

Jesus the Perfect High Priest // Hebrews 7

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[0 : 0 0] means king of righteousness. Then also, king of Salem means king of peace. Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the son of God, he remains a priest forever.

Just think how great he was. Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder. 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.

This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt, the lesser is blessed by the greater.

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. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood, and indeed the law given to the people established at priesthood, why was there still need for a priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?

[1 : 3 8] For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also. He, of whom these things are said, belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar.

For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears.

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. For it is declared, you are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

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

And it was not without an oath. Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him, The Lord has sworn, and will not change his mind.

[2 : 5 1] You are a priest forever. Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant. Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office.

But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Such a high priest truly meets our needs. One who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

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.

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.

[4 : 11] Thank you, Kay, very much for reading for us. Please, everyone, would you keep that chapter open? Thank you, Kay. You're going to need it, not just because we're checking that this is what God's Word says, but because, as Jonathan said at the beginning, it is a rich feast.

There's lots in there. Please do come and grab me afterwards if there are things that you would like to knock around off the back of the passage and anything that I say now. But as we keep this portion of God's Word open, he's just spoken to us.

Let's pray. Let's ask for his help as we come to think on it together. Our gracious Lord and heavenly Father, we praise you that you have spoken to your people in the past, in creation, through the prophets in your Word, and supremely and finally, perfectly in the person of your Son.

And we pray now, therefore, gracious Father, that in the power of your Holy Spirit, you would shed light on us. With that word that we have just read, be your voice to us.

Father, give us soft hearts. Give us open ears. Remove any veils or scales that are before our eyes. And whatever the week we've had, whatever the day we've had, we pray now that we would hear the very voice of our Father pointing us to Jesus Christ, our Lord, your Son, our great High Priest.

[5 : 37] And help us, therefore, to keep in step with your Spirit as we walk this walk of faith until Christ returns or we are called home. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Perfection. I wonder what your relationship is with that word. There'll be some, I'm sure, who are perfectionists.

You'll be scraping away for the better lesson plan, the better essay, the better seminar, the better presentation at work. You struggle to put the pen down or click sleep on the computer.

There'll be others who are not such perfectionists, who are a little bit more content with lastminute.com, but wherever you are on your own personal spectrum of that, the word perfection is something, I think, that I don't have to work hard to persuade you, retains a real fascination for us as humans.

So many stories revolve around the quest for the perfect. So in our household, we're a big fan of Remember the Titans, Denzel Washington, pain is fresh bread. He's telling people there that they will be perfect.

[6 : 50] I can see him enunciating it. I'm a minister in the Free Church of Scotland, so it's lovely to be in a church where there are drum kits. I'm not very used to that. You might be familiar with the film Whiplash, Quest for the Perfect Jazz Drummer, and the enormous cost, the toll for an imperfect person to try and get to that bar.

You see, there are loads of things, aren't there, that would stop us from being perfect. We muck up all the time. You don't have to be a Christian. If you're here as someone who's not a Christian, maybe you'll agree with me.

You don't have to be a Christian to say that we as people are imperfect. We fall short of our own standards, let alone God's. Think what else would have to be true if we were to be perfect.

We would never, ever have to fail in any way, morally, in what we set our hand to, even at the level of our bodies.

But you will know that even someone blessed with the most perfect health and accomplishments and CV will one day die. Imperfection all around us.

[7 : 58] We also have to acknowledge we're not unique. We're not special. On one level, of course, we are. Every single one of us here, made in God's image. And yet we are all people.

We are all human beings. There is no one of us who we can say, there is the perfect end point of what it means to be human. And you'll know why we're talking about perfection now as we come to this chapter of Hebrews.

It is all about the perfection of Jesus. It's written to a group of people. You'll probably know this already, those of you who've been around for this series over time.

Group of people who have made a start with Jesus. They've believed in him. But there are loads of things internally in their own hearts and community, externally, particularly pressure upon them that is making them wonder if Jesus actually is all that good.

Is it worth suffering for the sake of Jesus? Is it worth battling for holiness for the sake of Jesus? Is it worth putting my own stuff to death and at the feet of Jesus for the sake of Jesus?

[9 : 11] Wouldn't it be easier just to step back from this guy and following him? And the writer says, no, don't go back to what you once were.

