

Anglican Church of Noosa
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Hebrews 7:11-28
Jesus - Greater Than - Melchizedek Who?
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The main task of a preacher is to bring God's Story and our story, the human story, together. And to do that in such a way that God's story is personalised, and brings change to our lives.

Now no Bible passage is easy to bring together into a sermon, but there are some passages which do seem a little more obscure than others.

Hebrews 7 is a bit like that.

In fact there's a commentary on Hebrews, that I've seen, I don't own it, but I've seen it, and the title is, "I wish someone would explain Hebrews to me."

My hope today is that you will go away knowing a little more about Melchizedek, but more than that, you will have a greater and more robust view of who Jesus is, and why we honour him, love him, serve him and bow down to him, why we claim to be called by his name, as Christian.

Revisit the outline of this series ...

Jesus, greater than.

Basically the whole reason the writer to the Hebrews wrote it.

Bringing about an explanation of why Jesus is the ultimate.

Why Jesus is better.

Why Jesus is greater than all else, and why he is our Lord.

In our first week we looked at Jesus' superiority to the rest of creation, even the angels, that he is the radiance of God's glory, and he sustains everything by his powerful word. And he now is seated at God's right hand in heaven.

Because of all these things, the writer goes on to say, that we must pay careful attention to what we've heard, because if we ignore this great salvation offered to us, how shall we escape? What an opening!

And the rest of the letter is explaining this incredible superiority of Jesus. He is greater than everything and anything else.

He is greater than anything the Jews have been relying on since their nation was called by God.

We also need to remember that the book of Hebrews was written to Christians from that Jewish background. And it was written to them because they didn't seem to be growing spiritually.

And this is a warning against going back to a legalistic Judaism, which would actually take them away from Christ.

So this letter shows all that Jesus has done for us.

It shows that he was both God and perfect human.

It identifies him as being the perfect high priest, greater than, better than all the great high priests of the Old Testament, and that he has a better ministry.

It contrasts how sin was dealt with under the covenant with Moses, and how sin is dealt with under the new covenant in Christ. The old covenant was inadequate, insufficient, but in Christ, the new covenant is perfect in every way.

In the book of Hebrews, there are some words used repeatedly. These words are perfect, better, greater, superior are the key words.

The writer also takes it for granted that his readers are familiar with the Old Testament. He refers to it constantly, and uses it to explain the person and work of Jesus.

Last week our reading was Hebrews 4, and we heard another warning about disobedience. That we are laid bare before God, because His word is alive and active, and open us up totally, that nothing in all creation is hidden from God.

But

we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, a great high priest who is able to empathise with our weaknesses, but did not succumb. And because of that, and only that, we can enter God's grace and find help in our time of need.

This week we're looking at chapter 7, but we really need to have a quick potted look at chapters 5 & 6 to understand what's coming in ch 7.

In chapter 5 we have an explanation of the priesthood. That a priest was someone who was appointed to represent the people in matters relating to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

But because a priest was also human, he had to offer sacrifices for his own sin as well as the sin of the people. chapter 5:3.

That is why the old covenant was inadequate. Sacrifices for sin had to be repeated.

And it is in chapter 5 that we have the first mention of this guy Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:5-6 & 10

A little about Melchizedek. - hardly know anything.

He's only mentioned in two OT passages. Genesis 14 and Psalm 110.

In Genesis 14, this is only two chapters after Abram's call by God in chapter 12. When God said to him, leave your land, and I will bring you to a new place and make of you a great nation.

Abram and Sarai were already old when God called them, but at this stage Isaac hadn't even been born.

They'd been in some wars, and Abram had just had a victory.

He was returning victorious when out came Melchizedek to greet him. In fact he brought out a feast of bread and wine. Melchizedek was described as a priest of God Most High.

Now I find that really interesting, because the nation of Israel at this stage, hadn't even been established.

But God already had people established as his own, even before Abram was called.

And here, Abram meets one of them, Melchizedek.

The eternal God, already at work. He even had a priest, before the establishment of the Levitical priesthood.

Gen 14 - After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh [that is, the King's Valley]. Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God most high, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Melchizedek blesses Abram and praises God; and significantly Abram then gives him a tithe.

Now, interestingly, that little story is the sum total of the historical references to Melchizedek in the OT.

The other reference in Psalm 110, refers to Melchizedek, but it's not another story of historical interaction.

Psalm 110 is a Psalm of David, and it's all about the credentials of the Messiah. It talks about the one who will sit at the right hand of the Lord Most High.

And the one who does that will be a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Now the name Melchizedek is also a fascinating one.

It's explained at the beginning of Hebrews 7.

melchi = 'king'.

Interesting sideline here. I'm diverting.

