

Text of Message

Genesis 14:11-20

Hebrews 4:14 - 5:10

Message title: Abraham, Melchizedek, and the better priesthood of Jesus.

Adapted from: Our Great High Priest. by C. Philip Green @ SermonCentral.Com

A while back I was looking up job descriptions for various positions in the church, I came across these:

PASTOR: Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. More powerful than a locomotive. Faster than a speeding bullet. Walks on water. Makes policy with God.

ELDER: Able to leap short buildings in a single bound. As powerful as a switch engine. Just as fast as a speeding bullet. Walks on water if the sea is calm. Talks with God.

WORSHIP LEADER: Leaps short buildings with a running start. Almost as powerful as a switch engine. Faster than a speeding BB. Walks on water if they know where the stumps are. Is occasionally addressed by God.

YOUTH LEADER: Runs into small buildings. Recognizes locomotives 2 out of 3 times. Uses a squirt gun. Knows how to use the water fountain. Mumbles to self a lot.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT: Lifts buildings to walk under them. Kicks locomotives off the track. Catches speeding bullets in her teeth. Freezes water with a single glance. And when God speaks she says, "May I ask who is calling?" (Leadership, Vol. 7, no. 1.)

Now, we know who really runs the church. just kidding. But it does bring up an interesting question: What do people look for in a spiritual leader? What do they expect, especially when life gets hard and they need some help?

Well, there is no spiritual leader who can provide better support than Jesus can. As much as I, your pastor, really care about you and want to help, there is no one greater than our Lord. So, if you come to me, I'm just going to point you to Him. **Because Jesus is better, He is both our king and our Great High Priest forever.**

Which is what the letter to the Hebrews is all about: Jesus is better than the prophets, He is better than the angels, He is better than Moses, He provides a better rest than that which was promised by Joshua, and He offers a better sacrifice than any of the Levite priests ever could, along with the promise of salvation that none of them could because Jesus is in fact our "**Great High Priest**" ... **forever** (Hebrews 4:14)

Now this claim would automatically bring an objection from Jewish readers: How can Jesus be a better priest and especially a high priest since He is from the tribe of Judah (the king's line)? Because according to Hebrew law, all of the temple priests were required to be of the tribe of Levi and specifically a descendant of Aaron the first High priest of the people of Israel.

The answer to this objection can be found in Genesis 14:1-24, which tells the story of how his nephew, Lot, was swept up into the military doings of the ancient world and of how Abraham played a role rescuing him. But on his way back home Abraham also had a meeting with a mysterious King Melchizedek who was also a priest "of the God Most High who made Heaven and Earth," which just so happened to be the same God who had called for Abraham to go on a walkabout.

According to Genesis 13, Lot and Abraham's flocks having become too big for them to continue dwelling close together, Uncle Abe gave Lot free choice of whichever part of the land he wished to move to. Abraham would then go the other direction. So Lot chose the fertile well watered plain of Jordan just to the south of the Dead Sea, settling down near the city of Sodom, the sin city of antiquity, while Abraham stayed tenting in the wilderness as he had been told to do by God.

Then a day came when a messenger arrived at the tent of Abraham with terrible news. A coalition of kings from the east had invaded and had taken Sodom and enslaved all of its inhabitants — including Lot. So Abraham immediately organizes a rescue party. He catches up with the raiders and attacking by night puts them to rout, recovering not only his nephew but all of the wealth and citizens of Sodom.

But the unusual part of this tale takes place while Abraham is returning home after the battle. As he was passing by the ancient city of Salem (now Jerusalem) Abraham was met by a mysterious priest-king known as Melchizedek who brought along bread and wine and a blessing.

[Melchizedek] blessed him and said,

=Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' (Genesis 14:19-20)

In return Abraham awards him with a tenth of all the spoils from the battle. And that is all.



Melchizedek is not mentioned again in the rest of Genesis nor anywhere in any of the historical books of the Old Testament. Although there is a veiled prophecy in the Psalms concerning him (110:3), the significance of Melchizedek remains a mystery until we get to the letter to the Hebrews which is more than happy to enlighten us as to how the legend that had grown up around this ancient king related uniquely to Jesus.

Here is a portion of the text from the opening of Hebrews, chapter seven, referring to who Melchizedek is....

His name means 'king of righteousness'; he is also king of Salem, that is, 'king of peace'. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever. Hebrews 7:2-3

And now because of who he is, this is the priestly order for which Jesus uniquely qualifies.

