

A Greater Priesthood

JESUS IS GREATER #11 - Pastor Gary Combs - October 6, 2024 - Hebrews 7:1-17

INTRO: Good morning church! We're returning with Part 2 to a series that we began last Fall. It's entitled, "**JESUS IS GREATER: An Exposition of Hebrews.**" Our theme verse is:

Hebrews 1:4 (NLT) This shows that the Son is far **greater than** the angels, just as the name God gave him is **greater than** their names.

Last Sunday, the last verse from our reading in Hebrews brought us back to the topic that the author had taken a detour from in Hebrews 5:11-6:20 because he felt that many of his readers were too immature to understand it. What was this topic that was too deep for the "dull of hearing?" Answer: That Jesus is a "high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 6:20). So here we are this week, digging into why this "order of Melchizedek" is greater than the priesthood of the Levites, that the priesthood of Jesus is "A Greater Priesthood!"

Imagine being a Jewish believer in the first century, immersed in the rich tradition of Temple worship, the Levitical priesthood, and the sacrificial system. The priesthood of Aaron and the law of Moses were at the heart of your spiritual life. But now, through Jesus, you are told that everything you once knew is fulfilled and surpassed in Him. It must have been difficult for these early Jewish Christians to reconcile their past practices with their new faith in Christ. The author of Hebrews addresses this struggle, explaining that Jesus is not just a continuation of the old order—He is the fulfillment of it. Christ's priesthood is of a different and greater order, the order of Melchizedek.

Need: Why does this passage about a mysterious figure named, Melchizedek, and an ancient priesthood matter to us today? While we may not be struggling to reconcile temple worship with our faith in Christ, we face a similar challenge: Where do we turn to find true connection with God? In our world, people are looking everywhere for meaning, security, and spiritual fulfillment. Some turn to religious traditions, others to personal spirituality, and still others to worldly solutions like success, status, or wealth. Even as Christians, we may sometimes feel distant from God and question how we can approach Him and hear from Him.

This is why we need to hear about the greatness of Christ's priesthood. It reminds us that our relationship with God doesn't depend on our efforts, rituals, or qualifications. We have direct access to God through Jesus, our perfect High Priest. His priesthood is superior to anything the world or religion can offer. In Him, we find security, peace, and reconciliation with God.

Trans: The author of Hebrews wrote to believers struggling to understand how their old ways of relating to God fit with their new life in Christ. Likewise, we often need to be reminded that we don't need to rely on human efforts or traditions to connect with God. Jesus is all we need. This sermon will help us understand why Christ's priesthood is greater and why we can confidently trust Him for all our spiritual needs.

BODY: In Hebrews 7:1-17, the author explained to Jewish background believers, who were probably struggling with how their priesthood and temple worship fit in with their new life in Christ, why the order of Christ's priesthood is greater than that which was given by the Levitical law. We can understand why the order of Christ's priesthood is greater. How can we understand that the order of Christ's priesthood is greater? The text gives **three reasons** why Christ's priesthood is greater.

Read text: Hebrews 7:1-17 (ESV) 1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 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. 3 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. 4 See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! 5 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. 6 But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. 8 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. 9 One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, 10 for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. 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? 12 For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. 13 For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. 15 This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

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THREE REASONS CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD IS GREATER:

1. Because it has a superior pedigree.

EXP: (1-3) Melchizedek, a mysterious figure who appears only in Gen.14 and Psa.110. He is both a “king of Salem” (probably “Jerusalem”) and a “priest of the Most High God” (1) (a combination unheard of in the Levitical priesthood). His name means “king of righteousness,” he is also called “king of peace” (2). That Abraham paid tithes to Mel and received a blessing from him shows his superiority even over the patriarch of the Levitical priests. Mel’s priesthood is remarkable not only for his dual role as king and priest but also because he is without genealogy (3). Unlike the Levitical priests, whose lineage was strictly documented, Mel appears without any record of ancestry. He is a type, or foreshadowing, of Jesus. Christ’s priesthood has a superior pedigree because it is both divine (“Son of God”) and eternal (“priest forever”) (3).

“**Most High God**” (1) (θεός ὑψίστου, *Theos hupsistos*) - most high, supreme God. In Hebrew: “El Elyon.”

