

The Melchizedekian Priesthood  
Hebrews 7:11-19

Ephesians 2  
Romans 3:19-31  
Responsive Psalm 107:1-9

This morning we are going to continue our study in Hebrews chapter 7, where the Author here continues in his comparison between Melchizedek and Christ. We are going to be focusing on verses 11-19 this morning, but let us go back and read starting in verse 1. This passage is another one of those for us who hold to ideas of New Covenant Theology that stand out as we read it as being obvious that the Old Covenant ways, the Laws, the traditions, the temple worship, and in this case the role of the Levitical priests have all faded and been replaced, by a better covenant, by a better priesthood. By that I mean, Christ has fulfilled the law and has established as it were a new law in our hearts, as is written in Jeremiah 31:31-34. "Behold, the days are coming says the Lord, When I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, MY covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write in on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

This becomes more apparent here in this passage with the implication of this Priest-king who Abraham pays tithes to, not being a part of the Levitical priesthood, in fact, existing before the Levitical priesthood was established. As we mentioned last week, in this account recorded in Genesis he is referred to as the King of Salem, and a Priest of the Most High God but there is nothing said there about the order of Melchizedek, like what we see mentioned here in Hebrews. It isn't until Psalm's 110 that we see this phrase being used, and at the time of David the Levitical Priesthood had been established yet, he says, "The Lord has sworn and will not relent, you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." What we are seeing here is the idea of progressive revelation happening. That over time God reveals more and more about himself, and his plan to reconcile his people to himself. I personally think it is pretty cool to look at such things, for it shows a sovereign God working out his purpose and plan in the world. There are generations between Abraham and Melchizedek, and David here in Psalm, and again this Author here in Hebrews but that does not change the purpose or meaning behind this encounter which is being used as an example to point to a further revelation and greater truth about God.

Psalm 110 is expressing the expectation of the establishment of the messianic priest hood and kingdom which I had mentioned was written about a 100 years after the Levitical priesthood had already been established. Even David understood that the levitical order was not permanent and was pointing to one greater who would establish an everlasting priesthood. And we see this in our text this morning, the further revelation, "Therefore if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood ( for under it the people received the law) what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek and not be called according to the order of Aaron.?" This text is quite plain in its implication that the old and inferior order is to be replaced by a new superior order, which compared to the inadequate of the first, in which as we see here, there is no perfection, the new, or the fulfillment of this type will be eternal, and complete.

Verse 11 here says, that under the Levitical priesthood the people received the law. A better understanding would be instead of using the word under, would be to understand it as on the basis of. For there is a close interdependence between the priestly, and the legal system. The Levitical priesthood was instituted by Moses at the same time that he was communicating the law of God to the people of Israel. The law, and the priesthood belong together, just like faith and hope, you can not have one without the other. Now this brings up an interesting issue for those who still hold to the old covenant law today...for where is the Levitical priesthood by which it is administered? The Levitical priesthood was a necessity for the administration of the old covenant laws, for the one simple reason, that since the law was a representation of the divine standard of conduct and character, yet it was constantly being broken by the people, therefore there needed to be a priesthood provided to the people to provide a ministry of mediation and reconciliation. It is for this reason that the law, and the priestly system was inseparable, but we see what happens in the next verse when there is change of this priesthood. , verse 12. "For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law."

As it states, a new priesthood, changes the law as we saw in Paul's writing to the Roman church that we read this morning, chapter 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be... what? Guilty before God." In verse 20, Paul goes on to say, that there is no justification by the keeping of the law in the sight of God. "Therefore by the deeds of the law, by maintaining and keeping the law, no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." The law does not bring with it salvation, the law brings with it the knowledge of Sin. Verse 21 " BUT NOW, the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, ( there is that progressive revelation again) bring witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe for there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Whome God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, though faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time his righteousness, that he might be the just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded, what law, or works? No, but by the law of faith therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, apart from the law." So again, keeping the law does not bring justification, it is only by faith through the blood of Jesus Christ that there is justification.

The problem with the old law, or rather the old Levitical priesthood, for the law itself is just and perfect and has accomplished exactly what was intended, but the issue with the priesthood of the old covenant was that that priests, are people just like everyone else they do were breakers of the law. Because of this, they were unable to offer up adequate and perfect sacrifices since they must first offer up sacrifices for themselves and their own sins before they could represent the people before God. Another problem, was the sacrificial system itself, the use of animals, which were unable to submit, or be aware of what was happening, the reality is that they were a poor substitute for the sacrifice needed to cover the sins of people which is why the sacrificial institution was unending, there was always a need for an animal to be sacrificed because it's blood did not truly atone for the sins. Both of these issues alone show without any doubt that there is issues with this old system, and that in itself is imperfect and unsatisfactory. The system was an example and a reminder of the sinful nature of mankind, and points to the need for a messiah.