For them, that Jewish religious expression of their identity. Don't go back to the old ways, but keep going forwards to God himself in and through the person of Jesus.

Why? Because he is perfect. Tonight, we're going to be thinking about the way he is a perfect priest. And then as you go through, you can even just skip in your Bibles as you see it, you're going to see how he's the high priest of a perfect covenant and he's the leader of perfect worship and he is himself the perfect sacrifice.

This man, all those years ago, who wrote down almost like a written sermon to this group of people, he's saying, Jesus is the best. He is perfect. He is the end point. Keep going with him.

And that big framing is going to be really helpful for us as we dive in to chapter seven. Because there are things here that are hard to understand. There are certain things that will be quite unfamiliar to us.

[10 : 17] But my big hope and prayer is that every single one of us, whether you're someone who's new to Christianity or whether you're someone who has been a Christian all of the long years of your life, my hope and prayer is that every single one of us will go away more confident, not in ourselves with all our imperfections, but more confident in Jesus as the high priest who leads us to God.

If you're a note taker, we've just got two points. I think they might be appearing on the screen. Maybe not. The first is this. Jesus is a priest king like Melchizedek.

Now, that is not a snappy title, is it? Not least because the name Melchizedek is not the snappiest name. But that is the name we are given in scripture. You can see where the writer finishes.

Chapter six, verse 20. He's been talking about the certainty of God's promise. And he drops a bit of a bomb. Where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf, that's the holy place at the center of all reality, he has become a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

Now, to coin a phrase, how do you solve a problem like Melchizedek? There are lots of questions about this guy. And we're going to work our way through and try and go from what is most clear to that which we might find most challenging.

[11 : 42] What is our writer's big point in flashing up the name Melchizedek here? He is saying that Jesus Christ, the incarnate son of God, the second person of the Trinity, made flesh, that which has occupied the best part of the first half of the book.

He says that he is a priest, a go-between, a mediator between humanity and God, of an entirely different order to any who've gone before him.

He is, in fact, from a totally different family tree. Not Aaron, the first high priest, not of Levi, the clan from whom the priests were drawn, but of this guy, Melchizedek.

And the first half of this chapter is taken up with some biography and detail on Melchizedek himself so that we can see the picture of Jesus. And then the second part focuses in on Jesus himself because Jesus, we're told, comes from him.

Have a look down with me at chapter 7, verse 15. What we have said is even more clear. If another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest, not on the basis of a regulation as to ancestry, so not because Jesus can flash the Aaronic Levitical family tree, but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life, and he anchors it all in Scripture.

[13 : 06] You've already met Psalm 110 in this letter if you've been around. You can cast your eye just across the page on the Church Bible to chapter 5, verse 5, where he says, look, God has said to Jesus in Psalm 110, you are a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

So that's our anchor as we work through. God himself has declared Jesus to be the best high priest. And as the writer persuades those Hebrew believers then, he's going to be persuading us today of how true and how good that is.

So let's think about who Melchizedek is and how he is a picture of our priest, Jesus Christ. We're going to anchor this in verses 1 to 3. The writer assumes that we know who Melchizedek is.

That's because he's assuming that those people knew their Scriptures, what they would have had as the Old Testament. And Melchizedek enters the scene rather enigmatically in Genesis chapter 14.

Abram is on his way back from a battle and this guy appears. Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God most high, we're told there in verse 1.

[14 : 22] And what our writer is going to do here is show how extraordinary this guy is. Notice what he talks about first in verse 2. He gives us a clue to a couple of Hebrew, the language, puns.

So he says, Melchizedek, the name means king of righteousness. Literally, his name is just two Hebrew words, king of righteousness. Here is the one who is a ruler who is righteous.

That's a word that is to do with God himself. He's a ruler who is holy, who is pure, righteous, righteous, i.e. he is right with God because he's living in line with the law, loving the Lord his God and obeying him and loving his neighbor.

And further, he says, he's also king of Salem. Now, if we were to do a word association game and I would say Salem, there'll be someone here, I'm sure, who's doing English literature or has that in the locker.

You might think the crucible and you might think witch trials back in the eastern bit of the United States. Others of a more recent literary bent might think Stephen King and Salem's Lot.

[15 : 27] But what our word Salem is, literally, it's just a rendering of shalom, a word you might be familiar with, the biblical word for peace, for wholeness, for a land, a world, a creation where everything is in order.

