



Who is this Melchizedek?

Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul

Hebrews 7:1-10

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Intro: The pastor in Hebrews mentioned Melchizedek in 5:10 concerning Jesus being designated by God as our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. He went on in verse 11 to say that he had much to say about this connection but that it was hard to explain because they had become dull of hearing. With a pastoral heart of love for his beloved church, he exhorted them to engage the word and to follow hard after Christ and trust Him because He is the anchor of their hope. And he ends that exhortation in 6:20 where he again mentions that Christ has become our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

-Can't you just tell that the writer of Hebrews is just dying to explain this to his hearers? Have you ever been studying Scripture and you go here and there in search of something and make a connection and the light bulb goes off and you can't wait to tell someone else? By God's grace and the illumination of the Spirit you make an amazing connection of truth and it blows you away and you just have to tell someone else. This is how I imagine this pastor is feeling concerning Melchizedek. I imagine that he was meditating on this mysterious character in Scripture (mysterious because there is not much about him in the Word---Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 and that's it for this pastor) and made a connection to Christ and it blew him away. And when he wanted to explain it to the church he had to put that aside to lovingly exhort them to listen but now it is time.

-He used Abraham as an example of one whose faith to imitate because it was unwavering and Abraham was fully persuaded that God was able to do what He had promised. Remember that God had promised a child of promise to Abraham and that through Abraham and this child all the world would be blessed. And now he uses Abraham's encounter with the mysterious Melchizedek to introduce a section of

Scripture that will show the ultimate superiority of Jesus' priesthood. He will use verses 1-10 to show that the priesthood of Melchizedek points to the ultimate priesthood of Christ and also show that Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood. Then he will proceed to compare Jesus to Melchizedek to show the ultimate superiority of Christ.

-So let's look at this mysterious character and see what we can learn.

1 – Who is this Melchizedek? (1-3)

-First of all there are 3 main thoughts concerning the identity of this mysterious character. Some believe that he is the preincarnate Christ but that doesn't seem to make sense because the author of Hebrews says that he only resembled the Son of God. Some believe that based on the silence of Scripture concerning him that he must have been an angel in human form. Some believe that he was Shem, the son of Noah and Abraham's ancestor. There is nothing in the text that supports either of these views. Others believe, and I agree with them, that he was a historical man, and yes extraordinary, and one whom the Bible intentionally tells us only what it wants us to know. And there is a purpose for this that we will see in a little later.

-Before we read the first 3 verses I want us to look at the Scripture that they reference.

-“After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.” (Genesis 14:17–20, ESV)

-That's it. This is all we have in Scripture about Melchizedek except for Psalm 110 that speaks to the Messiah being a priest in the order of this guy. This is the only historical mention of Melchizedek that the pastor in Hebrews had to study in writing chapter 7. So what does he understand about Melchizedek---let's look and see.

-"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever." (Hebrews 7:1-3, ESV)

A - He recognized that he was a priest of the Most High God:

-Priest---Let's think about this for a minute. He is a priest of God before the priesthood is even established. The Levitical priesthood of the Jews does not even exist at this point and yet Melchizedek is a priest to the Most High God. And a priest among who---he came with the king of Sodom. What do we know about Sodom? The people there were so depraved that God would destroy them with fire and sulfur from heaven. And yet, Melchizedek lived a godly life in the midst of an evil world. John Calvin would say of him, "Amid the corruptions of the world, he alone, in that land, was an upright and sincere cultivator and guardian of religion." He was probably persecuted and treated as an outcast for his unwavering belief in God in the midst of that land but it didn't stop him from living what he believed. What a reminder to us beloved that we also can live a godly life in the midst of an evil world.

-Most High God---He was priest of the Most High God. This is the first time this name is mentioned in the OT. It was a more universal name for God and spoke to God as possessor of heaven and earth and all peoples. God is the one true God over all national distinctions. The Most High God is over both Jew and Gentile. And what this means is that Melchizedek's priesthood is not just for the Jews as the Levitical priesthood was but his is universal and he is a priest for Jew and Gentile. His priesthood was universal.

