

Hebrews – teaching #7

The Point of Hebrews: A Priest Like Melchizedek

Opening thoughts

While listening to a sermon, have you ever found yourself saying, “What’s the point?” We are exactly half-way through this sermon/letter of Hebrews – we’ve journeyed through six chapters, and now having crested the hill in a climb that’s been a bit roughgoing at times, the author has us stop at the peak and take in a breathtaking view – a view that is in fact the point of it all; a view he lingers over for the next three chapters before urging us on in the journey – a view zeroing in on, of all people, a somewhat mysterious character by the name of “Melchizedek” (mel-ki-zeh-deck...just call him “Mel”)...causing scholars, theologians, and Bible students everywhere to raise the collective cry, “Huh????” “Mel who?”

Melchizedek is mentioned 10 times in the entire Bible; twice in the OT and 8 times in the NT, all in this letter, Hebrews. So why make such an obscure character the centerpicce of a sermon to a bunch of burned out, buffeted and baffled believers who, overcome with weariness, were being tempted to chuck it all and just go back to what they at least knew how to do – to being safe and content to merely cope with life with the numbing help of the repetitive routine of religion??? Why Mel “what-his-name”?

Let’s meet the man...

First Reference: Genesis 14:17-20

Genesis 14 is the story of an invasion. A superpower alliance of four Mesopotamian kings led by a king whose name is even harder to pronounce than Mel’s invades the land of Canaan, Abraham’s stomping grounds, the Promised Land, and they beat all the local kings, including the king of Sleazetown, otherwise known as Sodom. The victorious, unstoppable kings take everything, including Abraham’s nephew, Lot and his family. Abraham hears about it, and gathers every able and willing hand to go after this invading hoarde – coming up with a whopping 318 men. He chases after them for 150 miles, finally catching up with them at the far northern edge of Canaan. Abraham does what Custer tried to do at the Little Big Horn – he divides his small force and hits them from several different directions in a surprise night attack. The superpower of the day is routed in confusion, hightails it home with Abraham in hot pursuit for another 40 or 50 miles, and he recovers everything and everyone that was taken, including his nephew Lot.

Now Abraham makes the 200 mile trip back home with a long column of plunder trailing behind him. As Abraham nears home, the king of Sleazetown (Sodom) musters his courage to come out and meet the returning hero. Weary from battle and a four hundred mile round trip journey Abram sighs heavily at the prospect of dealing with the king of Sleaze. Abraham awaits him in a valley just outside the city of Salem (we know it now as Jerusalem). But, instead of the king of Sleaze,

Abraham is met by Salem's king – our man Mel – Melchizedek, a man who, in a book where everyone has a genealogy and obituary, has none ; a man who is not only king, but priest of the Most High God. Melchizedek brings bread and wine, refreshing Abraham physically, and then he blesses Abraham, refreshing his soul:

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.
And blessed be God Most High,
who has helped you conquer your enemies.”

Abraham's spirit returns, his vision refocused, his path clear. Abraham gives Mel a tenth of all the stuff he recovered in battle...and is now ready to deal with the king of Slease...

Track forward 1000 years to David's time...

Second reference: Psalm 110:1-7

David, under the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit writes a song that by Israel is embraced as a song about the coming Deliverer, the coming Messiah of Israel:

The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet.”

The Lord will extend your powerful dominion from Jerusalem (Zion);
you will rule over your enemies.

In that day of battle, your people will serve you willingly,
arrayed in holy, priestly garments – fresh as the dawn on a Spring day, blanketing the fields
around you like the morning dew.

The Lord has sworn, and he will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order
of Melchizedek.”

The Lord stands at your right hand to protect you.
He will strike down many kings in the day of his anger.
He will punish the nations and fill them with their dead.
He will shatter heads over the whole earth.
But he himself will be refreshed from brooks along the way.
He will be victorious.

Now track forward another 1000 years, and we're in Hebrews...

Christ did not take upon himself the glory of becoming high priest, but God said to him,
“You are my Son, today I have become your Father.” And he says in another place, “You
are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.”

...though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered, and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey and was designated by God a high priest in the order of Melchizedek...

And here he wants to launch into the point of it all, but he splashes some cold water in their face first, unloads on them a bit, and then works around to it again as he talks about the

...hope we have as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure, and entering the inner sanctuary behind the veil, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf and has become a high priest in the order of Melchizedek...

And now here we are at chapter 7...

We haven't the time to teach it – only the time to hear it patiently and hopefully *get* it:

¹ This Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and Melchizedek blessed him, ² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” ³ Without father, without mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. ⁴ Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! ⁵ Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their brothers—even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. ⁶ This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. ⁸ In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him of whom it is declared that he lives. ⁹ One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, ¹⁰ because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

¹¹ Now if perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis the people received the law), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?

¹² For the priesthood being changed, there must of necessity also be a change of the law.

¹³ He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at any Mosaic altar. ¹⁴ For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priesthood. ¹⁵ And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, ¹⁶ one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is declared:

“You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek.”

¹⁸ The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless

¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. ²⁰ And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, ²¹ but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him:

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

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

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

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

^{8:1} The *point* of what we are saying is this: We have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high, ² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

Quickly consider the facts about Mel:

- He was evidently a man – not the “Son of God” but like him
- king of righteousness (so is Jesus!)
- king of peace (so is Jesus!)
- and priest of the Most High God (so is Jesus!)

And so in Mel we find a pre-shadowing of the reality we must grasp if we are ever to do more than merely cope with life:

The Mosaic religion and priesthood in all of its divine glory (and thus all religion with its rituals, routines and rules) doesn’t hold a candle to Jesus! Abraham, the father of Israel, the human fountain from which the whole Mosaic system ultimately sprang, bowed like a son before Mel (Jesus), received his fatherly blessing, and in giving him the tithe displayed Mel’s superiority over the entire Mosaic system.

The Mosaic system and priesthood:

- “Made nothing perfect” – couldn’t get the job done; couldn’t bring us into a full-on, life

transforming relationship with the living God!

- Had a priesthood of weak, sinful men who died. Inadequacy and failure were stamped all over them!

[The Jewish historian Josephus says there were 83 high priests from the first one, Aaron, to the last at the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Initially they served as a result of God's call for their entire lifetime...but by the first century AD they were little more than politicians, political appointees and puppets of Herod or Rome. There were 28 high priests alone in the last 100 years of the temple's existence; an average of 3 years apiece. These high priests weren't about the people's needs but their own power and position, and everyone knew it.]

And here's the point:

- **We have a high priest who meets our needs** – his ordination cry was “It is finished” (Not “Here we go again”) He got the job done and has become the *guarantee* of a better covenant that because of his perfect doing and dying brings us smack dab into the middle of a full-on, life transforming, soul renewing, guilt freeing, holiness empowering relationship with the living God!
- **And, he will never, ever, ever go away!** He lives! And he lives to clasp your hand in his and pull you into his Father's arms (intercession!). And he does it to “the uttermost” – completely, passionately, resolutely. He lives for *you!*

If you are covered with the leprosy of shame, he wants to touch you!

If you are stumbling blindly about clueless, homeless, hopeless, his heart breaks for you, and he wants to open your eyes!

If you are sick and tired of the battles you have been facing, he wants to restore your soul with bread and wine today!

This is the point of Hebrews:

We have such a high priest, who meets us in all of the weariness of our battles and our journey, meeting us with bread and wine, putting light back in our eyes, steel in our resolve, and fire in our hearts – and then empowers us to “go and do likewise.”