

Heb. 7:13-28 The Superiority of Jesus' Priesthood (part 1)

Last week we spoke the entire time about the idea of “perfection,” which can also be translated as “completed” or “fulfilled.” And his point is that Aaron’s priesthood and the Levitical system under the Law of Moses were insufficient. But, the priesthood of Christ is sufficient and vastly superior to the old. This is why, over and over the author exhorts those Hebrew Christians not to go back to that system. If they do, it will do them no good. For the priesthood of Jesus is better and superior, and in fact “perfects” or “fulfills” or “completes” what was lacking in the old priesthood under Mosaic Law. Today, I want to continue this topic and work through more truths as to why Jesus’ priesthood is superior. And I will do my best to apply these truths to our lives today. I have 3 more truths this morning found in vv. 13-19. 1) A completely different order, 2) Indestructible, and 3) Into God’s presence.

1. Jesus is superior because his priesthood is of a completely different order. Here, the author’s point is that the priesthood of Jesus is not like Aaron’s at all, but **AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK**, which is completely different. Look at vv. 13-14: **“For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.”** Jesus is not even from the tribe of Levi. He is of the tribe of Judah. And **ONLY** the tribe of Levi, Aaron and his sons, could serve in the tabernacle . . . at the altar. The tribe of Judah never served in this way . . . at the altar. In other words, according to the “law” (v. 11), that is the Law of Moses . . . the system of worship given under Moses . . . the order of the priesthood and all its’ ceremonies . . . has come to an end. Why? Because with Jesus, there is a **COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PRIESTHOOD**. He serves at a different altar. **(This is why I think there is a change in the law as well. To what? The Law of love! This is at the heart of what it means to be a new covenant Christian.)**

Think about it. God never said that the Levites would continue forever. But, he did say that **ONE** from the tribe of Judah would sit on David’s throne forever. **THEY** (the Levites) had their place in God’s history of revelation and instruction. But, the priesthood of Jesus was of a completely different order. The priesthood of Jesus is not in accord with the Law of Moses and its prescriptions given under the old Levitical system, since he hails from the tribe of Judah. And the OT prophesied of this new king who would also be a priest. (See Ps. 110:4)

I think of the Royal Family in England. Who can be a king or a queen? It must be someone from the family. There must be proven lineage. We don’t get this here in the USA. But for Kristen, who comes from the Commonwealth of Australia, this is important! The kings and queens **MUST** come from the family. If they are not of the family, they **DO NOT QUALIFY!** Now, to the Jews it will be no surprise that the Messiah, the King, comes from the tribe of Judah. There are many prophecies of his human lineage. The **PROBLEM** for the Jews is not his kingship, but his **PRIESTHOOD**. As a priest, Jesus does not come from the “right” family. But the author’s point is that God has promised that another priesthood would come, not from Aaron and the Levites, but from the order of Melchizedek. This is how Jesus can also be of the Tribe of Judah.

Now, it is very interesting to me that this word “descended” is the not the normal word used to show that someone came from a particular tribe or family. It is the word used to describe the “rising of the sun.”

Do you remember Balaam? He is the one with the talking donkey. As Israel came out of Egypt the people of Moab (the Moabites) were afraid and they hired the witchdoctor, the great spiritual seer, of their day to pronounce a curse on Israel. But instead of a curse, what does he do? Well, God speaks to him and tells him EXACTLY what to say. And on 4 different occasions the prophetesses a blessing. But, in this blessing of Israel IN THAT DAY, he speaks of a new king, a priest/king who would come from the tribe of Judah. In his 4th prophesy he says, **“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel . . .”** (Num. 24:17). Here we see the same word. Also in Zech. 6:12 that says, **“Behold, the man whose name is the Branch (same word) for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD.”** Let’s move on.

2. Jesus is superior because his priesthood is indestructible. Look at vv. 15-17: **“This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him, ‘You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.’** The argument here is simple. The priests under the Law of Moses had to be born of the Tribe of Levi. They must prove their “bodily” descent to qualify as a priest. And as we’ve seen, they began their work as a priest at 25 and their work finished at the age of 50. They “lived” and they “died.” But, the author says Jesus’ priesthood was after another order, one that is indestructible. As Ps. 110:4 says concerning Jesus: **“You are a priest forever.”** In other words, the Levitical priesthood is founded upon genealogy, the right family tree that comes and goes. But, the priesthood of Jesus is of a different nature, after the “order” of Melchizedek, who . . . 7:3 **“is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.”**

Now, there are some who say this verse speaks to Jesus’ deity. Others say v. 16 speaks of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. And YES, BOTH are CERTAINLY true. But, the emphasis I believe is on the Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. ALL Levitical priests die. But, Jesus is a priest who has triumphed over death forever. His life will never be brought to an end! The key is the word “forever.” The priests of the old covenant could not conquer death. But, the priesthood of Jesus is “indestructible.” Death could not hold him!