B – He is king of righteousness and king of peace.

-The first thing that would have jumped out at the Hebrew Christians that may not jump out at us is that Melchizedek was a **priest AND a king**. That coupling of offices never existed in Jewish life. In OT Israel the offices of priest and king were always strictly separated like a system of checks and balances. This way no one man could utterly dominate and control all of Israel life. And yet, Melchizedek not only combines these vital offices but he is worthy of both of them.

-He is king of righteousness---Our passage says this is true by translation of his name. The first part of his name, Melek, means king and the second part, tsedeg, means righteousness. His name means king of righteousness. And remember that in the OT one's name carried much significance. The name communicated one's nature and character and their essence. And so we see that Melchizedek was one full of righteousness and he was a king.

-He is king of Salem or peace---The word Salem is from the root word for shalom which means peace. It is also an ancient name for Jerusalem. Jerusalem means city of peace and in the OT Salem and Zion are linked together (Psalm 76:2) as the abode and dwelling place of God. So what we learn about Melchizedek here is that he was the king of peace that ruled over Salem or ancient Jerusalem, which would become the home of God's people.

-What is amazing is that in an evil, godless region of war we learn of a king of righteousness who ruled the city of peace!

C – He is without father or mother and genealogy with no beginning of days nor end of life and continues as a priest forever:

-These statements lead many to assume that Melchizedek was an angel or divine being but that misses the point the author is trying to make. The point here is not that Melchizedek is literally without father or mother or without beginning or end but how he is presented in Scripture.

-Without father or mother---This does not mean that he came from nowhere. What this simply means is that in the OT record there is no mention of his parents or his origin.

-Without genealogy---this means in the Greek without ancestors or without descent. This is the only time in Scripture that this word is used because it didn't really make sense. Everybody has ancestors and everybody descends from somebody else in the human realm. But the point here again is not that Melchizedek literally didn't have any ancestors but that there is no biblical record of them.

-And this would be huge considering the priesthood. In the Levitical priesthood descent and genealogy was everything. One could not serve as a priest unless he could provide historical record of descent and ancestry back to Aaron. If you couldn't prove that you came directly from the line of Aaron then you were excluded from being eligible to serve as priest. This is recorded for us in Ezra when Israel was coming back to the land after being in exile.

-“Also, of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, and the sons of Barzillai (who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name). These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but they were not found there, and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean.” (Ezra 2:61–62, ESV)

-So the Levitical priests would have to prove their line of descent to inherit the privilege of serving as priests but we see that Melchizedek did not have that proof but was serving as a priest of the Most High God by the appointment of God.

-Neither beginning of days nor end of life but continues as a priest forever---

The Levitical priesthood had limitations. The Levites that served as priests were required to retire from serving at age 50. They could start around the age of 25-30 but had to quit at age 50. The Levitical priests could not serve continually because of these restrictions or because of death. They had beginning of days and they had end of life. But Melchizedek here is pictured as serving as a priest forever. Now it doesn't mean that he is eternal and will serve literally forever but there is no biblical record of his priesthood ending. William Lane said it this way, "Melchizedek's sudden appearance and equally sudden disappearance from recorded history awakens within a sensitive reader the notion of eternity."

-What we learn here is that Melchizedek's priesthood was not literally eternal but it gave a picture of an eternal one.

-The author of Hebrews has given us some insight into who Melchizedek was and now he endeavors to show us how his priesthood was superior to the priesthood that these Jews would be familiar with.

2 – Melchizedek's Superiority (4-10)

-“ See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.”
(Hebrews 7:4–10, ESV)

-In this passage we see Melchizedek's superiority in basically two ways---tithing and blessing.

A - The law of tithes---In the ancient world paying tithes to another was recognition of the other's superiority and a sign of subjection to that person (why we tithe to the Lord---He is the superior one). And let's think about this moment for Abraham for a second. He was returning from an overwhelming defeat of the kings and had to be on a personal mountaintop. He had to be feeling like a man. He is becoming the father of the Jews and generations to come would consider him to be the greatest of men. It would have been easy to be puffed up and in a position to think that you were superior. Illustration of arm wrestling at Aaron's house.

