is that the Melchizedekian Priesthood ministered to all – it
was all inclusive. The Levite priests only ministered to the nation of Israel. But
Melchizedek’s Priesthood was to all. It was universal, not national. Jesus also has a
universal priesthood.

The point of these 6 similarities is that Melchizedek was made like the Son of God.

Some teach that Melchizedek was a pre-incarnate Christ, but this
cannot be true for several reasons:
1. The text does not use any adjective to describe Melchizedek to be the Son of God,
instead a participle is used meaning that Jesus was similar to Melchizedek.
2. He says Melchizedek was like the Son of God, but it doesn’t state that he was the
Son of God (in the Old Testament).
3. Where Melchizedek is mentioned in Psalm 110:4, there is a distinction between
Melchizedek & the Messiah.
4. Hebrews 5:1 states that the prerequisite for priesthood was that he had to be
human. Jesus didn’t become a man until the Incarnation, conceived by the Holy
Spirit in the womb of Mary. Before that time, Jesus appeared in the form of a man,
but He was not an actual human man.
5. In the Old Testament theophanies (visible manifestations of God to mankind)
appeared & disappeared. They didn’t hold any long-term office. Melchizedek was
the king of Jerusalem (a city). This required permanent residency and a position.
Theophanies never held any position and they were only short-term/temporary
manifestations.

Some suggest that Melchizedek had to be Jesus because of the
meaning of his name – the King of righteousness.
But we know that he had a Jebusite dynastic name. Joshua fought against Adoni-
zedek (a pagan), and his name also means ‘my lord I righteous’. Joshua fought
against him and killed him.

Melchizedek was a real man, not the pre-incarnate Christ. But he was a type of the
Messiah.
Comparison 2 – The Order of Melchizedek & the Order of Aaron (v4-10)

The second comparison is between the Melchizedekian Priesthood and the Levitical Priesthood. The Hebrews writer’s point is that the priesthood of Jesus is after the order of Melchizedek ... which is superior to the Order of Aaron. Verse 4 – he is asking the reader to consider certain historical facts and from that deduct certain theological conclusions.

The writer goes on to show the **superiority of the Melchizedekian Order** to the Levitical Order in 4 different ways.

The **first superiority** (v4-5) is that Melchizedek ACCEPTED tithes. Abraham paid the best tithes from the chief spoils of the plunder. He marks the dignity of the one paying the tithe by calling Abraham the patriarch. So if Abraham is the patriarch, that puts him in a position of superiority, yet Abraham pays Melchizedek, indicating a higher superiority.

The Levitical Priesthood collected tithes from the tribes of Israel – their own brethren. Melchizedek had no racial connection with Abraham, and yet received tithes from the Father of the Levitical Priesthood. So, in the area of who collects tithes from whom, it shows that Melchizedek is superior to Aaron & Levi.

Tithing was given as a command under the Law of Moses. Since the law has come to an end, there is no biblical basis or command for tithing today. You will hear Churches teach about the importance of tithing & institute the word tithing in their offerings etc. but that is an old command given to Israel, now superseded by grace through Christ. A New Testament believer must give as God has prospered him/her.

Many Churches enforce the tithing command from this very verse. But Abraham’s tithe was a one off event. He never gave it regularly. Second, Abraham didn’t give the tithe from his income/estate, he gave it from the spoils of war. He had conquered a group of kings who had captured his nephew Lot. Abraham rescued Lot (and others) from Sodom, gathered all the spoils and from these proceeds of war gives a tenth to Melchizedek. Abraham’s payment of a tithe is NOT a basis for teaching tithing today.

The **2nd superiority** of the Melchizedekian Priesthood (v6-7) is that of blessing. Melchizedek blessed Abraham. He had no racial connection with Abraham or the Levites, but received the tithes and blessed Abraham. But it was Abraham who had the Covenant promise from God. The point here in verse 7 is that the Blessor is superior. The lesser is blessed by the greater – that was the custom of that time.
Abraham did not bless Melchizedek ... Melchizedek blessed Abraham proving therefore that he is superior.

The 3rd superiority (v8) is the fact that the Aaronic Priesthood was administered by dying men. When a priest died he no longer received tithes. Sooner or later, Aaronic priests died. This is why provision for succession after death was made under the Law. But this was not true for Melchizedek. There is no record of his death, or someone to succeed him. Melchizedek represents the living not the dying. His priesthood is eternal.

