

Hebrews 6:20 – 7:12

Considering the Greatness of Melchizedek

Now consider how great this man was – v. 4

The value of a man's religion can be gauged by the key person or persons of that religion. This is true in most any religion. The value of Islam may be measured by the character of Mohammed. The value of Judaism can be gauged by the character of Moses or Abraham or David. Or it's value could be gauged by the antiquity of its institutions – the Levitical system of worship or the temple in Jerusalem where their worship took place.

Paul realized this very thing and that explains why he devotes so much space to expounding the theme of the superior greatness of Christ. He is greater than the angels. He is greater than the prophets. He is greater than Moses. We've seen all these things already but we haven't been focusing on that theme in recent studies because ever since 5:11 through all of chp. 6 Paul has been on a diversion, so to speak. He mentioned Melchizedek back in 5:6 and again in 5:10 but then noted in v. 11 that he had many things to say about Melchizedek but he couldn't go directly into that subject because of the dullness of their hearing which made the things that Paul wanted to say hard to be uttered.

And so this led to a diversion in which Paul had to explain the impossibility of renewing one who had been enlightened and had tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come if such a person would fall away to renew him again. The apostle must have hoped that in his solemn warning as well as his expressed confidence in the Hebrews they would overcome their dullness and be ready for what he had to say in chp. 7.

They certainly would have been in great need of increased spiritual sensitivity to the truth of God's word for it is in this 7th chapter, especially, that Paul drops a bomb. This bombshell, if you will is found in v. 12 *For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.* And if the first explosion didn't work another explosion takes place in v. 18 *For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.*

The priesthood changed? The law changed or disannulled? It's important to understand what Paul is saying and what he's not saying. He's not saying that there was any change to the moral law. He is saying that there was now a major change to the ceremonial law. The Levitical priesthood was rendered obsolete. And the sacrificial system that had been a part of Jewish life for some 1400 years was now disannulled. You might well imagine the impact that such sayings would have had upon Paul's original readers of this epistle.

This was the kind of teaching that had created so much trouble for Paul among the Jews and even among the Jewish Christians. When Paul went back to Jerusalem against the advice of his peers and was apprehended in the temple the cry went out *Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place* (Acts 21:28). They thought that Paul was teaching against the moral law by teaching that salvation was by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And they thought Paul

was teaching against the ceremonial law by explaining that the Old Testament sacrifices were no longer necessary, hence, he was teaching against the temple.

It is in this epistle to the Hebrews that Paul has the chance to carefully explain himself regarding such accusations and especially now in this 7th chapter does Paul get to the heart of such teaching. And the question that naturally arises to the student of Hebrews would be – How does Paul go about it? How does Paul proceed to explain to them that the priesthood, which had been a part of Jewish life for generations is now changed and the ceremonial law, which they and their Fathers and their Father's Fathers would have observed is now disannulled?

The answer to these questions is that Paul directs their attention to an obscure character in the Old Testament by the name of Melchizedek. We find a very brief account of this character in Genesis 14 which reveals to us the victory that Abram gained over a confederation of some 5 Kings. The King of Sodom and the King of Gomorrah along with a couple of others were conquered when they tried to rebel against a King who had the rule over them all for some 12 years. The rebellion was suppressed and in the course of the battle, Abraham's nephew, Lot, had been taken into captivity.

When the news of Lot's captivity reached Abram he put together a militia made up of 318 of his servants and launched a surprised attack on the victorious King Chedorlaomer and his allies and Abram delivered Lot as well as the confederacy of Kings that had been defeated and taken captive. You may recall that the King of Sodom offered the spoils of the war to Abram but that Abram refused lest anyone say that the King of Sodom had made Abram rich. And at the same time this meeting took place between Abram and the King of Sodom we also read that Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought forth bread and wine and he was the priest of the most high God and he blessed Abram and received from Abram tithes of all.