“**Slaughter of the kings**” (1) - refers to Gen. 14 when Abram defeated 4 kings and returned with his nephew, Lot, and all the wives, children, and possessions lost. This is when Mel came out to bless him.

“**Tenth**” (2) (δεκάτη, *dekatē*) a tenth part of anything, a tithe.

“**Genealogy**” (3) (ἀγενεαλόγητος, *agenealogētos*) - Lit., “no genealogy.” No written pedigree.

“**Beginning nor end**” (3) - Scripture gives no indication of this man’s birth or death. He is a blip in the story.

“**Resembling the Son of God**” (3) (ἀφομοιώω, *aphomoioō*) - to be made like, similar to Christ.

ARG: The author is explaining the implications and fulfillment of David’s Messianic psalm...

Psalm 110:1-4 (ESV) A Psalm of David. 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. ...The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

ILL: In Gen. 14, Abram, whom God renamed “Abraham” (“Father of nations”), defeated 4 kings who had defeated 5 local kings, including the king of Sodom where his nephew Lot lived.

Genesis 14:17-20 (ESV) ¹⁷ 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). ¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) ¹⁹ And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

APP: Christ’s priesthood pedigree is superior because He is both the “Son of God” (3) and the Son of man. His priesthood is timeless and eternal. It precedes the Levitical law and ultimately fulfills and surpasses it. He is the ultimate priest, the true King of righteousness, the real King of Peace, and the eternal Son of God! As believers today, we can rest in the fact that He stands forever as our mediator, bringing us into the presence of God with a priesthood that will never fade or fail. Let us rejoice in the greatness of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, and trust fully in His all-sufficient work.

2. Because it has a superior position.

EXP: (4-10) The author continues to highlight the superiority of Melchizedek—and therefore Christ’s priesthood—by pointing out the superior position Melchizedek holds in relation to Abraham and the Levitical priests. Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils to Mel (4). This act of tithing demonstrated Abraham’s recognition of Mel’s greater status. But more than that, the author argues that since the Levitical priests descended from Abraham, they, in a sense, paid tithes through Abraham to Melchizedek (9). This shows that Melchizedek’s priesthood, and thus Christ’s, holds a superior position even to the entire Levitical system.

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Furthermore, Mel blessed Abe, and as v.7 says, “It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.” By blessing Abraham, Melchizedek’s position was confirmed as being greater, and by extension, Christ’s priesthood, which follows the order of Melchizedek, holds a superior position to the Levitical priesthood. Christ’s position is supreme because He is greater than the founders of the Levitical system.

“**Great**” (4) (πηλίκος, *pēlikos*) - how great, how large. Consider how great Mel was!

“**Tithes**” (5) (ἀποδεκατόω, *apodekatoō*) - to pay a tithe of anything

“**Descended from Abraham**” (5, 14 - 2x) (ὄσφῦς, *osphus*) - Lit., from Abraham’s “loins.”

“**Inferior is blessed by the superior**” (7) (ἐλάσσων, *elassōn*) - lesser (in age, in rank, in excellence) to (κρείττων, *kreittōn*) greater, better (more useful, more serviceable, more advantageous).

“**Loins of his ancestor**” (10) (ὄσφῦς πατῆρ, *osphus patēr*) - Lit., “Loins of his father” Abraham.

ARG: Christ’s priesthood holds a superior position because He is the one and only Mediator...

1 Timothy 2:5-6 (NLT) ⁵ For, there is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. ⁶ He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time.

ILL: On Tuesday of Passion Week, Jesus taught in the Temple when His position was challenged: (Tell story)

Matthew 21:23-27 (ESV) ²³ And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” ²⁴ Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵ The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

APP: The Jews were so concerned about issues of position and authority, but they failed to recognize the One whose position and authority was supreme! As Jesus told them at another time when they questioned His authority and spoke of their authority as being from Moses...

John 5:39, 46-47 (ESV) You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.” ...For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”

Christ’s position and authority are greater, therefore His priesthood is greater! Therefore let us rest in His power and position as our Great High Priest. For we have access to the Father through Him.