The 4th superiority (v9-10) is shown in respect to Levi, the founder of the Tribe of Levi. He paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham. The point the writer is making here is that Levi, who is the one who collects tithes, paid them. Verse 10 applies the principle of imputation – even though Levi was not living at that time when Abraham paid the tithe to Melchizedek, he was part of the lineage of Abraham. In other words if the fathers recognized the superiority of Melchizedekian Priesthood, then so should the sons.

**Comparison 3 – The Levitical Priesthood & the Priesthood of Jesus (v11-25)**

The third comparison is trying to explain why the Levitical priesthood could not perfect the worshipper and therefore HAD TO BE SUPERSEDED by something else. The Greek word for perfection here means ‘maturity’.

In discussing the office of priest, the writer says 2 things about the old Priesthood and 2 things about the new Priesthood. His emphasis is on the Psalm 110:4 passage.

**The (Old) LEVITICAL Priesthood**

1. The Old Priesthood was changeable (v11-14). It was only transitory / changeable. There was no perfection (spiritual maturity) attainable through the Levitical Priesthood, so they could see for themselves that the Law had to be done away with. God never intended perfection to come through the Levitical System. **There is a connection between the Levitical System and the Law of Moses. If you get rid of one, then you must get rid of the other.**

Psalm 110:4 predicts another Priest to come – one after the order of Melchizedek. This meant that the old Order under Aaron was changeable. This prophecy was given some time after the Levitical system had been in operation.
So the change from one Law system (Levitical) to another (Melchizedek) required a change of the Law (v12). We know that since the Law did not perfect anyone, or bring anyone to spiritual maturity, the old Law had to be done away with.

Psalm 110:4 speaks of a priest from David's line (Tribe of Judah) – not of Aaron’s line (Tribe of Levi). This is puzzling because under the current arrangements only a member of the Tribe of Levi could function at the altar. No one from the Tribe of Judah could qualify under the law.

So the Messiah had to come from another order other than the Levitical Order. This fact (another Priest to come after Melchizedek) shows that the old Priesthood (Levitical Order) was changeable.

2. The Old Priesthood was temporary (v15-19).
If there was another Priest to come, then the author teaches that the old Levitical Priesthood was temporary. The word for ‘another’ here means of a different kind. So, not another Levite Priest, but a different kind from a different Order. The Old was based on the Law (outward focused), but the New is based on inward power. The Old system meant that a man was a priest only because his father was a priest. In the New, this One had been made (abiding nature). He has been made a priest and continues to be a priest.

The Old Law was fleshly because it was based on a human birthright/descendancy. This resulted in some unholy priests throughout Israel’s history. The New Order (Jesus) was based upon the power of an endless life.

When did Jesus become a priest?
After His Resurrection, and as a result, He loves forever.

Psalm 110:4 emphasizes 2 things (v17):
- The Priesthood is eternal (you are a priest forever)
- The character of the Priesthood (after the Order of Melchizedek)

Just as Jesus’ death has put away sin, in the same way, His death has put away the Law. It was set aside for 2 reasons:
- It was weak – it couldn’t give man the strength to fulfill commands or produce justification.
- It could not bestow life.

If the Law were still in effect, then Jesus cannot be Priest. Jesus can only be Priest if the Law has been put away.
Verse 19 says that the Law never brought perfection. That’s why a new Priesthood was needed. That’s why a new Priest was needed. The Law COULD NOT bring anyone to spiritual maturity. The only thing the Law could do was to point to the One who could bring perfection. That’s what Paul is saying in Galatians 3:23-25 – the Law is just a tutor – to lead people to the Messiah (the One who brings a better hope & our New High Priest).

The result of this New Priest’s ministry is ACCESS. (It’s an ‘Access all areas’ pass). Because of this new Priesthood, we have direct access to God, we can draw near to God. If we go back a few weeks & chapters, Hebrews 4:14-16 says:

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,[] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We can only draw near to God is because of this Priesthood.

We’ve talked about the Old Levitical Priesthood (changeable & temporary), but now let’s talk about the New Priesthood of Jesus. There are also two things – it is unchangeable & uninterrupted.

