



## A Better Hope

Series: *Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul*

Hebrews 7:11-19

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**Introduction – Into the Deep Waters** Last week, we began venturing out into the deep waters of this letter to the Hebrews. Over the next few chapters, the writer is going to really begin deepening and expanding our understanding of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, the full and powerful redemption that He accomplished as our substitute on the cross, how He **“was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (and now) since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 4:25–5:1, ESV)** This is heady stuff, glorious truth, amazing theology, but it is theology with a purpose. All theology has a purpose – to glorify Christ, to magnify and reveal God the Father, to save lost souls, to mature and strengthen, to embolden and empower the people of God and to lead us to live lives that are unashamedly surrendered and devoted to Jesus Christ. That is the purpose of theology and it is the purpose of this letter, this sermon really, to the Hebrew Christians in Rome.

We need to keep in mind that there is a reason that the writer of Hebrews, whom I believe is the pastor of this church who has been imprisoned for his faith, is writing these words to his church. There is a context. This is not just a theological paper written for a journal; it is not his personal doctrinal statement; nor is this a book, a bible study, or a matter for church discussion and vote. This is essential truth, essential and vital truth that he knows the church must lay hold of and never relinquish her grip if they are to remain faithful to the end and if they are to ultimately be among those who **“through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (Hebrews 6:12, ESV)**

There is no doubt that the Hebrew Christians were facing increasing and arduous pressure to renounce their faith in Christ. Following Jesus – and we have talked about this a great deal – had cost them much and was going to cost them even more. They were under government persecution and pressure to conform to the “accepted religions” of Rome, in

which OT Judaism was included. They had already lost jobs and possessions, lost some of their rights. Their pastor and other believers were already thrown in jail and death for faith in Christ was just on the horizon. Their families, who rejected the gospel and remained in the Jewish religion, rejected them and opposed them outwardly for their faith. The Roman society marginalized them for their insistence that Jesus Christ is Lord. There was very real pressure to abandon the Christian faith, to return to the Jewish faith and its system of sacrifices and priests, for various reasons, BUT – and here is the key – to fall away from and abandon their faith in Jesus Christ, to regress and return to the Jewish system, would be to go back to the very religion that fulfilled and replaced by the coming of Christ. And it would cost them the answer to their greatest need, the very thing for which they were made – to know and love, to worship and to draw near to God, salvation and reconciliation with the God who is. What did these Hebrew Christians REALLY want?

Repeatedly in the psalms, you see the godly describing their longing for God as the highest good that they could imagine. **“One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.”** (Psalm 27:4, ESV) And, **“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”** (Psalm 42:1–2, ESV) And, **“O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.”** (Psalm 63:1–3, ESV)

This access to God, drawing near to God, is described as the highest good, the thing for which we have been made, and it is true, right? Why? Because access to God assumes a right relationship to God, acceptance before God and forgiveness of sins, beholding His glory and delighting in all that God is. You can see why the psalmists ached in their hearts for such a thing.

The question is: “Do we desire this?” Do you? Is this the longing of your heart above everything else – to be accepted by God, received by God, forgiven by God, to know Him and to be known by Him? Those are questions not only for us, but also for these Hebrew Christians. These were questions they had to ask and answer, because – here’s the deal – this access to God, this acceptance with God, this life in God could only be found in Jesus

Christ alone. It is just as the Apostle John said it, **“No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.”** (1 John 2:23–25, ESV) You cannot turn away from Christ and have the Father, have eternal life. You cannot abandon the only One who can make us acceptable before God the Father; you cannot compromise on Christ, who he is and what he has done, and have eternal life – He is eternal life. That is the point that the writer is making in these verses that we are looking at today.