Hebrews 7 then goes into a detailed explanation as to why Jesus who has been declared a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, is far superior to any of the Jewish priesthood, including the high priest. As already noted Melchizedek's name literally meant "the King of Righteousness" and he ruled over the "City of Peace"

But what's in a name? When we name children, it is often because we like the sound of it. But names in the ancient world were full of meaning, especially among the Jews. **Names were given to tell something about the character of the person.** This is why you occasionally find a Biblical character whose name is changed. This was the case of Abraham - his name prophetically was changed from Abram ("father of high places") to Abraham ("father of a multitude"). So while Abraham may have met a man named, The King of Righteousness, there has only been one person in history truly qualified to wear that title: Jesus.

"City of Peace" is also an ironic name for Jerusalem, since the history of Jerusalem has largely been of war and of conquest. It has been anything but a city of peace, with three notable exceptions:

- Jerusalem was the city where the God of Peace chose to locate His only temple.
- It was the city where Jesus the Prince of Peace presented Himself as such to the Hebrew people.
- And one day it will be capital of the New Heavens and Earth to which Jesus will return when he comes as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Here is the point:

- The kings of Israel can only trace their roots back to David and by Mosaic law they could never be a priest.
- While the priesthood of Israel can only trace their roots back to Aaron and by law they could never be king.

But long before the time of either David or Aaron there was a priest-king ruling over Jerusalem, the city of God. This legendary king's right to also be a priest was based not on any law but on his personal relationship with God. Since Melchizedek had no genealogy, no record of his birth and no record of his death, according to legend, he remains a priest forever. In this manner, he uniquely resembles Jesus the Son of God, the only other person who can claim to be both a King and a priest of the God Most High and someone who has lived forever.

You might be thinking, "Wait a minute, Jesus had a genealogy! How can you say that Jesus is like Melchizedek because he has no genealogy?"

The answer is found in the pre-existence of Jesus. Though Jesus does have a human genealogy and a recorded birth, He also existed before He was born. Remember: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God (John 1:1). And while Jesus had a very publicly recorded death by crucifixion, three days later God restored Him to life eternal. Where He now continues to live in heaven serving as our priest and advocate before the actual throne of God; not some symbolic replica of that throne before which all the Jewish priests ever served.

So the priesthood of Jesus is better because, not having been inherited, but having been appointed by God to the priesthood by virtue of His righteous life, Jesus will ALWAYS be our high priest and like the King Melchizedek, He has and will live forever. Jesus will always be the one responsible for

our forgiveness and our fellowship with God. That certainly is a lot better than what any human priest, pastor, or rabbi could claim. Since God declared of Jesus ...

'You are a priest forever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.'
Hebrews 5:6

So now you know both the history of the legendary priest/king King Melchizedek and of Jesus' right to His own priestly claim according to the order of Melchizedek. But how does it now benefit us to know that Jesus was designated as both our King and high priest by God the father.... What good does His priestly function do us? How good a priest can Jesus be for us.

To answer that question, we will need to turn to Hebrews chapters four and five.

So if you have your Bibles, I invite you to first turn with me to Hebrews 4, where we can read just what it is about Jesus that makes him a better priest for us.

Since, then, we have a great high priest
who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to
our confession.
Hebrews 4:14

What this means for us is that when life gets hard and you feel like quitting, DON'T. If you are following Jesus, just hang in there! PERSEVERE. Hold fast your confession. Don't give up your faith, because Jesus will forever be your Great High Priest – the one goes directly to God on your behalf

You see, in the middle of the Hebrew Temple was a very small windowless room called the "Holy of Holies." It was separated from the rest of the temple by a thick curtain. Inside was the Ark of the Covenant, a golden box that symbolized God's presence with His people.

By law, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, only once a year and only with the blood of an animal sacrifice to cover for his own sins and the sins of the Israelite people. This High Priest would have a rope tied around his waist long enough for the other end of it to stick out from under the curtain. That way, if the High Priest died while in God's presence, the other priests could pull him out without having to risk their own lives. Being a High Priest in Israel was an awesome responsibility and an awesome privilege.

However, Jesus has done much better than that. He didn't go once yearly into a man-made temple on earth; He went to live in Heaven itself in the very throne room of God. And He didn't bring with Him the blood of an animal sacrifice; He brought His own shed blood. And He didn't go to a golden box which only represented God's presence; He went into the very presence of God Himself. All this makes Jesus a better priest for us.