3. Because it is superior in perfection.

EXP: (11-17) Finally, the author points out that Christ’s priesthood is greater because it is perfect, while the Levitical priesthood was imperfect. The very fact that there was a need for another priest to arise, not from the line of Aaron but according to the order of Melchizedek, shows that the Levitical priesthood could not bring about true “perfection” (11). The law and the Levitical priesthood were unable to save and bring people to God in a lasting way. Year after year, sacrifices had to be made. Priests themselves were flawed and had to make offerings for their own sins. But Christ’s priesthood is perfect because it is based on His “indestructible life” (16). He doesn’t need to offer sacrifices repeatedly because He offered Himself once for all. **Verse 17** quotes Psalm 110:4, declaring that Jesus is “a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” This divine and eternal aspect of Christ’s priesthood is what makes it perfect. It doesn’t end when a human priest dies, nor is it limited by sin or weakness. For Christ has overcome sin, death, and the grave!

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“Perfection” (11) (τελείωσις, *teleiōsis*) - completion, fulfillment, perfection. If the law given through Moses implemented by the Levitical priesthood had been sufficient then no other priest would be needed

“Another priest” (ἕτερος, *heteros*) - “another” priest of a “different kind” (In John 14:16, the word “another” in “another paraclete,” is the Greek word ἄλλος, *allos*, which means another of the same kind.

“Necessarily a change in the law” (12) (μετάθεσις, *metathesis*) - to transfer, to change. “Not by the sacrifice of beasts, but by the sacrifice of himself, and to sanctify their souls by the influences of the Holy Spirit; the whole law concerning the sacrifices of beasts, and the sanctifying of the flesh of the Israelites by washing, was of necessity entirely abolished.” — Benson Commentary

“Another tribe” (13) (φυλή, *phulē*) - “tribe, kindred.” Again it's *heteros* so a different tribe. Judah, not Levi.

“No one has ever served at the altar” (13) - Judah was not allowed to serve at the altar, in fact, those who tried paid a heavy cost. King Uzziah contracted leprosy for getting too close. (2 Chronicles 26:16)

“Evident” (14) (πρόδηλος, *prodēlos*) - openly evident, known to all, manifest

“Descended from Judah” (14) (ἀνατέλλω, *anatellō*) - to arise from, be descended from. Jesus from Judah.

“Likeness of Melchizedek” (15) (ὁμοιότης, *homoiotēs*) - Lit., “sameness.” Similar, resemblance, likeness.

“Legal requirement” (16) (σαρκικός, *sarkikos*) - Christ's priesthood isn't based on the “fleshly” legal requirement of lineage. Even so, we have 2 records of His human lineage in Matt. 1 & Luke 3 for kingship.

“Power of an indestructible life” (16) (ἀκατάλυτος, *akatalutos*) - indissoluble, not subject to destruction.

“Witnessed” (17) (μαρτυρέω, *martureō*) - “to see,” Christ as the fulfillment of Psalm 110:4.

“Priest forever” (17) (αἰών, *aiōn*) - for ever, an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, eternity

“Order” (17) (τάξις, *taxis*) - an arranging, arrangement, due or right order, orderly condition.

ARG: Let's look to Jesus the Founder and Perfecter of our faith.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV) ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

ILL: The Temple and its sacrificial system ended in 70 AD when the Romans pulled down the walls of Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, leaving only the Western Wall. Also called the Wailing Wall because Jews pray and weep there today, believing “the divine Presence never departs from the Western Wall.” Jews lament the destruction of the Temple and pray for its restoration, and it has long been a custom to push slips of paper with wishes or prayers on them into the cracks between its stones.



APP: There has been no sacrifices made since 70 AD. The imperfect priesthood has been fulfilled and replaced by the perfect priesthood of Jesus Christ. He is our Perfect Mediator!

CONCLUSION: So, how do we understand that Christ's priesthood is greater? The text gives us three reasons: Because Christ's priesthood...

- (1) Has a superior pedigree—it is after the order of Melchizedek, not based on human lineage.
- (2) Has a superior position—it is greater than Abraham and the Levitical system.
- (3) Is superior in perfection—it brings true and perfect reconciliation with God.

Let's remember that it is grace, not law, that saves us and enables us to draw near to God. Religion and rule-keeping provide no security, no access. They always fall short. Our access to the Father is through His Son, our Savior, who has fulfilled the law for us. Under Christ's priesthood, we are no longer under law, but under grace. Being right with the Father, is not about our self-effort, but Christ's finished work at the cross and His indestructible life revealed in His resurrection!

Let us turn fully to the One who not only hears us, but loves us. Let's turn to Jesus. Let's pray.