Do you remember in the Christmas narrative that there were the magi from the east. The wise men. Well, there's traditional folklore that these men were three kings, and the folklore gives them names. And the name of one of them was Melchior. Again, begins with Melchi = King.

I'm stressing this is not biblical, I'm telling you this so that it might help you to remember that melchi means king.

zedek = 'righteousness'

King of righteousness. That's what his name means.

What is it to be righteous?

It's to be made right with God, isn't it?

But Melchizedek also had a role - he was King of Salem.

'salem' means peace.

It's the base of the Hebrew word 'shalom'.

And Salem is the place which eventually became Jerusalem. The city of peace.

Melchizedek was both King of righteousness — by his name, and king of peace, — by his role. Who does this make you think of?

He was both King, and priest of the most high God.

Who does that make you think of?

And the other wonder is that in Genesis, the feast Melchizedek brings out for Abram is bread and wine.

Who does that make you think of?

Now why was all this important for the readers of Hebrews to hear?

Because they needed to be reminded of how great Melchizedek was, and hear again, that it was God who said that the Messiah would be a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

Not in the order of Levi, whose priesthood was inadequate.

Those priests died, their sacrifices had to be repeated.

By comparison, nothing is known of Melchizedek's genealogy, nothing is known of his birth or death, he predated Levi, in fact Levi's great grandfather, Abram, paid him tithes.

Therefore, as chapter 7 verse 7 puts it, the lesser is blessed by the greater. Through Abram, his forefather, Levi was blessed by the greater one, Melchizedek. The Hebrews had to hear again how great Melchizedek was.

Can I divert one more time?

I found out a fun fact.

Just like the Melchior reference, please don't go home only remembering this, whether you like it as a fun fact, or don't like it at all.

But the understanding of Melchizedek being great, isn't just represented in the scriptures.

I've learnt something new. There is a bottle size called melchizedek. And this is the size of a melchizedek beside an ordinary size bottle of 750 ml.

Nothing quite compares with a melchizedek!!



Back to the serious stuff, he was fundamentally different from the later priesthood that was established. The levitical priesthood was founded on law, but priesthood in the order of Melchizedek was founded on promise, the promise and word of God.

The receivers of this letter had to hear it because they weren't growing spiritually, and they were in danger of losing their salvation.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, the writer said in chapter 2.

The greatest thing about Jesus being in the order of Melchizedek was that the endless cycle of sacrifices came to an end.

Jesus' priesthood is a better priesthood.

It's greater than what has been in the past. This is testament to his divinity, which contrasts with the sinful humanity of the old priesthood, who had to offer a sacrifice for their own sin before they could offer on behalf of the people.

Even the first of the priests in the priestly tribe of Levi, whose name was Aaron, Moses' brother — do you remember one of his first mistakes was to bring the people together and produce the golden calf when Moses was up the mountain communing with God. The supposed priest of the most high God produced an idol.

No, Jesus gives us a **better priesthood**.

While he fully shares humanity with us, he doesn't share the sinfulness.

Therefore he is qualified to not only offer the sacrifice, but to actually BE the sacrifice for our sin.

He has no need to offer sacrifice for his own sin before he offers for us.

He is perfect. A better priesthood.

Not even from the tribe of Levi, but from the tribe of Judah. This is something totally new and different.

And because of that he offers a **better hope**.

v.18 - *What has gone before was weak and useless, for the law made nothing perfect. The only way we can draw near to God, is because of this better hope.*

And there's more.

Jesus has become the guarantor of a **better covenant**. v. 22.

The old covenant was ok, but just ok.

Because those priests died, and kept on having to be replaced.

There was nothing permanent.

But Jesus lives forever.

He has a permanence that will never go away.

v.25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

You see, the truth is,

through the Son, we have perfection forever.

Better priesthood

Better hope

Better covenant

Because he is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

My friends, Jesus hasn't just given us a greater covenant, but he has give us a greater everything.

if you haven't as yet, defined your life by this One called Jesus, this one that is greater than all else, then can I ask you, why not.

Ask yourself that question. Why not?

Can I ask you to consider doing so today.

Where else is there to go, that is truly satisfying.

Don't delay anymore in submitting to him as your God, your Lord, your all.

I'm going to pray, and if you make these words that I pray, **your** words today, will you please let me know after the service, that you prayed this prayer today.

I would love to hear it. Chris would love to hear it. And maybe some of your friends here today would also love to hear it.

I'm going to pray.....

Lord Jesus, I acknowledge before you today, that I am lost without you.

I acknowledge that you are truly greater than anything else, anything that has been or ever could be.

*Please forgive me my sins, and I declare today, that you are the only one who **can** deal with my sin, now and for eternity.*

Thank you that on the cross, you laid down your life, your perfect life, so that my imperfect life can be transformed.

I'm yours — today and forever. Amen.