-But when Abraham met Melchizedek he recognized his superior greatness and paid him a tenth of the spoils. And don't think that Abraham had so much plunder that he just gave Melchizedek some left overs that didn't matter. This word for spoils means the most valuable of the plunder, the top of the heap. He gave the finest that he had because he recognized that Melchizedek was superior. This was a calculated recognition by Abraham that he was in the presence of one that was greater than himself. That's why the pastor here calls us to see how great this man was because Abraham saw it and tithed to him.

-This is a powerful point made by the writer of Hebrews but he anticipates a potential question that may exist in the minds of some of his hearers that may diminish this point. That question is this---"What's so great about Abraham tithing to Melchizedek---Levitical priests collect tithes too? And so in anticipation of this he continues. ***"And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham."*** (Hebrews 7:5–6a, ESV). His point is that the Levitical priest's right to collect tithes came from the law and not from any natural superiority but it was different for Melchizedek. He didn't have his descent from Abraham or the Levites and yet because he was superior he collected tithes, not from the people, but from Abraham himself who is the father of the people. He strengthens this point by saying that in one case the tithes are received by

mortal men (Levites) and in the other case they are received by one of whom it testifies that he lives. Again, this does not mean that Melchizedek was eternal but the testimony of Scripture does not record or speak of an end to his priesthood and so he foreshadows a notion of a continuing priesthood that is superior to the Levitical priesthood because they had to adhere to limitations of service and death.

-The author makes one more point to show the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood over the Levitical one. He goes on to say that one might say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham for he was still in the loins of Abraham when he encountered Melchizedek. In the ancient world it was common belief that an ancestor contained all his descendants within himself. And so his argument was this---since Levi himself was contained in Abraham and Abraham tithed to Melchizedek then the whole of the Levitical priesthood tithed to Melchizedek. And since Abraham tithed in recognition of Melchizedek's superiority then even the Levitical priesthood acknowledges the superiority of Melchizedek.

-So the point here that is made is that Abraham's tithing to Melchizedek shows that Melchizedek is superior and so is his priesthood.

B - The superior blesses the inferior---Remember what we have just learned from this pastor and Scripture in the previous section. God's promise to Abraham was sure because God made it and God doesn't lie and His promise came with an oath. And we know from Scripture that God's promise to Abraham was that through him and his descendants that all the world was to be blessed.

Abraham was to be the blesser and all the rest of mankind were the blessees. But Abraham sees himself as inferior to Melchizedek and he receives blessing from him. Verses 1 and 6 tell us that Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek and verse 7 makes sure that we know that the inferior has been blessed by the superior. As the blesser, Melchizedek was indisputably superior to Abraham and if superior to Abraham then he must also be superior to the Levites who were descendants of Abraham.

-So the writer of Hebrews has given us insight to who Melchizedek is and how he is superior. And now back to the light bulb moment. Imagine this pastor who is studying and meditating on this mysterious character. This little bit of info that he has from Genesis 14 and then the amazing prophecy of Psalm 110 that shows that the Messiah will come in the order of Melchizedek and then it hits him---the light bulb goes off. What he comes to understand and the connection that he makes is one that I hope you are already thinking about yourselves. He comes to understand that Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of all of what Melchizedek is pointing to. Jesus Christ is the ultimate reality of what the life of Melchizedek is only a type of. Melchizedek is a type of Christ that points to Him as the ultimate reality of everything that we have seen in Melchizedek. And what we learn is that Christ is ultimately superior. And when this pastor makes this connection he cannot help but share it with his church. And as a church let's look at this together.

3 – Christ is Ultimately Superior

-Just as Melchizedek was both priest and king so is Jesus. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and He is our great High Priest.

-Just as Melchizedek was a priest to the Most High God so is Jesus. Jesus is the true High Priest and has been designated by God as such. Jesus is the only mediator between God and man and being fully God and fully man, He is the only one that can truly represent us. He is holy and as our priest He has offered the perfect sacrifice once and for all to give us life and to reconcile us to God and save us. And because He is our priest we can come into God's presence with confidence and find the grace and mercy that we need.

