

Melchizedek. No one seems to name their kid “Melchizedek”, do they. Samuel, Noah, Ruth, Naomi, Esther; James, Andrew, ... Michael.... .. “Melchizedek” doesn’t seem to get a guernsey.

To help us to understand today’s reading, we’re going to kick-off with a bit of background from the Old Testament.

In Genesis 14, there’s an account of a Battle, followed by a religious encounter. And if we were just reading Genesis, we might just read on through it, and not give it a whole lot more thought. But it’s an encounter that **becomes** important, because David wrote a song about it (Psalm 110).

And that Psalm, is what’s known as a “messianic Psalm” – it is a song, about looking forward to the coming of the Messiah... – A great king – one who is high above every other king. A king whom the people will willingly submit themselves to.

And **this** King, would become a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek...

And so, the Messiah (Christ), would not only be King, the Messiah would also be priest. And He won’t be like a normal priest – He would be priest forever. And so we realise that the appearance of Melchizedek is teaching us something about Christ.

So, let’s begin with a little history lesson.

In Genesis 14, we're in a period well before the People of Israel came to the promised land. It's a period where Abraham is camping in that sort of area. Anyway, there's a pretty big battle (5 kings who have come up from Assyria, fighting against 4 kings). BTW, in this period, it seems a King, was a ruler of a city and its surrounds...

Anyway, 2 of the kings (the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah) were routed.– they fled. And their enemy captured all of their possessions/provisions, and they captured many of their people. And among the prisoners of war (which then become slaves), was Lot (the nephew of Abraham).

So, when Abraham got word of this, he mobilised his own forces, to rescue his nephew. He had 318 trained soldiers on staff. And he pursued the army, and we're not given many details, but it would have been a massive undertaking.

If you have a look at the map on the screen, the red line shows where Abraham marched his troops.

At a moment's notice, Abraham and his soldiers marched from Hebron (East of the Dead Sea), all the way up to Dan (North of Sea of Galilee), where they came to battle. (Google Maps >250km they had to march). And he defeated them, and then he pursued them all the way past Damascus (another >50km).

And he captured all of the baggage (possessions (spoils of war)), along with his Nephew Lot, and everybody else that had been taken away as Prisoners of War.

It was an amazing victory.

And when Abraham returned, let me read from V17.

Genesis 14:17-24 (ESV)

¹⁷ 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.

And Abraham didn't even keep any of the plunder for himself. **His** share of the plunder, and all of the people, he returned to their homes.

So, who's this Melchizedek bloke?

Melchizedek, was the King of Salam. And most commentators (along with ancient documents), believe that Salem, was an earlier name for what became known as Jeru-Salem (Jerusalem)... And it means "Peace".

And so, we have the King of Jerusalem – the King of Peace,,, who is also a priest... And this King of Jerusalem, is the one

who brings bread and wine to the faithful. It's starting to build a picture of the Christ, isn't it...

And something else that really jumps out here, is up until this point, it seems that (when it comes to God) the only real and faithful interaction that's been going on, is with Abraham. But we realise at **this** point, that God has been at work in a place we haven't even known about.

And as Christians, this is important for us to remember. We might get really focussed on the ministry that our own little patch/branch of the church is doing (or more importantly, what God is doing through us), but God is at work in **other** churches in this town, and that's why we pray for every other church.

We pray, that they would:

- hold true to His word;
- proclaim His word;
- be a people who worship Him;
- And give glory to Him in this town.

And we pray that:

- that they would grow:
 - in faith;
 - in love; and
 - in number.

So, here's Melchizedek. He's described as **priest of God Most High**

And he spoke a blessing over Abraham, and praised God and gave glory to God in doing it.

Now, when Jesus came along, the religious establishment couldn't handle Him. And they rejected Him.

In John 9, the religious leaders said of Jesus:

John 9: ^(ESV)29 *We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."*

You see, they didn't learn from Melchizedek. They didn't learn that God doesn't always work through their known channels. And they didn't learn that the Prince of Peace, is the King who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

And when they rejected Jesus, they rejected God's own Son... You see, they didn't learn from Psalm 110, that there will come a day, when this mighty king, will sit in their judgment.

Alright, so that sets the scene about Melchizedek. What does Hebrews have to say about it?