To these Hebrew believers that were seriously considering returning to the Jewish faith, the writer is going to explain how the priesthood of Christ absolutely supersedes, fulfills and renders useless the OT sacrificial system that pointed to Him. He is going to do it based upon His brilliant and Holy Spirit inspired understanding of David’s prophecy in Psalm 110, where he writes: **“The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.””** (Psalm 110:1–4, ESV) And the first thing he is going to show us is the:

**Inability of the Aaronic Priesthood (11-14)** Look, starting in verse 11: **“Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?”** (Hebrews 7:11, ESV) Here’s his point. The OT priesthood was insufficient and was superseded by Jesus Christ, because it was unable to – in fact, it was never intended to – bring people to the perfection that was promised and prefigured by the OT sacrificial system. It couldn’t bring anyone to perfection. Now what does that word “perfection” mean in the way that it is used here? It means to “put someone in the position in which he or she can come and stand before God, to where someone is fully and finally acceptable to God, and to be received by Him.” It refers to access to God and an eternally right relationship and standing with Him. The OT system of priests and sacrifices could never do that.

Now don’t misunderstand, ok? It is not that the OT sacrifices or the Law was worthless – not at all. God gave it. In the flow of redemptive history and the revelation of God, it was

necessary and good, and all of it pointed powerfully to Jesus Christ, our Savior and King. And it accomplished some very necessary things. The Law opened our eyes to our sin, to the reality of our sinful condition before God. It makes us see what rebels, by nature, we really are. It shows us how spiritually dead we really are. It shows us the punishment that we truly deserve. It shows us our need for grace, for mercy from God, and for forgiveness. In particular, the OT sacrifices show us the need for atonement, for the shedding of the blood of an innocent substitute to pay the penalty for our sins in our place. The whole system pointed to our need for a Savior, to our need for Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul says it like this in Galatians 3:24: **“So then, the law was our guardian (our tutor, or our teacher) until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.” (Galatians 3:24, ESV)**

But that’s just the point. The Law and the sacrifices, even the priests and their role as mediator, as go-between for the Israelites and God – pointed to Jesus. But the sacrifices couldn’t atone for sin, not really. They could cover sin but not remove it. The writer will say later in Hebrews 10, **“For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4, ESV), and “And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.” (Hebrews 10:11, ESV)** The reason that the priests continually offered sacrifices to cover sin is because sin was never fully taken away, never fully atoned for until Christ came. The truly believing Israelite offered sacrifices through the priests looking by faith to the day when Jesus Christ would come and actually deal with sin once and for all – through a single sacrifice, the sacrifice of His own life. Like the writer of Hebrews says, again in chapter 10, **“But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:12–14, ESV)**

Only Jesus can do this. Despite all their longings, the Jews in the OT lived with limited access to God, regardless of their godliness. That doesn’t mean that their faith was any less real, but the hard truth is that OT system of the Law and Sacrifice kept everyone but the High Priest in Israel out of the Holy of Holies, out of the place in the temple or tabernacle, where God’s manifest presence and glory dwelt. Even he could only enter into God’s glorious presence once a year, and that only after he had offered sacrifices for his own sins, gone through ritual washings, put on the holy garments, and then only to bring a basin of the blood of a sacrifice and to sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat to cover the sins of the people for the last year. And he would do it over and over again. But it is only through Christ that we are all made able to come into God’s real presence, right now, like we do

every week in worship, like we do in times of personal prayer, that we are made fit to call upon God, and praise Him and worship Him and serve Him. Only because Jesus actually accomplished salvation and reconciliation with God for us through His death and resurrection. Do you realize what a blessing, what a privilege, what a grace this is? Jesus is not like the priests in the OT, the priests in Aaron's line, from the tribe of Levi. He is far better and far greater.

The writer says: ***“For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.”*** (Hebrews 7:12–14, ESV) In other words, what the writer is saying is that Jesus has replaced these priests – like the priests that were still serving in the temple in Jerusalem at the time that the writer wrote this. He is an entirely different kind of priest. He is not from the tribe of Levi, like Aaron and his descendants. His priesthood isn't according to the Law or according to being born in the line of Aaron. In other words, the OT Laws of worship and sacrifice don't apply at all anymore. They have been fulfilled and superseded by Jesus. That's what he means that there has been a change in the Law. Jesus is not even comparable to the OT priests in this respect – He is from the tribe of Judah, the tribe of kings. He has descended – in fact, the word is literally “has risen up from” the tribe of Judah, a phrase that was used in the OT of the Messiah, of God's King for God's people. I know this can get confusing, so I need you to stay with me and I'll try to bring it all together and make it make sense as the writer talks about

