

## **Jesus is Better** *Hebrews 7:1-28*

I heard a story years ago about Albert Einstein and his approach to shaving. I don't know if it is true or not; you can definitely find it out there on the internet (of course if it is on the internet, it has to be true right?). Regardless, I'll share it because it illustrates a point. Apparently, when Albert Einstein shaved he only used a razor and water. One day a friend asked him why and he said that water and the razor do the job. But this friend urged him to try at least once using shaving cream because it would make shaving less painful and would give him a better shave. Eventually, this friend gave him a tube of shaving cream and he used it. And he loved it. He thought it was a great discovery. Using the shaving cream he got a better shave and the razor didn't pull the beard. He thought it really was a great thing. It was a better way to shave. And so from that point on he used the shaving cream every morning . . . every morning, that is, until the cream ran out. Then he reverted back to just using water. Why? We don't know. Maybe it was simpler. Maybe he was too absent minded to remember to buy more. He certainly didn't seem to remember to comb his hair. We don't know. But the point is, he had experienced something better and for one reason or another he turned back to the old way.

A similar thing can happen in our spiritual lives. We come to faith in Christ and begin submit our lives to Him and to follow Him as best we can. And we find genuine joy in doing so. We realize that we have found a really great thing. But then, maybe we experience a time where it is hard to live out our faith. We might face some pressure or opposition for being a follower of Christ. Or maybe in the whirl of life we just sort of lose sight of Jesus and begin to turn our attention to other things. And over time, we find ourselves reverting back to our old ways of trying to live life. A friend of mine who counsels people talks about how we all have "strategies," which he defines as the ways that we try to make life work apart from God. All of us at one time or another are tempted to return to these strategies.

For the Hebrews, their strategy was the law. Due to the stress and persecution that they faced for following Christ, they were tempted to turn back to their Jewish faith. They were tempted to return to living under the law even though they had experienced something far better in Christ. They needed a fresh vision of Christ. They needed to be reminded that a life of following Christ really is a better way. Some of you might be right there today too. You need fresh vision of Christ and that following Him really is a better way. That's what the author of Hebrews is going for in the whole book for sure, but it is right at the heart of what he is doing in chapter 7 that we are looking at today.

Today we are going to focus on later part of this chapter, but I want to read the beginning of the chapter as well and make some comments just so we get the flow of the author's argument. And so let me set the context. Back in 5:10, the author had talked about how Jesus was a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. But then he broke off his line of thinking to offer a challenge and an encouragement at the end of chapter 5 and then all of chapter 6. But right at the end of chapter 6, he repeats this

idea that Jesus is a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. This signals that he is ready now to press into what this means that Jesus is according to the order of Melchizedek. He's ready to paint a fresh vision for how great Jesus is. My hope is that all of us walk out of here today with a fresh vision in our own lives of how great Jesus really is.

The author begins by talking about the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood (7:1-10).

*<sup>1</sup> For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, <sup>2</sup> to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. <sup>3</sup> Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually. <sup>4</sup> Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. <sup>5</sup> And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. <sup>6</sup> But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. <sup>7</sup> But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. <sup>8</sup> In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. <sup>9</sup> And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, <sup>10</sup> for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.*

Some believe that Melchizedek was some kind of divine being who appeared to Abraham, but I believe the writer of Hebrews is saying that there is simply no record of his father or his mother or his genealogy in the Scriptures. There is no record of when he was born or when he died. He just appears on the pages of Scripture for these few verses and then he is gone. His point is that Melchizedek didn't have any of the normal priestly qualifications based on his genealogy that would allow him to be a priest and yet the Genesis passage that records his encounter with Abraham affirms that he was a priest.

And as a priest, the writer argues that Melchizedek's priesthood was greater than the Levitical order of priests. First, he is greater because he blessed Abraham. The writer says that the *lesser* (i.e. Abraham) *was blessed by the greater* (i.e. Melchizedek). Second, he is greater because Abraham gave *a tenth part of all the spoils* (v. 1, 4) to Melchizedek. And based on this the author makes the point that Levi, from whom the Levitical order of priests descended, paid tithes to Melchizedek while in the loins of Abraham. All of this points to the fact that the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priesthood.