Realize also that there were no chairs in the Jerusalem Temple. The on-duty priests never got to sit down as their work of offering sacrifices never stopped. But once He had offered his complete sacrifice for all time and all people, Jesus (metaphorically) sat down at the right hand of God the Father where He remains to this day, meaning that His sacrificial duties have been completed; He need to do nothing more to assure our salvation. Which certainly makes His the much better sacrifice.

So don't quit. Hold fast your confession. Hang on to your faith. Persevere, because you are being personally represented in Heaven by your priest/king Jesus, the Son of God. But more than this, you can also pray with confidence because Jesus, who represents you to God, understands your suffering having also personally suffered as a human.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.
Hebrews 4:15

Jesus is not only the Son of God, He is the God who suffers with you and me. The word for "sympathize" literally means "to share the suffering together with," so Jesus suffers when you suffer; having personally experienced every weakness, every pain and every temptation you have experienced.

A lot of people often question "WHY?" when they go through times of pain, but God does not seem to be in the business of answering that question. Philosophers and theologians try to answer the "why" question, but their answers are often unsatisfactory.

In fact, they usually try to get God off the hook for the problem of pain, while God, on the other hand, doesn't seem interested in getting off the hook. Rather, His answer to the problem of pain is not to get OFF the hook at all, but to impale Himself ON the hook of human pain, suffering with you in the midst of your pain.

Jesus is the God who suffers with us, because when it comes right down to it, we don't really want an answer to the question "why"; we want someone to walk with us through the pain, and Jesus is that person.

In an article for the Christian Standard magazine, Matt Proctor wrote about how his 5-year-old, Carl, and his 3-year-old, Conrad, loved it when he dressed like them. They would put on jeans and a blue T-shirt and then ask him to put on jeans and a blue T-shirt. When he did, they said, "Look, Dad – same, same!"

When Matt played living room football with his boys, Conrad (his 3-year-old) would not let him play standing – so big and scary. Instead he insisted that Matt get on his knees. Then, when Matt was down at eye-level, Conrad put his hand on his dad's shoulder and said, "There. See, Dad – same, same."

That summer, Matt scraped his leg working on his house. When Conrad fell and scraped his leg, he pointed at his dad's scab along with his own and said, "Hey, Dad – same, same."

Here's the point... God himself has felt what we feel. When He became a man, He got down at eye-level and experienced what it's like to be tired and discouraged... He knows what it feels like to hurt and bleed. On the cross, Jesus experienced the pain of complete loss, separated from His Father for the first time in all eternity.

In your pain, you may be tempted to say, "God, You have no idea what I'm going through. You have no idea how bad I'm hurting." But God can respond, "Yes, I do." He can point to your wounds and then to His own and say, "Look: same, same... I know how you feel. I have been there, and I am

with you now. I care, and I can help." (Matt Proctor, "Carols for Any Season of Suffering," Christian Standard magazine, 12-23-07; www.PreachingToday.com)

As your priest, Jesus suffers with you in your pain, so don't be afraid to go to Him for help. In fact, come boldly to Christ with your need. Pray with the confidence that He really cares. As the author of Hebrews would encourage you...

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
Hebrews 4:16

I like the way author Nancy Spiegelberg expressed it: "Lord, I crawled across the barrenness to You with my empty cup uncertain in asking any small drop of refreshment. If only I had known You better I'd have come running with a bucket." (Erwin Lutzer, Failure: The Back Door to Success, p.117).

In your time of need, don't crawl to the Lord with a tiny little cup; come running with a bucket, because He wants to fill it with all the mercy and grace you need.

So here is your "take home" from the story of Jesus being both a better priest and our forever priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

When life gets hard and you feel like quitting, DON'T. Instead, persevere in your confession of faith and pray with confidence, boldly approaching God's throne of Grace, because Jesus your Great High Priest has once for all made the better sacrifice sufficient for covering all your sins. Through His ultimate obedience on the cross, Jesus paid the penalty for our sins and He grants eternal life to anyone who puts their trust in Him. Also because of having suffered with you, He is able both to sympathize and to walk with you through whatever suffering you now face.

Jesus has the authority to serve forever as your High Priest, and Jesus has the ability to save forever as your Complete Savior.

So when life gets hard and you feel like quitting, DON'T. Instead, persevere in your confession of faith, because Jesus is the Son of God. Pray with confidence, because Jesus suffers with you.

Let's pray about this together