BTW, this is going to get pretty deep. Remember last week was about "going deeper". Well, chapter 6 was Hebrews preparing us for chapter 7.

As we've been going through Hebrews, up until now, it's been a bit awkward for me, because we've already touched on Melchizedek 3 times (twice in Chapter 5 and once in chapter 6). And I've sort of given a bit of information, to get us through.

But now in Chapter 7 it's all about Melchizedek and how that relates to Jesus being our **new** and only High Priest...

So, what have we already learned in Chapters 5 & 6?

At one time:

- the High Priest, was the intermediary between sinful man, and our Holy God.

Now, **Jesus** is the intermediary.

- the High Priest would make sacrifices, to atone for the sins of the people.

But now, **Jesus** has given Himself as the sacrifice. And so, no further sacrifices are required. He was the once and for all perfect sacrifice.

- the High Priest used to have to get himself right with God before he could help us.

But now, Jesus, Who even though He was tempted, remains sinless. And yet, because He lived as a human, and because He suffered the same temptations that we do, He's a good man to have in our corner. He is compassionate and understanding, in the way He deals with us.

So, let's get into Chapter 7.

1. Jesus is The Forever Priest.

Firstly, Jesus is the Forever Priest.

With most of the important people in the Bible, there's evidence of a genealogy – a list of their ancestors, so you know who they are. With Melchizedek, there's no record of this, and there's no record of his birth or his death.

And Hebrews says, “In this way, he resembles the Son of God”, because the Son of God continues as a priest forever. And we’ll talk more about that shortly.

2. The Greatness of Jesus

Secondly, we learn about the greatness of Jesus.

With the Old Testament priesthood, out of the 12 tribes of Israel, it was the tribe of Levi, who were set aside to be priests. And they were given that duty, as a reward of their faithfulness toward God.

(but I don’t have time to explain that nowⁱ)

But all the priests came from the tribe of Levi. (Levitical priesthood). (The tribe of Levi is the tribe that Moses belonged to).

But Hebrews makes the point that Melchizedek was **greater** than the Levitical priests. And here’s the reasoning: Abraham was a more important ancestor than Levi (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi). And yet Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek. And so, that means Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, and so he’s far greater than the Levitical priests.

And then Hebrews takes that one step further.

Tithes and offerings were given to mortals – to humans who live, and then die... **Jesus** is much greater than that. **Jesus** is immortal. They killed Him on the cross, but He rose again. The fact that Jesus lives, and lives eternally, is testimony to His greatness.

3. Perfection

Thirdly, “Perfection”.

If perfection could have been achieved through the old way of doing things (Old Covenant / old priesthood), well, that would be fine. But was perfection ever achieved? No.

All we have to do is read through the history of God’s chosen people, and how:

- their kings were evil;
- their priests were corrupt;
- the people were godless...

It was so corrupt, that when God’s own Son arrived, they hated Him and they crucified Him...

And so, the Old Covenant could not achieve perfection. The Levitical Priesthood had failed. The **High** Priests who were the descendants of Aaron, failed. And so, God did something new.

“Under new management”

You know how sometimes a business gets sold, and the new owners want to let all of their potential customers know, that all of the failings/empty promises/bad dealings of the past are gone, they put up a sign. And that sign says: “Under new management”...

God is doing a new thing through Jesus. Let it be known, “Under new management”. There is a change in the priesthood. The old priesthood/high-priesthood, is gone. No longer, will the “**im**perfect” suffice. We are now under new management, with a new High Priest.

And so, perfection, has arrived. Completion, has now arrived, in Jesus Christ, our new High Priest.

4. Legality Vs Divine Power.

Fourthly, Legality Vs Divine Power.

The old priesthood, was based upon a requirement of the Law. The Law said, the Levites were the priests. The Law said, that from **within** the tribe of Levi, a descendant of Aaron would be set aside as the **High** Priest...

That cut Jesus out. Jesus wasn't from the tribe of Levi, and he definitely wasn't a direct descendant of Aaron. He was from the tribe of Judah.

But Jesus has something better than that: Divine power (the Power of God).

V16 the power of an indestructible life..

In Psalm 110, they sang about Jesus when they sang
“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”

5. The main point. A better hope.

And this is where we come to the main point. A better hope.