-Just as Melchizedek's priesthood was universal so is Christ's. Salvation is not just for the Jews but for the Gentiles as well and praise the Lord for that. There is no one who takes a breath on this earth that cannot be saved by the blood of Christ. If you are here today and you think that you are unforgiveable and that your sin is greater than the grace of God then you are wrong. There is no heart to hard or no sin to great that

the blood of Christ cannot cover. I don't care who you are or what you have done---if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved!

-Just as Melchizedek's priesthood was without end but continued forever so Christ's priesthood is eternal in reality. Because Jesus lives forever there will never be a time when this Great High Priest cannot show forth His blood that was shed for you. There is no time when His great intercession for you will not pour forth blessing upon your life.

-Just as Melchizedek was the king of righteousness and peace so is Christ so much more. Jesus earned the perfect righteousness needed to be in the presence of God and He became sin so that we might become that righteousness. Scripture says that He is our righteousness and because of Him we stand justified in the presence of God and seen as righteous. That's amazing! And because of Jesus's perfect sacrifice and the forgiveness of our sins we are reconciled to God and at peace with Him. Jesus Christ is our peace. There was no permanent righteousness or peace with the Levitical priesthood but in Jesus righteousness and peace exist forever. Melchizedek could not make men righteous or give them peace. Only Jesus, the divine priest, can do this and He has. And this is where it gets personal. If you know Christ as your Savior and Lord He, by His death and resurrection, has made YOU righteous and He has given YOU peace. Praise Him!!

-Just as Melchizedek was without father, mother, genealogy and had no beginning of days nor end of life so it is literally with Christ. He continues as a priest forever. Jesus proclaimed that He was the Alpha and Omega thus proving Himself to be God. Melchizedek was not eternal but he pointed to one that was and that was Christ!

-And just as Melchizedek was superior and blessed Abraham so Christ is superior and He blesses us! Think of the richness of the blessings we have in Christ. **-God's love---** In Christ we are those loved by God or the "beloved of God"

-God's grace---We all have received grace through Jesus Christ

-His **mercies in Christ** bring us:

-**Forgiveness and propitiation** of our sins (**4:7-8, 3:25**)

-**Freedom from sin** (**6:18, 7:6**)

-**Reconciliation** (**5:10**)

-**Justification** (**2:13, 3:23-24a**)

-**Conformation to Christ** (**8:28-29**)

-**Glorification** (**8:30**)

-**Eternal life** (**5:21, 6:22-23**)

-Mercies of **divine sonship through adoption** (**8:14-17**)

-**Holy Spirit** who personally **indwells** us (**8:9, 11**) and **intercedes** for us (**8:26**) and whom the love of God has been poured out within our hearts (**5:5**)

-Mercies of **faith**, which is mentioned over 30 times in Romans (**4:5**)

-**Peace** (**1:7, 2:10, 5:1, 8:6**)

-**Hope** (**5:2, 8:20, 24**)

-Shared righteousness (3:21-22, 4:6, 11, 13, 5:17, 19, 21)

-Glory (2:10, 5:2, 8:18, 9:23)

-Honor (2:9-10)

-Sovereign mercy (9:15-16, 18, 11:30-32)

-It is undisputable that we, the inferior, have been blessed by Christ the superior!

-This pastor wants us to see the big picture here that Jesus perfectly fulfills all that we see Melchizedek's life point to. No one had ever seen this until this pastor presented it to his church. His heart is full of worship and praise and he expects his Jewish hearers to feel the same way especially as they reflect on their situation. My prayer today is that our hearts are filled up as this pastor's was and that our hearts will not be able to do anything but sing praise to Christ and worship Him!

Application:

1 – **Melchizedek reminds us that it's possible to follow and honor God and live a godly life in a godless world.** Remember that he lived among the Canaanites who were deeply depraved so much that it required holy war for the Israelites to inhabit the land. So it is today. Through Christ we are a holy and royal priesthood and we need to live like it in this evil world and testify to the goodness and superiority of Christ.