The (New) Priesthood of JESUS

1. The New Priesthood is unchangeable (v20-22) – it is unchangeable because of God’s oath (v20-21). The old Levitical Priesthood system was with an oath. A person became a priest because of his father. But the Melkizedekian Order came with an oath making it special and superior. Psalm 100:4 is quoted again proving that God made an oath. This proves the promise of a future Melkizedekian Priest who will be eternal, permanent and unchangeable.

So, as a result in verse 22, the Messiah has become the guarantor of a better covenant between man & God. The word ‘covenant’ is used a total of 33 times in the New Testament, but it is used 17 times here in Hebrews (that’s more than half!!).

This emphasizes the Jewish nature of the epistle of Hebrews. This future Priest guarantees the fulfillment of the New Covenant.
2. The New Priesthood is Uninterrupted (v23-25)

The writer reminds them again about how weak the old system of Law was (v23) – death prevented any priest from continuing. In verse 24, Jesus is presented as the contract. He abides (lives) forever; therefore the new priesthood remains forever. There is now only one High Priest compared to many before who were interrupted by death.

So (in verse 25) in light of the kind of High Priest this One is, eternal security can now be provided based on the fact that He can save forever ... because His Priesthood is forever. He saves to the uttermost. Uttermost means 'to arrive at a final destination with all these various aspects completed’. It means ‘to be saved completely and to be saved forever.’ (Eternal security)

Now that they have been saved forever, saved totally and saved completely, Jesus guarantees that the believer will arrive at his/her final destination.

Now there is still a future facet of salvation which is the redemption of a believer's body at the resurrection. And because a believer has been saved to the utmost, their resurrection is guaranteed 100%.

We spoke in an earlier chapter that Jesus is able to sympathize. Now it is showing that He is able to save – that He has the power of salvation. These believers are saved and therefore can draw near to God. The objects of salvation are those who have drawn near by grace through faith. It is through him (Jesus) that they can come near to God. Jesus and Jesus only, is the means of salvation!

The last part of verse 25 the writer mentions that Jesus always lives to intercede for them. This is one of the very reasons that they are saved to the uttermost. When they sin, Jesus is already making intercession for them.

He is ever living. He will not die. So therefore, His intercession is uninterrupted.

Salvation is secure simply because salvation is not dependent upon them but upon Him. And it is Him who keeps them saved.
Conclusion (v26-28)

In the last 3 verses, the writer teaches using contrast to exactly show what Jesus is in His Priesthood. There are 2 major points here:

- Humanity needed a spotless priest (& God provided the spotless priest) (v26);
- Humanity needed a sufficient sacrifice (v27).

To prove that Jesus is spotless the writer says 5 things in verse 26:

- He is holy (personal purity, not capable of sinning);
- He is without evil (even in His thought life), innocent & harmless in his relationships;
- He was pure/undefiled – unstained, free for all defilement, sinless, moral purity;
- He was separated from sinners – which is His present ministry in the Holy of Holies in the heavenly Tabernacle;
- He was exalted above the heavens – shows how Jesus became separated from sinners. He passed through into the Third Heaven.

The 2nd point – that humanity needed a sufficient sacrifice → because He is a spotless priest Jesus did not need to offer sacrifices for himself (like the Levitical priests). While his death was a priestly act, He didn’t become a priest at the time of His death, for it was God the Father who offered Him up (Psalm 22:15; Isaiah 53:10). Jesus did not become our High Priest until His Ascension – that’s why His Priesthood is continuous.

The Levitical Priesthood was insufficient and so it was replaced. But the sacrifice of Jesus was once-and-for-all when He offered Himself up. It was a sufficient sacrifice.

The writer concludes in the final verse (v28) contrasting weakness and strength. The weakness is the Levitical Priesthood, operated by common persons, it operated under Law, it was temporary. It was physically weak, frail physically & morally. All of it’s priests suffered both spiritual & physical infirmity.

In contrast to the weakness of the Old Priesthood system, the Priesthood of Jesus is by an oath (Psalm 110:4). It came after the Law (Psalm 110 written after the Law was given). Instead of being officiated by a common person, it is officiated by a Son, the uniqueness of this One Person.