The Law made nothing perfect. V18 is quite blunt around the failures of the Old Covenant (or more truthfully, it's "The failures of us humans, under the Old Covenant").

¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect)

You see, the Old Covenant Law, what it does, is it helps us to see God and know God, and know His ways... But it doesn't enable us to achieve it.

"I love mountains", says the bloke who lives in St George.

I don't know why. It's probably because I grew up at Goondiwindi where there's no hills. But whenever I see a hill, or a mountain, I want to climb it. And for a little while, I did used to do a little bit of rock climbing, until I dislocated my shoulder (that really put a dampener on things)... and I haven't felt safe to climb since...

And yet, whenever I see a steep mountain or a cliff, I still want to climb it. I want to get to the top, and I want to look out... I see that mountain as a thing of beauty, and I want to climb it,,, but sometimes I just can't... (too big/steep)

And the law of God was like that. It is good/holy/wonderful.... Those whose hearts are inclined toward God, love it. We want to live it / achieve it.... but it remains, an unscalable mountain.

And so, the Law could get a person on the path toward God, but they could never complete it.

And the word “perfect”, is about completion. *Like an artist, putting the finishing touches on his masterpiece... “Ahh. Now it’s perfect”...* The Law could never get us, to that point.

And so, with Jesus Christ, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

The coming of the Messiah/Lord Jesus Christ, was always God’s plan. The Law helps us to understand that we don’t have the ability to achieve perfection. And so, it prepares us for the coming of Jesus, who **can** achieve perfection...

And for us to become perfected/completed, 2 things need to happen.

The first, is something that God had to do: The former commandment (Old Covenant), was put aside. That’s why we don’t have priests and sacrifices any more. And whenever the Scriptures talk about “The Law being put aside”, it’s not talking about “righteous living” – that’s never been put aside. It’s talking about the old religious system that was in place before the coming of Jesus.

And the second thing that needs to happen for us to be perfected through Jesus Christ, is something we have to do. a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

We draw near to God, by coming to Jesus Christ.

So, that's the main point: A better hope. a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God by coming to Jesus.

6. Permanency by an Oath of God.

Alright, so if it's changed once already, what's to say it's not going to change again?

And so, the sixth point, is Permanency, by an oath of God.

We live in a world of “fads”. And these days,

- *the things people believe;*
- *what they think they know;*
- *what they choose to follow,*

seems to change on a weekly/daily basis...

The speed in which social media can change attitudes and beliefs of a generation, is astonishing... When enough people get involved in a pile-on, “Oh, I don't want to be on the wrong side of that”... Those with the loudest voice, quickly sway anyone isn't strong enough to think for themselves...

And when it comes to religion, people flex and sway, like never before.

Let me tell you, the truth of the matter: There **was** a change. It happened 2000 years ago, and the change is permanent. Jesus became the **only** way to God. Jesus **still is** the only way to God. Jesus **will always be** the only way to God.

"The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
'You are a priest forever.' "

And so, searching for a new religious experience anywhere other than Jesus, might be fashionable, but it's pointless. Jesus is the **only** hope. He's the **better** hope....

And that ²² ... makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. It's a certainty.

7. Permanence = Perfecting opportunity.

Which brings us to point No.7. Permanence = Perfecting opportunity.

One of the problems of being in a democracy, is our governments are afraid to make the hard decisions they need to. You see, in Australia at the moment, we are a people who are so greedy, and so selfish, we are living way beyond our means.

We want:

- *to pay less tax;*
- *to have more government benefits;*
- *higher wages (so we can have more stuff);*
- *the government to bail us out when we're flooded, or when there's a drought;*
- *and we don't want to take the responsibility ourselves...*

What we need, is a leader, who will step in and say, "Listen you lot, this is going to be tough, but we're all going to have

to pull our belts in, and over the next 10 years, we're going to work harder, spend less, pay off our debts, and stop living beyond our means...

Why won't our governments do that? I'll tell you why. It's because the next election is only 3 years away. They may have the best economic plan ever, but their government isn't permanent, and so they won't be there long enough to be able to see it through.

I've had my rant. Now, let's get away from politics.
Jesus, is our permanent High Priest.