2 - **Melchizedek's life in Scripture serves one purpose** and that is to point to Christ. Everything we know about him is designed to point us to the ultimate reality and fulfillment that is only found in Jesus. The same is to be true of our lives---they are to point to Christ.

-So how are we doing?

-Does our life point to Christ in our relationship to Him---When men tried to find something on Daniel to trip him up or make him guilty their only plan had to revolve around Daniel's relationship to his God. Is it the same with us today with our relationship to Christ? Is he so much our joy and contentment that the people of this world notice? If someone around us was looking to trip us up would they have to resort to our relationship with Christ to do it?

-Does our life point in our responses to trials, unjust suffering, sickness and other people in the world and church. Jesus was tempted without sin, He faced trials that made Him sweat blood, He was treated unjustly and suffered unto a death that He did not deserve and He related to others with the truth and did not sin against them and He continually entrusted Himself to the one that judges justly. How are we doing in these areas? Does our responses point others to Christ and reveal who He is?

-Does our life point to Christ in how we serve Him and others. Jesus said that He came to serve and not be served. Paul tells us in Romans 12:1 that because of the blessings of His mercies that we ought to pour ourselves out as a living sacrifice in worship. Are we doing that or are we expecting to be served?

-Does our life point to Christ in how we worship? Jesus loved the Father and submitted Himself to the Father's will in every area of His life so that the Father would be glorified in Him. Can we say with Paul that whether in life or in death that we want Christ to be glorified in us?

-Does our lives point to Christ like Melchizedek's did?

3 - And our life can't point to Christ if we are not looking to Him for life. The writer of Hebrews has told us to consider Christ and in chapter 12 he will tell us to look to Jesus who is the founder and perfecter of our faith. We can't do this in our own strength. Listen to what Spurgeon says about this.

-Quote: It is ever the Holy Spirit's work to turn our eyes away from self to Jesus; but Satan's work is just the opposite of this, for he is constantly trying to make us regard ourselves instead of Christ. He insinuates, "Your sins are too great for pardon; you have no faith; you do not repent enough; you will never be able to continue to the end; you have not the joy of His children; you have such a wavering hold of Jesus." All these are thoughts about self, and we shall never find comfort or assurance by looking within. But the Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self: He tells us that we are nothing, but that Christ is all in all. Remember, therefore, it is not thy hold of Christ that saves thee-it is Christ; it is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee-it is Christ; it is not even thy faith in Christ, though that be the instrument-it is Christ's blood and merits; therefore, look not so much to thy hand with which thou art grasping Christ, as to Christ; look not to thy hope but to Jesus the source of thy hope; look not to thy faith but to Jesus the author and finisher of thy faith. We shall never find happiness by looking at our prayers, our doings, or our feelings; it is what Jesus is, not what we are that gives rest to the soul. If we would at once overcome Satan and have peace with God, it must be by looking unto Jesus. Keep thine eye simply on Him; let His death, His sufferings, His merits, His glories, His intercession, be fresh upon thy mind; when thou wakest in the morning look to Him; when thou liest down at night look to Him. Oh, let not thy hopes or fears come between thee and Jesus; follow hard after Him, and He will never fail thee.

"My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness

I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name."

-Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what HE promised and He has brought the blessing through Jesus Christ His Son. Melchizedek was fully convinced and his life pointed to Christ. Are you fully convinced in Him this morning? You can be because He is our High Priest forever and He is the anchor of hope and the source of salvation. Consider Jesus and look to Him!

-Jesus said in John 8 that Abraham saw his day and was glad. It may just be that when Melchizedek brought out the bread and the wine that day that Abraham saw Christ. I know the pastor in Hebrews saw Christ and I know that his church saw Christ and it's my prayer that today we have and will continue to see Christ as high and lifted up and superior!

-Pray

-Unbeliever---if you don't consider Christ and look to Him and come to Him there is no blessing and no peace for you.

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