God ruling over his people in a perfect place, experiencing his blessing. And so he says, here is a guy who just appears and he bears enormous titles.

He's got a serious lineage behind him, but notice not an earthly lineage, but a spiritual one. Verse three, he is without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life.

Here is a guy who emerges stage right, who exits stage left, and all he leaves is this big kind of cut out shape in the scenery.

We don't know where he came from, humanly speaking. We don't know where he goes to. And notice how careful our writer is, therefore, in verse three. Notice he resembles the son of God.

[16 : 35] He sees a picture of an eternal life that brings peace and that is only righteous.

And so he says this cut out image, this outline, points to the son of God, the one who in the beginning, as John would say, is with God and who was God.

And as a result, therefore, verses four to ten, he is great. You might read verses four to ten and these details of tithes and blessings and Levites and think, what's going on here?

But try and put yourselves in the shoes of those back then. They are tempted to, having begun with Jesus, turn their back on him and go back to their old way of life, to which the priesthood of Israel was central.

Because the big question is, how can we know God? How can we serve God? What does it mean to wait for God? What does it mean to move towards God? And the writer is saying, look, you have to go towards Jesus because back there, that priesthood, he needs to persuade them, that priesthood is not only imperfect, which it will come through, clearly, but it is, in fact, over.

[17 : 50] And his argument in verses four to ten is from the lesser to the greater. Just look at a couple of details with me. Verse four, just think how great he was.

Even the patriarch Abraham, even the greatest forefather of the Jewish people, the one who received the foundation stone promise back in Genesis chapter 12, even he, the writer to the Hebrew says, is in some way lesser than Melchizedek.

Now, he's not knocking Abraham here. He's not trying to pull Abraham down. Rather, he is exalting the role of Melchizedek and so Jesus as one who is both a king and a priest.

As that priest-king, Abraham is lesser and is proven by giving tithes. Verse five appeals to the law, the Torah, the Ten Commandments and those that come after it in the law codes, saying that the priesthood coming out of Levi are going to receive tithes, a tenth of not only money but stuff, the things of life.

And he says, the writer, that actually it is only those who are lesser that give the tithe. Look what Melchizedek does. He receives a tithe, we're told, and he pronounces a blessing.

[19 : 15] Verse six, rather. He collected a tenth and blessed him who had the promises. And he finishes his argument there in verse nine by saying that in a sense, Levi himself, the father of the priests, was through Abraham giving money to Melchizedek because he was in the body, in the loins, literally, of Abraham as his forefather.

So the writer's whole point is that the whole architecture of the priesthood, all of those who bore the breastplate with twelve stones, with the names of the tribes engraved upon it, that he took into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, where Jesus is, he says, that glorious figure, well, Melchizedek was greater.

The one who pronounced the forgiveness of God through the offering of sacrifices, Melchizedek is of a greater line. And so as he keeps on hammering away at this point, he is saying, look, the picture that Melchizedek gives us is fulfilled perfectly in Jesus.

I'm excited for you for the coming weeks in this book because these chapters that come are some of the most foundational in how we today read the Old Testament scriptures in light of the new.

And what we see here is a great little model of how the Bible does it. Here is the picture of Jesus outlined in Melchizedek. Here is an anchor in scripture, Psalm 110, saying this is who Jesus is.

[20 : 48] And so what we are being presented with, with the eyes of faith, is a little outline drawing from the Old Testament in Melchizedek that is brought through into glorious 3D technicolor in Jesus.

And that is why it is now from verse 10 that Jesus occupies his attention. See, Jesus is the one who brings perfection for and to his people.

Because the old way, the old priesthood, the Levitical family tree, could never in itself establish perfection.

See that in verse 11 with me? He says, well, why then was there still need for another priest to come if they could have done it? They themselves were holed below the waterline as priests, in their sins, in the death that they would die.

In the fact that they are many and not unique. And so as he zooms in further and further, like a skilled director, narrowing and tightening the focus down until we're looking at the whites of the eyes, he keeps focusing on Jesus.

[22 : 04] When the priesthood changed, verse 12, the law must be changed also. He of whom these things are said belong to a different tribe. And no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar.