**The Perfection of Jesus' Priesthood (15-17)** Now read verses 15-17 with me and then I'll explain to you the heart of what they writer is saying: ***“This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.””*** (Hebrews 7:15–17, ESV) What the writer is emphasizing is that Jesus is not just the latest in a long line of Jewish priests. In fact he has done away with the need for those priests forever. He is not a priest like those in the line of Aaron, those that only got their positions because of the family line they were born into – only those from the tribe of Levi could be priests. He is priest like Melchizedek, and He became High Priest, not because of his family lineage but because of His “indestructible life” and because of the declaration of God – ***“You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”***

Ok, so what does this mean? What kind of priest was Melchizedek? Well, you saw it last week, right? **“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,” (Hebrews 7:1, ESV)** He was both a kingly priest and a priestly king and Jesus is both the High Priest who offers sacrifice and a King who conquers in even a far greater way than Melchizedek. Jesus is the High Priest, the one appointed by God, who can accomplish the salvation, secure the forgiveness, and pay the redemption of sinful men and women and take away sin forever. He offers the sacrifice of Himself, His own righteous blood shed as the substitute for our unrighteous life, that turns away God’s wrath, which satisfies God’s justices, that upholds God’s holiness and yet saves the ungodly who can do nothing to save themselves. He makes us to be at peace with God, accepted by Him, opens the way to make us able to draw near to Him as sons and daughters, and by the gift of His indwelling Holy Spirit guides and leads us into righteousness. He is the Great High Priest but He is also the true King of Righteousness, God’s King, who rules and reigns over His people, having conquered the power of death, the might of sin, and every rebel power, everything that would keep us from God the Father. He has done this all by His indestructible Life – by the death He died and then by His resurrection from the dead to love forever. No priest in Israel could do this. Jesus is more than a mere man, more than a human priest; He is God in the flesh and He is our Lord. He is Alpha and Omega, Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. His Life is indestructible and He reigns forever as our King and Priest. And in Him alone,

**We Have a Better Hope (18-19)** The writer of Hebrews tells us, starting in verse 18: **“For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.” (Hebrews 7:18–19, ESV)** The old way of approaching God, the OT way of repeated sacrifices and priests making offerings on behalf the people – that way to which the Hebrew Christians were being tempted to return – that way is over; it is set aside; it is no longer valid. To go back to that is to return to the shadow of what Christ has fully accomplished. It is insane to leave Jesus.

We have a better hope in Him – He and what He has done as our High Priest and King is our better hope – through whom we draw near to God. How is Jesus and all that Christ has done a “better hope?” He has actually accomplished atonement with God for us for all time - **“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to**

**righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (1 Peter 2:24–25, ESV)** He has given to us a clean conscience before God. The sins for which the Israelites sacrificed every year showed them that their sin, though it was covered, was not fully expunged. For that reason, **“gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,” (Hebrews 9:9, ESV)** but, **“how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” (Hebrews 9:14, ESV)** Not only that, but he has given us an unbreakable peace, **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1, ESV)** Our Kingly Priest has given us life: **“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him (with Christ), having forgiven us all our trespasses...” (Colossians 2:13, ESV)** And He has given to us access to God forever – **“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” (Hebrews 10:19–23, ESV)** And He has given to us the gift of His Spirit. Jesus said, **““If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:15–17, ESV)**

Do we truly realize the fullness of blessing we have only in Jesus Christ? Do you live in active fellowship with God? Through God’s Spirit, do you know Him and relate to Him? Do you hear His voice in the Scriptures? Are you living in new obedience by His power, with the evidence of His fruit growing in your life? Do you worship God in Spirit and in Truth? Are you really laying hold of all that you have in Christ? This is the true Christian life. If you can say, “Yes” to these things, thank Christ that you can because He is the reason. And if you cannot say, “Yes” then come to Him and surrender your life to Him and place your faith in Him alone and find the life that He offers that nothing else can.

This is our freedom, our blessing, our hope, as Christians... not to presume upon God’s grace through loose living or flirting with sin, but the freedom and blessing of drawing near to God, of fellowshiping with God Himself, to worship God freely and without fear of

rejection, which was what the priesthood looked forward to, but was only accomplished by the priestly and kingly work of Jesus Christ.