It's interesting to note that the word *priest* occurs for the first time in the Bible in Gen. 14:18 with reference to Melchizedek. This incident in Genesis occurred, of course, hundreds of years before Moses and the institution of the Levitical priesthood. So we have this single historical narrative in Gen. 14 that introduces us to this character Melchizedek. The only other mention in the Old Testament that we have of him occurs in the 110th Psalm which we sang this morning. It is the 4th verse of that psalm that is quoted on a number of occasions here in Hebrews *The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou [art] a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*

So Paul's task was to convince the Hebrew believers of a change in the priesthood and a disannulling of the ceremonial law. And Paul would build his case by referencing this character, Melchizedek. The only exhortation in chp. 7 occurs in v. 4 where we read *now consider how great this man was.*

Our aim in considering this man is not the same as the Jews that are addressed in this epistle. You and I shouldn't need to be convinced that there has been a change in the priesthood or a disannulling of the ceremonial law. These things have been accepted in the

church for some two thousand years although I suppose that with so many crazy things that take place in Christianity today it's good to have the biblical warrant for disannulling the ceremonial law lest some new sect or cult suggest to us that the ceremonial law should still be practiced. Our primary aim, however, in studying Melchizedek should be to have impressed upon our hearts all the more the greatness of our Savior. Melchizedek, after all, typifies Christ. You remember what I said in my opening remarks how that the value of a man's religion can be gauged by the greatness of the key people associated with that religion. Christ is our foundation and so the greater the estimate we can have of His greatness the greater will be our understanding of the value of all that Christ is to us and all that Christ has done for us. These things are magnified to us in this 7th chapter of Hebrews.

And so this is what I want to focus on this morning in our study of this man, Melchizedek. I want us to be able to see the type but to see beyond him to the antitype.

Consider the Greatness of this Man

So our text reads. And in considering his greatness I want you to see how Melchizedek typifies Christ in His greatness.

I. Melchizedek Typifies the Greatness of Christ's Person

Our text tells us to *consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils*. It's important to note regarding this character Melchizedek that he was a man. That's a point that is not acknowledged by all. There are those who hold to the view that Melchizedek came in the form of a theophony – i.e. he was a preincarnate manifestation of Christ.

This view of Melchizedek is based on verse 3 which describes him as *Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually*. On the surface of it, this verse would seem to indicate that Melchizedek came out of nowhere when he appeared on the scene before Abraham. And since these descriptive phrases seem to point to a person who could not be an ordinary man, Melchizedek must be a preincarnate manifestation of Christ.

There are a number of problems with this interpretation of v. 3, however. To begin with, we've already learned back in Heb 5:1 that *every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things [pertaining] to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins*. The qualification for any and every priest was that he be taken from among men. It would be inappropriate to the qualification of the priesthood for Christ to appear as a priest and not truly be a man.

Another problem with the interpretation that views Melchizedek as a preincarnate manifestation of Christ is that the context from Melchizedek comes back in Gen. 14 implies that Abraham was not unfamiliar with Melchizedek as a priest of the Most High God. One commentator notes: *The most simple and probable opinion is that given by Josephus, that he was a pious Canaanitish prince; a personage eminently endowed by*

God, and who acted as the priest of his people. The implication seems very strong that Abraham knew and respected him as the priest of the Most High God.

Yet another problem with the notion of Melchizedek being a preincarnate manifestation of Christ is that you would find a singular instance in which Christ became a type of Himself. I believe these considerations lead us to the conclusion that Melchizedek was a man. We'll get the seeming problems of v. 3 in a moment but for now let's simply mark the fact that as a man, and as a great man that we're called upon to consider, having preeminence over the patriarch, Abraham, he serves to remind us that Christ was and is a man and that Christ must be a man in order to be our High Priest.

It seems like some time ago now that we considered Heb 2:17 *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto [his] brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things [pertaining] to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.* Some of you may recall that when we dealt with this verse I pointed out that the term *behooved* is a term that literally depicts an obligation. Christ was obligated to become a man, then, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest and make reconciliation for the sins of the people. So we note that our Savior is a man and that He's a great man, indeed we could truthfully call Him the greatest of men.

But in typifying the greatness of Christ's person, God's design is for Melchizedek to typify the deity of Christ as well. This is what accounts for what seems to be the difficulties of v. 3 where Melchizedek is described as *Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God.*

Barnes notes in his commentary: The phrase without father means, literally, one who has no father; one who has lost his father; one who is an orphan. Or it denotes one who is born after the death of his father... The word occurs often in these senses in the classic writers. It is morally certain, however, that the apostle did not use the word here in either of these senses, for there is no evidence that Melchizedek was fatherless in any of these respects. It was very important, in the estimation of the Jews, that the line of their priesthood should be carefully kept; that their genealogies should be accurately marked and preserved; and that their direct descent from Aaron should be susceptible of easy and certain proof. But the apostle says that there was no such genealogical table in regard to Melchizedek. There was no record made of the name either of his father, his mother, or any of his posterity. He stood alone.