It is eternally perfected & so has comprehensively & totally replaced the Old System.
SUMMARY: Eight points help us summarize this section -

1. Jesus represents all while Aaron represented Israel only
2. Aaron only a priest, whereas Jesus is both King & Priest;
3. Aaron concerned with sin & judgement. Jesus & His ministry is characterized by peace & righteousness;
4. Jesus did not inherit or pass on His Priesthood. Aaron’s priesthood was passed on to descendants;
5. Aaron’s priesthood kept those he represented in a state of infancy. Priesthood of Jesus brings all to maturity;
6. Ministry of Jesus resulted in blessing. Aaron’s ministry only produced that which was weak & unprofitable;
7. Aaronic priesthood was based on the Law of Moses which functioned under an endless procession of dying men. The priesthood of Jesus is based upon a covenant that made Him priest forever;
8. Priesthood of Jesus is based upon the sinlessness of the Priest. Aaron’s priesthood was carried on through sinful men.

CONCLUSION:
I want to conclude by asking one question – “Is He your High Priest?

So many (even Christians, or those who call themselves Christians) rely on higher forms of authority than Jesus. It might be your horoscope, or trusting in your numbers to come up to make all the difference. Perhaps it’s how many followers you’ve got on Facebook or your next addictive fix to make everything smooth. Maybe it’s the lyrics of your favourite singer/band’s new songs that you rely on. In our culture today we have so many people who have advice for us. Influencing our lives.

None of these things will give you authority in your spiritual life. Your spiritual life’s authority rests solely on your faith in Jesus. We need to make our allegiance to Christ and His Word. Unless He is our High Priest ... unless we have professed faith in the finished work of Christ, then everything is in vain. It’s just our tiny little kingdom that dies when we die. But Jesus’ kingdom that is another thing. If this world followed the advice of Christ I wonder where we would be.

You might think that what Jesus has done as our High Priest is too easy. Well, you’d be right. Yvonne & I were going to a wedding yesterday. The car was dirty from a trip up bush we made on the Public Holiday this week. I was busy getting everything ready for the wedding, and unbeknown to me Von was outside washing...
the car (a quick wash). So, when I came out of my office, there was the car – all washed. It had been done. I didn’t have to do anything. I just had to receive the reward.

That’s what the writer to the Hebrews is saying. Everything has been done in Christ. His sacrifice was sufficient. We don’t have to add anything to it. Our salvation is eternal. Christ’s death & resurrection and ascension into Heaven gives us the assurance that our salvation is eternal (Jesus is interceding forever), and therefore our resurrection from the dead is guaranteed. We are longer slaves to a law that doesn’t perfect. We have the perfect sacrifice for sin - Jesus. Nothing more to be done!

If you want to talk more about Jesus’ sacrifice for you, I would love to talk to you. Maybe you have never by faith made a decision to trust in Jesus. I did when I was 18 years of age. It was the best thing I have ever done. I would never want to go back to the old way of life. That just led to destruction, heartache, disappointment. My new life in Christ is everything I will ever need when I die.

Is He your High Priest? I pray that today He is.

If not, all that is needed is for you to accept the gift of faith, trust Jesus entirely for your salvation and ask Him to forgive your sin.

Next week we will look at Chapter 8 of Hebrews dealing with a Better Covenant. Are you enjoying the ‘meat’ of the Word?

Next week - Hebrews Chapter 8 – ‘A New Covenant in Blood’

Your homework for the next week is to read Hebrews 8.

Let’s pray ...

Closing Song ~ Majesty
Melchizedek the Priest

1 This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, 2 and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” 3 Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

4 Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! 5 Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham.

6 This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. 8 In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. 9 One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, 10 because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

Jesus Like Melchizedek

11 If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood—and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood—why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? 12 For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also. 13 He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. 14 For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

15 And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, 16 one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is declared:
“You are a priest forever, 
in the order of Melchizedek.”

18 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless 
19 (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by 
which we draw near to God.

20 And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any 
ofath, 21 but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him:

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

22 Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better 
covenant.

23 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented 
them from continuing in office; 24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a 
permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those 
who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for 
them.

26 Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, 
pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 27 Unlike the 
other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first 
for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their 
sins once for all when he offered himself. 28 For the law appoints as high 
priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, 
appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.