All of this and more, we have in Christ and only and exclusively in Him. Let me put it this way. Let me make this personal, ok? And what I am going to say, I could never say, never ever say, apart from what Jesus Christ has done for me. I have eternal acceptance with God, that is permanent and unchanging. At every single moment of my life, I am accepted with God because of what I trust in my soul Jesus did for me. At every moment. Now that is hard for us to believe sometimes. We see the ways in which we still sin and still fail God and we think, “I cannot be acceptable to God. I just can’t” But listen to me beloved, the death of Christ, the power of His sacrifice, the might of His resurrection, the strength of His indestructible life is so powerful that not only does it purchase and establish your forgiveness of your past sins completely, but your future sins too. You are accepted by God, through Jesus forever. There was nothing that you could do to earn acceptance with God or to maintain it. It was purchased for you by God’s grace and there is nothing that you can do to lose it. Not a thing.

Now that is not an excuse for sin and I am not speaking to those who would take God’s grace and use it as a license to sin, not to those who have a cheap view of grace, not to the presumptuous, those who deliberately sin against God’s grace and call it all good. I am speaking to those who now the pit from which they have been rescued, the cost it took to deliver them, and the One who paid that price to bring them to God. What could we ever desire more? Now here is where this all brings us this morning. It brings us to this question:

**What Do You REALLY Want?** That was the question that was facing the Hebrew Christians to whom their pastor was writing. What do you really want? What do you truly desire? Do you desire the approval of all men or the approval of God – because you cannot have both. The Hebrew Christians were faced with a choice. They could hold fast to Jesus Christ by faith, stay faithful, endure the persecution the persecution that would come with it, and have in Him the highest good, the answer to their greatest need, the very thing for which they were made – to know and love, to worship and to draw near to God, salvation and reconciliation with the God who is. OR, they could fall away from Christ and return to the old Jewish religion, the old way of approaching God through sacrifices and priests and lose the hope – Jesus Christ – alone by which sinners can approach, and be accepted, and draw near to God.



They could avoid government persecution, the shunning of their families, the marginalization and the mockery of their society by going back to Judaism, but they would be giving up what was priceless – Jesus – to have that which was ultimately worthless. The pastor of this Hebrew Christian flock knew his people and he knew that this amazing theology regarding Christ would put things in their proper perspective for them, that it would awaken and strengthen their faith, that it would embolden their witness, and would have just the affect that he was hoping for – they would be determined to hold fast to Jesus no matter what. They would answer the question, “What do you REALLY want?” with the only right answer – Jesus.

And so the question comes to us. What do you REALLY want? What is the greatest desire of your heart? What do you long for? Do you long for the highest and greatest good or something that isn't too bad? Our social circumstances are not exactly like the Hebrews, not yet, and we are not faced with the temptation to return to Judaism but we are faced with the siren call of the approval of family members and friends, to just fit in, to blend in with the society and not be on the government's radar, to have life of relative ease, to spend our energies and efforts on getting our best lives now, to conform to culturally acceptable form of spirituality that acknowledges a “Jesus” but not the Jesus of the Bible who is both Priest and King. But to do that you have to fall away in some degree from Jesus of Scripture. Is it worth it? Really worth it?

Could you be satisfied with the approval and applause of men if it came at the cost of Jesus Christ? Could you be satisfied with relative ease, not ruffling any feathers by remaining silent about Christ and about the gospel, by not insisting on the truth of the Bible and the Lordship of Christ, to have “good kids,” a fit body, some money in the bank – the American dream – if it cost the hope of heaven? What do you REALLY want? Could you be satisfied to pursue what the world pursues, to approve what the world approves, to live as the world lives, to invest your life as the worldly invest their lives, or would you rather have Jesus – the Jesus who says, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.”** (Mark 8:34–35, ESV) Would you rather have the Jesus who promises, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** (John 14:6, ESV)

That is the issue, the choice, underlying the incredible theology of this passage, this beautiful picture of Jesus as the Superior High Priest and the Eternal King after the order of Melchizedek. It is the choice that the Hebrew Christians needed to make and it is the one that we must make and increasingly as we see the day approaching. What do we really want? My prayer is that we will, by the power of God's grace and in light of the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ, choose wisely.

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