Our Lord, he says, comes from the tribe of Judah, not Levi. And yet here in Psalm 110, God is saying, you are a priest. Here is a perfect priest established by God himself and one whose ministry will never, ever end.

See that language of oath in verse 20. Saying this is committed to by the very word and declaration of God.

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. You are a priest forever. The God who bound himself to his people with unshakable, unbreakable promises has bound himself to the priesthood of Jesus Christ, his incarnate son.

He said, you are the one who is going to represent my people to me. You are the one who, like the priest before you, is going to bring them to me.

[23 : 24] But unlike the priests before you, you are the final word, as we thought of in our call to worship. You are the full stop.

You are the one who is of a totally different lineage. Perfect in righteousness. Perfect in eternity. Perfectly unique. So even here, before we consider the blessings of Jesus, his salvation of all who trust in him, we can just press pause and see something of where our writer is trying to get their hearts and ours.

He's saying, why on earth would you go anywhere other than to Jesus if you would want to know God? My guess is that for the bulk of us listening tonight, our main temptation in stepping back from Jesus is not to go back to Jewish religious ceremony.

There may be someone for whom that is the case. But for the bulk of us, it's going to be a little bit different to that. But while the temptation is not necessarily to go back to a Jewish priest, the temptation to withdraw from Jesus, to just start putting our heads below the parapet, to be less public about our Christian life, to be less bold in our Christian witness, to be less sacrificial in our Christian discipleship, I take it those are real dangers that each of us will face.

But if we would keep going and go to God, well, there is no one other than Jesus. He is the priest, king, like Melchizedek.

[25 : 10] But then as we go on, if we're worried that this gets like the abstract, like an amazing truth that we're not sure how it has purchased on our life, our writer continues for us. And if you would flip over the page with me, we'll see in these final verses how he lands this identity and work of Jesus.

Verse 22, because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant. So if our first point was that Jesus is a priest, king, in the order of Melchizedek, he is the one that maybe feels less abstract.

Therefore, he saves his people to the uttermost. Jesus is so perfect. He is so great that all who approach God through him lack absolutely nothing in terms of the salvation that he gives.

So don't go anywhere else other than him. Don't go sideways. Don't go backwards. But keep going towards God in Christ. Look at some of the details that he draws out.

First, that this salvation because of Jesus is unique. Verse 23, there have been many of those priests since death prevented them from continuing in office. Pretty blunt.

[26 : 29] My wife's Dutch. She's a bit of a truth teller. She says it as it is. I think the writer to the Hebrews is like that as well. So if you're in any doubt that the previous priests were not perfect, they died. And he died.

And he died. And he died. It's the refrain of the beginning of Genesis after the fall. And it's the refrain here as well. Death prevented them from continuing in office.

But unlike them, Jesus is one and unique. Verse 24, because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

He's already dwelt on this, hasn't he? But just like Melchizedek, who has no genealogy, unlike the Levites who died, Jesus has an indestructible life.

And God has given it to him. And God has given him his ministry. And the two are bound together such that the ministry of Jesus as a priest, the ministry of Jesus as the one who intercedes for us, will never, ever end, and nor will it ever, ever cease.

[27 : 37] And what I mean by that is, it won't only have an end point ever, but it is a constant ministry. Notice how that is made clear for us in verse 25.

Therefore, because he has a permanent priesthood because of his life, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

If you are someone here tonight who has faith in Jesus Christ, who trusts in him, right now, he is interceding for you to and before your Father.

Let me just say, that is a wild thought. That right now, the living Jesus Christ in the incarnate flesh with which he was born, now glorified, is bearing our name together before God in the Holy of Holies at the center of all reality.

You are not only loved, but you are spoken for. You're not only being died for, but you are being ministered on behalf of right now.

[28 : 58] Jesus is there pleading his indestructible life and his present identity walked right in, drawn in, boldly gone into the very Holy of Holies at the center of everything.

And his purpose is to make intercession for all who come to God through him. His ministry is eternal and it will go on into the new creation because the children of God, the people of this priest, are the apple of his eye and he loves to speak for us.

It's just wonderful. And more than it being eternal and never-ending, notice verse 26, it is perfect and righteous. Do you remember that portrait of Melchizedek?