Now, says the apostle, it is distinctly said in Ps 110:4 that the Messiah was to be a priest according to his order: and in this respect there is a remarkable resemblance, so far as the point of his being a priest (which was the point under discussion) was concerned. The Messiah thus, as a priest, **STOOD ALONE**. So Christ, like Melchizedek, was a solitary priest. But can we not say that what is said of Melchizedek regarding the absence of a priestly genealogy certainly conveys to us the truth of Christ that He is eternal.

Where His essential deity is concerned He is without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life. His goings forth, according to Micah are from everlasting. He has always been. And so we're reminded by Melchizedek that the absence of any genealogical record of his priesthood typifies for us the eternal deity of Christ and indeed the everlasting priesthood of Christ. *He ever liveth to make intercession for us* we read in v. 25. This certainly adds to the strength of our consolation and the fullness of our assurance, doesn't it? What a blessing to know that our High Priest is an high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (6:20).

And only by having a High Priest that is both God and man, two natures in One Person can we find One who can be our advocate before God. It takes a man to represent us to God and it takes God Himself, or the Son of God, to be precise, to make the kind of sacrifice that could prevail to cleanse us from our sins and satisfy God's justice and thus make us acceptable to God and bring us into the realm of God's favor.

So Melchizedek typifies the greatness of Christ's person. But would you consider next how:

II. Melchizedek Typifies the Greatness of Christ's Office

Note again from v. 1 that the greatness of this man that we're called to consider is found in that *this Melchizedek was king of Salem*, as well as *priest of the most high God*. Here is a man that was a king as well as a priest. You find these two offices coming together in this one man.

Nowhere in the Levitical order of priests do we find a son of Aaron who was both a priest and a king. We come close, I suppose, in the person of Samuel who was a judge in Israel, but Samuel preceded the days of the kings and indeed it was Samuel who established the office of king for the Israelites but he never occupied that office himself.

There would always be a dividing of these two offices throughout the history of Israel. And whenever a king tried to impose on the office of priest he met dreadful consequences. You might recall that it was king Saul who panicked when Samuel didn't show up on time to offer sacrifice before battling the Philistines, and so Saul offered the sacrifice himself and in so doing he unlawfully intruded into the office of a priest and it cost him his kingship.

And in 2Chron. 26 we have the account of King Uzziah entering the temple to burn incense. And as he attempts to usurp this priestly function he's opposed by the priest, Azariah, along with 80 others of the sons of Levi. They withstand king Uzziah (v. 18) which makes him angry but before he can vent his anger leprosy would arise in his forehead. The Lord smote him, we're told, and we find him both being thrust out of the temple and fleeing the temple and we go on to read that he spent the rest of his days in a separate house and was cut off from the house of the Lord.

So these two offices of priest and king were kept very distinct throughout the history of Israel and the distinction between them was jealously guarded by God Himself. But in

Melchizedek you find both offices merged. This certainly contributes to Paul's argument that the priesthood of Melchizedek was a superior priesthood to the Levitical priesthood. That's the main point that Paul is teaching this 7th chapter of Hebrews. The one who blesses ranks higher than the one who receives the blessing so Melchizedek had a higher rank than Abraham himself. And the one who receives tithes has a higher rank than the one who pays tithes and so again Abraham must be viewed as being of an inferior rank to Melchizedek.

And since the sons of Levi were yet in the loins of Abraham when Abraham received the blessing and paid tithes to Melchizedek the conclusion becomes a forgone conclusion that the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to the priesthood of the sons of Aaron. And Christ is of the order of this superior priesthood of Melchizedek. Commentators tell us that v. 4 of the 110th Psalm was generally recognized even among the Jews throughout their history as being a Messianic Psalm. They may not have appreciated the full significance of the statement but they knew the statement applied to the Messiah which reads *The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou [art] a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*

And so we find in Christ a Mediator who is our prophet, priest and king. He is the greatest of the prophets and He is of a superior order of priests and He is king of kings and Lord of Lords who rules and reigns over all. Let us beware at all times of underestimating His greatness. This was the danger the Hebrews were facing. They were tempted to return to an inferior priesthood that offered inferior sacrifices which could never prevail to remove sins the way Christ's once for all sacrifice would prevail.