He goes on then to make the point that the Levitical priesthood has been replaced.

<sup>11</sup> Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? <sup>12</sup> For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. <sup>13</sup> For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. <sup>14</sup> For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. <sup>15</sup> And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, <sup>16</sup> who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. <sup>17</sup> For it is attested of Him,

“YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER

ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”

<sup>18</sup> For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness <sup>19</sup> (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

His point is that the Levitical priesthood was inadequate. It could not, through the law that it administered bring people to *perfection*. It did not qualify anyone to draw near to God or to enjoy with certainty a new covenant relationship with God. It didn't ultimately deal with sin. And so, there was a need for this priesthood to be replaced with another priest who was *according to the order of Melchizedek*. This new priest is Christ, who is declared such by the Father in Psalm 110:4, which the author quotes verse 17. Christ's priesthood replaces the Levitical priesthood and the law that it administered. That law was weak and useless. But with the new priesthood of Christ there is a *bringing in of a better hope* and through this better hope we truly *draw near to God*.

Jesus is better. That's the vision that the author is painting. And that's what he goes on to highlight in the rest of the chapter. He says a lot of things about how Christ is better here, but I want to highlight five things that he says about Christ. First, he says that **Jesus is better because he is a priest forever**.

<sup>20</sup> And inasmuch as *it* was not without an oath <sup>21</sup> (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him,

“THE LORD HAS SWORN

AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND,

‘YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER’ ”);

<sup>22</sup> *so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.* <sup>23</sup> *The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing,* <sup>24</sup> *but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.*

As we have already seen, Jesus didn't become a priest by having the right genealogy. He was from the tribe of Judah, not Levi. He became a priest because God appointed him a priest through an oath. And Psalm 110:4 says about this oath that *The LORD . . . will not change His mind*. And the thing that God will not change his mind about is that Jesus is a priest forever. Verse 24 says that he *holds His priesthood permanently*.

And because he does, he is able to be *the guarantee of a better covenant*. This better covenant is the New Covenant through which an eternal relationship with God is made possible. And Jesus, who is never prevented by death from continuing his priesthood, is able to guarantee this covenant's eternal effectiveness. The author is using a legal term that referred to someone who assumed responsibility for another person's debt if they could not meet their obligations. Jesus is the surety. He is the guarantee of this better covenant. Jesus is better.

The writer goes on to say that **Jesus is better because he is able to save us in every way**. In verse 25 the author says:

*<sup>25</sup> Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

When it says that Jesus is able to save, *forever*, that word can have the sense of time, as in eternally or it can have the sense of "completely" or "in every way." The reality is that it is probably both. Jesus saves in the most comprehensive way possible. The salvation that we experience through Jesus is complete salvation; it is forever salvation.

The author not only makes this affirmation, but he explains how this is so. Jesus *always lives to make intercession* for us. We're not told what the content of Jesus' prayer is. We are simply told that through his intercession we are saved in every way.

Do you remember Jesus' interaction with Peter on the night he was betrayed? He told Peter that Satan was going to turn Peter's world upside down, but he promised Peter, "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31-32). Maybe this is what this intercession in heaven looks like – Jesus interceding for us that we would endure to the end.

Suppose this week you are having lunch with a good friend – a friend who knows you better than anyone else in your life. This friend tells you that s/he has been thinking about you a lot lately . . . your responsibilities, your challenges, your relationships and that friend then tells you the s/he is praying about these things. How would you walk away from that interaction? You'd probably be pretty encouraged right?

Jesus, who knows you perfectly, who knows all the stuff that is going on in your life, is interceding for you right now. He is praying for your complete salvation. He is praying that the merits of what He accomplished for you through His death and resurrection

would be worked out into your life. Maybe he is praying exactly what he prayed for Peter, that your faith would not fail.