He was unique, he was eternal, but he was also king of righteousness, holiness. Look down with me at verse 26. Such a high priest truly meets our need. One who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

Loads and loads of different words and angles to show how distinct Jesus is, how flawless Jesus is, how sinless Jesus is, how blazingly pure Jesus is.

[30 : 20] Not just an absence of the wrong, but the overwhelming presence of the right. this is the high priest for all who come to God through him. Some of you might want to cast your minds back or even your eyes to Hebrews chapter 4 where we're told this high priest is one who is sympathetic to our weaknesses because he was tested in every way as we are yet without fault.

Hebrews 4 verses 14 and onwards some of the most encouraging verses in the whole of the Bible. Well here the focus is on the perfection of that intercession.

And again our truth teller in his bluntness says it like it is in verse 27. The other priests all of those who've gone before even Aaron well they had to offer sacrifices constantly and he's going to return to this theme later in the letter.

Day after day after day even for their own sins. The high priest himself only ever was allowed into the Holy of Holies when he had offered sacrifices for his own sins.

He was there by God's grace and favor. Jesus is there on the basis of his righteous indestructible life. He doesn't need to muck around with the blood of bulls and goats and birds because he himself has no taint to be washed clean.

[31 : 43] And so his eternal ministry for you for me for our churches for all of those who call on the Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely perfect.

His sacrifice has done it all. Verse 27 He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. And here is the very mystery at the heart of the gospel that the one who is the priest is the one who is the king is the one who is the sacrifice and as the priest he offers himself as the sacrifice such that he can plead his blood even now for us in all our imperfection.

What an extraordinary saviour we have. What an extraordinary perfect salvation in which we rest.

And what a perfect priest we have. One exactly as we need so far from what I at least deserve. Honestly so far from what you deserve though I don't know you.

But exactly what we need. Because without him we cannot approach God. So here's our end point. Here's the one thing I want you to remember and ask that the Lord would write on your heart.

[33 : 17] In light of who Jesus is let's go to the one even now who makes intercession for his people. Let's go to him now and let's go to him always.

There are two little points in this wonderful sermon letter. where we are encouraged to approach God. Not to go from him but to come to him.

I've already mentioned the first one in Hebrews chapter 4 verse 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.

And then secondly as we go on into chapter 10 just flip there with me. I'm going to read verses 19 down to 22 because these two calls to progress towards God are anchored in the person and work of Jesus.

Therefore brothers and sisters since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way open for us through the curtain that is his body and since we have a great high priest over the house of God let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

[34 : 48] Let me speak directly to you with the certain kind of freeness and anonymity that not knowing you brings. There will be some here who right now are tempted to go backwards from God because of your battles against sin.

What some of you might remember from baptism services as the world the flesh and the devil. Sin within pressure without the temptations of the evil one.

Let me say directly to you if that is you rather than in shame retreating from Christ come to God through him. He knows your weaknesses he's interceding for you now he is your high priest come to God with confidence not in yourself but in Christ.

there are others for whom that pressure will not manifest itself though in guilt but it may well manifest itself in a hardness of heart.

You may listen to all of this and say yeah I trust in Jesus but I'm just not fussed. I want that relationship too much. I want my way too much.

[36 : 08] There's too much clouding my vision and I just can't be bothered. Again to you do not walk away from him. Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts but come to the one who is your priest.

And for many of you brothers and sisters in Christ your desperate desire is to keep on following him. There was a button here and you could run up and hit it and never sin again and only be with him forever.

If that is you know that until the Lord returns your high priest is speaking for you now. I know that even when you are called home to him and you see him as he is he will go on being your high priest for he will never change.

We are imperfect so imperfect but Jesus is perfect so let's stick with him. Join me in prayer.

our gracious God and our heavenly father there is so much that you say to us in your word but we praise you for the clarity with which you point to your son Jesus.

[37 : 29] We know that the evil one would desire nothing so much as to bring mists across our eyes now that we might not see him. please in your mercy burn those away in the bright radiance of your glory that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

Help us we pray to approach you with confidence even now as we sing would our worship be acceptable in your sight not because of our merits not because of our demerits but only because we rest in the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ your son.

Help us to trust you to go forward in faith to you and to stick with Jesus for all the days that you give us for we ask it in Christ Amen.

I'll hand over to the band we're going to sing a couple of great songs focusing our hearts and minds on Christ.