What a blessing to worship and serve such a Savior! What confidence or assurance we can have in One who earned the right to rule the world by virtue of His atoning death. He rules today and in His rule He also makes intercession for His people. And what this means is that our Lord is also our advocate and representative before God. And in His rule and intercession we live in a day of salvation when the benefits of His atoning death are still being applied to those for whom He died in every kingdom and nation and tribe and people.

Consider the greatness of this man, our text tells us. Because in the greatness of Melchizedek we find foreshadowed the greatness of Christ. He typifies the greatness of Christ's person and he typifies the greatness of Christ's office. Would you consider with me finally how:

III. Melchizedek Typifies the Greatness of Christ's Accomplishment

In v. 2 of Hebrews 7 we're given a divinely inspired interpretation of the name of Melchizedek. Look at vv. 1,2 again: *For this Melchisedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.*

It's always a blessing when the Scripture itself provides the interpretation of a thing. There is no room for controversy or speculation under such a circumstance. And the thing we're now told about Melchizedek is not only that he was a king and a priest but was by interpretation *King of righteousness* and also *King of peace*. The name Melchizedek is a compound word in the Hebrew made up of 2 words – *King* and *righteousness* – that makes the interpretation fairly simple doesn't it?

And the word *Salem* is generally considered to be a reference to the city of Jerusalem which means peace. Some would translate Jerusalem as *city of peace*. And so we have the kingship and the priesthood of Melchizedek interpreted for us with a two-fold meaning – righteousness and peace.

What a beautiful emblem or type this character becomes of what was accomplished by Christ. I've referred to Mt. 5:17 a number of times in the course of my preaching. I take it to be a very important key to the sermon on the mount when we hear Christ say: *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.* Christ came, in other words, to fulfill all righteousness.

I'm reminded of His words to John the Baptist when John was reluctant to baptize Christ. He said to Him in Mt. 3:15 *Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.* And this is what Christ accomplished in His life and His death. He fulfilled all righteousness. He lived a righteous life and then He willingly fulfilled righteousness by paying our debt to the broken law.

It is His righteousness that we have all received when we called upon Him by faith to save us. It is His righteousness that qualifies us for heaven for His righteousness is what exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. It is His righteousness imputed to us that gives us a perfect standing with God for time and for eternity. It is, as Paul calls it in Ro. 5:17 *the gift of righteousness*. And Paul goes on to say in that verse that those that receive this gift of righteousness and abundance of grace are the ones that reign in life. That's one of my favorite verses in the New Testament because it shows us how to reign in life or how to be on top of things in life. If we receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness then we should be on top of life rather than having life on top of us.

And why is this so? We return to the interpretation of Melchizedek. It's because he is King of righteousness and also King of peace. It's because we've received Christ's righteousness that our minds can be at peace. When we understand that Christ has fulfilled righteousness for us in His life and in His death then our conscience can be at peace because we know that it is a right thing for God to do when He receives us and when He forgives and cleanses us from all sin.

I love to underscore that part of the familiar verse in 1Jn. 1:9 *He is faithful AND JUST to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Do you begin to see how great your Savior is. Melchizedek, we're told was a great man and we're to consider his greatness. But Melchizedek, for all his greatness was but a man. But the fact that he was a priest and a king and the fact that he was King of Righteousness and King of Peace makes

him a fitting type to point us to the greatness of Christ. Remember what I said in my opening remarks. The value of a man's religion is traceable to the character of the key figures in that religion. That being the case we can certainly affirm that our religion is very valuable because there is no Savior like our Savior. He is our righteousness and He is our peace. He has made our peace through the blood of His cross and this enables us to be at peace even in the midst of a world that knows little or nothing of peace.

It's no wonder that Paul could say earlier back in chp. 6 that we have a hope that functions as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast. I wonder this morning if the peace of God that passes all understanding is your portion? It should be. Your King is the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace. He has supplied what you lacked and has removed anything and everything that could stand between you and God.

I trust that the reality of these things will be ministered to your souls this day and that as you consider the greatness of this man, Melchizedek, you'll be enabled in the power of the Spirit to see beyond this man to the One who is indeed the source of our righteousness and the source of our peace.