I was out for a walk yesterday and the thought came to me that I ought to spend time simply wondering about Jesus is praying for me. I think that would be a helpful thing to do. Maybe that would be encouraging for you to do as well – wonder about what Jesus is praying for you.

Now, as we go on to the final 3 verses, they are in a sense a summary of the whole of chapter 7. Let me read it first and then I will make a couple of more comments about how Jesus is better.

*<sup>26</sup> For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; <sup>27</sup> who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. <sup>28</sup> For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.*

**Jesus is better in his character.** Every high priest who ever served in the temple was sinful. Before any high priest could offer a sacrifice for the people, he had to first offer a sacrifice for his own sin. When the high priest did this he was ritually pure. But Jesus was not just ritually pure, he was completely pure in his character. He was *holy, innocent, undefiled*. He had no need to offer a sacrifice for himself because he never sinned.

All of us at one time or another have been let down by someone whose character wasn't what we thought it was. Their character had a flaw and we were hurt and disappointed by that flaw. You will never be let down by Jesus. His character is perfect. Jesus is better.

And because this is true, it leads to the next statement of how Jesus is better. **Jesus is better because he offered a perfect sacrifice.** Because of Jesus' sinless nature, he was able to offer up what verse 27 calls the *once for all* sacrifice of himself. He was the perfect and sufficient sacrifice *for the sins of the people*. Through His perfect sacrifice he put an end to the whole sacrificial system of the Old Covenant. There is no need for another sacrifice. He has fully dealt with sin through his one perfect sacrifice of Himself.

If you have trusted Jesus for salvation, He had made a once for all payment for your sin. It is sufficient. Sometimes we have doubts about whether God has really forgiven us, especially in those areas of habitual sin that we continue to struggle with. Jesus' perfect sacrifice has paid for that sin. And in light of the fact that he saves completely, I believe that he is interceding for you in that very area that the power of His saving work would transform you in that very area.

Finally, I want to highlight one other thing that makes Jesus better. **Jesus is better because he ministers in God's presence.** Look again at verse 26. When it says that he is *separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens* these two ideas go together. Jesus was physically separated from sinners. In other words, He left the realm of this world where he lived and suffered for a time and he was exalted *above the heavens*. This is spatial imagery to refer to God's throne. Jesus, as a high priest, as your high priest, is right now in the very presence of God. That's where He continues His ministry on our behalf.

Suppose you have a need right now that only the president of the United States could meet. Could you get in touch with him? Do you have access to him? Do you know anyone who would have the credentials to go into his presence to talk to him about your need? My guess is that probably none of us do. We have no way to get our needs represented before the president of the United States. But we do have a way to have our needs represented before the God of the universe, because Jesus is *exalted above the heavens*. At this very moment, with whatever needs you have, Jesus stands in God's presence. And he is interceding for you. Jesus is better.

The writer of Hebrews knows that his readers are tempted to return to Judaism and to living under a weak and useless law as their strategy to deal with the pressure that they faced as Christ-followers. To these people, he reminds them that Jesus is better. He wants them to be encouraged by the truth that God has acted decisively on their behalf in Christ and that Jesus continues to intervene on their behalf. This knowledge was to be a source of encouragement and strength to them in their situation.

Some of you right now are in the midst of a struggle to return to your strategy to try to make life work independent of God. You are tempted to return to old ways of living – old ways that in reality have failed you every single time in the past. Just like the author of Hebrews is encouraging his readers to not return to Judaism, but to stick with Jesus because he is truly better, so too I believe he encourages you – stick with Jesus. Later in chapter 12 the author will tell us that we can run this race of the Christian life with endurance as we fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith (12:2). All these things that we've talked about would be truths about Jesus to focus on; to think about; to fix our eyes on. Jesus really is better. Keep trusting him. Keep holding on to him. Keep turning to him. Jesus is better.

Amen.