That brings us to this change in priesthood, according to the order of Melchizedek, which is outside the order of the priesthood of Aaron which was the keepers of the law, this eternal priest king Jesus Christ does not need to offer sacrifices for himself, he is not in need of redemption, but rather was himself the willing sacrifice. Not like the clueless beasts of old, but a willing sacrifice taken from the humanity in which he was sent to reconcile to himself. Much like the priests being taken from among the people, only the blood of Jesus Christ, the righteous and perfect God Incarnate is a sufficient sacrifice of atonement. So this new priesthood, and new law that has been established is in Christ Himself, and it is a law of faith, as Abraham had which was accounted to him for righteousness.

After having gone through the book of Mark and reading the accounts of Jesus ministry and his confrontation with the Religious leaders of Israel at the time, now in light of this idea of him being the new priest, establishing a new law.. which side note, is not really new for it is the same that operated under Abraham, we can see why he was so despised, and why he was labeled a blasphemer by them. His arrival, even though it is the very thing that their scriptures foretold, it was an affront to their belief. Salvation is by faith, and has always been by faith, and not through the works of the law. So, its quite easy to see why they would have hated Jesus as they did.

Verse 13: For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar.” These Hebrews here, and even the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day would have been very familiar with the passage of Psalm 110's mention of the order of Melchizedek being attributed to the coming Messiah. This signified even then that the messiah would not come from the Levitical tribes, and also his kingly nature has its connection with the line of David, out of Judah which also ties into the promises concerning the coming Messiah would be a King like David but who's kingdom would be everlasting. Which we see here in verse 14, “ For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek there arises another priest who has come not according to the law of the a fleshly commandment but according to the power of an endless life. For he testifies, you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” There was an idea, which can be found in the Dead sea Scrolls that there would actually be 2 Messiah's one priestly, and one kingly. And this could also be something that the Author here is trying to instruct that in Christ, he is both the priest and the king.

As noted, his lineage is from another tribe, the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of the Levites, So his priesthood does not come from the law of fleshly commandment as it says here in verse 16, but it is different, it is like Melchizedek's having no beginning, and no end, where in Melchizedek it was figuratively, in Christ it is literal. This is not the Dead Sea Sects idea of two Messiahs, nor is the idea of the binding together of the two tribes in Christ as some believe, but it is Christ the king, who is priest of a different priesthood, who has established a new law which is written on the hearts of all those who believe on him through faith. So as Philip Houghton puts it, “ the argument of the author here runs as follows. “ the imperfection of the levitical system is implied by the very fact that, while that system is still functioning vigorously and without challenge, the psalmist mentions another order of priesthood whose priest is a priest forever, for there would have been no point in saying this if the system that was then in operation were effective and irreplaceable but this has become even more evident now that another priest who is no a levite and therefore of a different order, has appeared on the scene of history. In the nature of things, the fulfillment is clearer than the prediction. In Christ what was promised and foreshadowed has now come to pass. Again, progressive revelation becoming clearer as more is revealed.

In closing out this morning looking at the last 2 verses, verses 18-19 which state, “ For on the one had there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. Again, this is just another way of saying that the old has passed away and has been replaced by the new. The former commandment of the levitical priesthood lineage has been set aside, or canceled because of its weakness and unprofitableness in other words, its inability to provide the justification needed for sinners before a just and holy God. I must clarify though, as I had mentioned the law itself is perfect and holy, and it is not an issue of the law itself, but rather of sinful mankind. As Paul wrote, the law is a principle of life only to the man who fulfills the righteousness it prescribes, but to the law breaker it becomes an instrument of death. And that is the issue, mankind in its natural state is nothing more then sinful law breakers bringing upon themselves the full judgement of God's holy and just law.

This is why the distinction and understanding of the positions held by the new covenant theology has massive implications on the life of the believer. We who are in Christ, the priest not according to this fleshly law from the levitical order, but a priest of the spiritual law, we are not bound to this fleshly law. It serves its purpose of conviction, and condemnation and judgment to the law breakers, but through Christ we have been freed from this law. For as it says here, the law made nothing perfect, the law never provided salvation, for mankind is incapable of following the just and righteous law of God, so as our passage says here, on the other hand there is the bringing in of a better hope, which is through the law of Christ, the establishment of the new covenant in which he is the priest, and the king who's subjects are those of faith and love, not some forced outward obedience to a list of laws and traditions. But rather bound together in love toward God, through his son which is reflected in us toward one another. We who are Christs are of this tribe, of this Israel, the one bound in Christ blood, in whom he first loved us that he died for us so that we may be reconciled to him, being our eternal Priest and King in the order of Melchizedek.