And because He is our permanent High Priest, He can get the job done. He can bring us all the way through, to perfection...

You and I, can have every confidence, to start following Jesus. And even when we fail, we can have confidence in this:
V²⁵ ... he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

When we fail, and then come to Jesus and ask for forgiveness, we're not going to come to a closed door, with a sign that says "permanently closed"... Our Lord always lives, to pray for us – to intercede on our behalf, before God.

8. Perfection of the Devine Son.

And we can trust Him, because He is perfect. **he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him**

All the other High Priests, had to offer daily sacrifices. They had to make sacrifices for their own sins. And then they had to make sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people. And they had to do it every day.

If we were still living under the Old Covenant, the old meat-works out of town, would be the perfect building for us as a church... Cheap too... But we don't make sacrifices any more. Why? Because the vegans/PETA would hate us (RSPCA have outlawed sacrifice)? No. Because that has all passed away.

Jesus (the Son of God), is perfect. He is sinless. He never has to make a sacrifice for His own sins. And because Jesus (the perfect Son of God) died on the cross, He became the perfect sacrifice, that never has to be re-done.

When we meet together for communion, we are not re-sacrificing Jesus. We are doing what we are told to do – we are remembering when the perfect sacrifice was made. The perfect sacrifice, that was good enough, to atone for every sin, forever.

Our Lord is described here as:

- innocent. There is no wrong in Jesus;
- unstained. No mud can stick, no matter what anyone says about Jesus;

- separated from sinners. The only way to come to Jesus, is through baptism. All of our sins are washed away; and
- exalted above the heavens.

Isn't it amazing, that our Lord, who is so high, and so much greater than us, cares deeply for you and me.

No sin is so great, that He won't forgive us. Our past can be left behind, as we draw near to God, and embrace a better hope.

To finish up, I want to come back to the main point, and summarise what this means for us, with two sentences from the reading.

The first sentence comes from V18

¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a **better** hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

The second sentence comes from V25

²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Jesus is the only way to God. The only way to draw near to God, is through Jesus.

And because Jesus is perfect, He can save us to the uttermost.

- He **will** take away our sins; and
- He **will** totally transform us

He prepares us, by perfecting us for eternity.

When we fail, He intercedes for us, before God in Heaven.
And the warranty don't ever run out. Our Lord is forever.
He'll never let us down.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
we thank You for Your great mercy, love, and foresight.

We thank You for Your Son,
our Great High Priest,
our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank You, for the better hope we now have.
We thank You, that through His once and for all
perfect sacrifice,
He is able to save, to the uttermost,
those who draw near to You through Him.

And Lord, we do this.
Psalm 110 says:

Your people will offer themselves freely
on the day of Your power,
in holy garments.

Yes, Lord, we do this.
We offer ourselves to You.
Not because it's the Law,
but because You are the way.

And we come in holy garments,
not because we have been so good,
but because You have been so merciful.
And because You have forgiven us,
and clothed us in righteousness.

And Lord, in faith we know that
You are able to save us to the uttermost,
Because You are eternal;
Because You are faithful; and
and because You hold dear,
those who come to You.

We praise You,
Lord Jesus,
our Great High Priest.
Forever.
And Ever,
Amen.

ⁱ Moses and Joshua were up on the mountain receiving the 2 tablets of stone (10 commandments), and they were up there a long time, and so the people of Israel thought that God had deserted them (& Moses & Joshua)...

And so, when Moses & Joshua came down from the mountain, the people were running amuck. They'd made themselves this golden calf and they were singing & dancing & worshipping it. "You're the one who led us out of Egypt"...

And Moses called out, "Anyone who's faithful to YHWH, The God of Israel, come to me. And it was Moses' own tribe (the Levites) who came. And it is because of that act of faithfulness to God, that in time, they were rewarded by becoming the tribe of priests.

Now, the worldly side of Michael doesn't really figure that as a reward... When the other 11 tribes were given land, the Levites were given very little, because they wouldn't be farmers. And yes, it was an honour to serve at the temple of God, but at times it was really tough for them. When the people didn't give their tithe, the Levites had nothing to eat... And if you're someone like me who loves farming: No, you can't be a farmer – you've gotta be a priest...

Anyway, that's why the priests came from the tribe of Levi. (Levitical priesthood).