His priesthood is based on an “indestructible life.” I believe the author is referring to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Today, as Christians, as followers of Jesus, as those believe in Him, the basis of our faith is not upon the systems or religions of this world upon which death resides. Buddah lived and he died. Muhamed lived and he died. All the greatest prophets and kings of this world lived and died. The governments of this world come and go. Peoples and civilizations rise and fall. Why? . . . Because of the great enmity that God has placed upon sinful Adam and all his kin. Brothers and sisters, why do you think this world is so fearful of death? Why do you think we do everything we can to prolong or even imagine there is some “fountain of youth?” It is because we cannot escape what we know to be true! This world is literally a “culture of

death.” And for everyone in this room and in this world, death is closer today than it was yesterday. Therefore, do not put your faith in the things that will die . . . that are “destructible.” This is the author’s point for those Hebrew Christians who were considering going back to the old priesthood. It was good! It served its purpose. But, it was “destructible.” But, Jesus, on the other hand, as the Son of God, was without sin. And yes, he did lay down his life. But, unlike the other priests, he offered himself as a spotless lamb, a perfect sacrifice. And yes, he died! But . . . death could not hold him. After 3 days, he rose from the dead, which makes his priesthood of a different nature, after the order of Melchizedek.

To finish this truth, let’s read together.

Pastor: But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Cor. 15:20-22).

Congregation: When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:54-57)

Pastor: Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Cor. 15:58)

Congregation: Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.

Pastor: So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” (Rom. 6:8–14 [ESV](#))

Brothers and sisters, Jesus’ priesthood is superior because it is indestructible.

3. Jesus is superior because his priesthood brings human beings into God’s presence. Look at vv. 18-19: “**For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.**” Before I get to this specific truth in v. 19, I need to speak of v. 18 for a moment. If you remember last week, we spent our time on the fact that old priesthood under Mosaic Law was not complete. It was not sufficient. In v. 18 here he says it was “weak” and “useless.” Now, for its time, it was not “useless” in and of itself. It was good. It was right. It came to Israel through a holy God. So my question is: “*What is the problem?*” Why would the author say it was “weak” and “useless”? You know the answer! It is

because of SIN, and the great “enmity” the great “gulf” between a holy God and sinful men, it could not atone for sins.

Brothers and sisters, this is the problem with the world. They are trying to cover their sins. They are trying to do good works. They are trying to justify themselves before God. They say, “I’m not such a bad person. I do my best.” But, at the end of the day, they are still frustrated. They continue, over and over and over, day after day after day, year after year, trying to make themselves look “good” to everyone, and especially to God. In principle what are they doing? . . . They have some inkling of some standard of righteousness out there somewhere. Concerning the Gentiles, Paul speaks of this truth in Romans 1-3. He says that “by nature” they sometimes do what the law requires (speaking of the Law of Moses) In Rom. 2:15 says: **“For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them . . .”** And this truth . . . in principle . . . applies to the Jews of Paul’s day as well. They look at the Law of Moses and they are trying to obey. They also are trying to be good, and in some way be justified by the works of that law. And then in Rom. 3:9 Paul asks, “What then? Are we Jews any better off?” To which, he answers his question: **“No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: None is righteous, no, not one.”** This is why the Law of Moses and the priesthood under that law, is . . . according to v. 18, **“weak” and “useless” (for the law made nothing perfect).**

The Law of Moses and the priesthood of Levi under the Law of Moses was given to the people of Israel and anyone who would come to God through Israel, for THAT TIME . . . as they looked forward to the Messiah, who would be the great High Priest, the ONE who would “*perfect*” or “*fulfill*” or “*complete*” what was lacking in that covenant. Let me ask, “*Did any priest of the old system ever fulfill ALL of what the Law of Moses commanded?*” We could go further back and ask the same question: “Did Adam?” “Did Noah?” “Did Moses?” “What about David or Solomon?” Or any man or woman that descended from Adam? No! What about you? Of course not! In this way, this priesthood under Mosaic Law was “useless” and “weak.”

One illustration: Let’s say you had to cross the Pacific Ocean from Sydney Australia to Los Angeles, and you were given two choices: 1) A life preserver, or 2) A Cruise liner. Which will you take? Well, only the 2nd choice would be effective. (though this illustration still falls short). In the same way the old covenant is ineffective. Look back at v. 11: **“Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood . . . what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek . . .”** This is why in the Book of Revelation John weeps when no one is able to open the scroll: **“And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (Rev. 5:2-5).** Brothers and sisters, as you consider your best works before God and know they fall short, **“WEEP NO MORE!”**

The old covenant reminds us of sin and death. It was not effectual to forgive sins . . . And because it could not cover our sins, it also could not bring a sinner into the presence of God. The blood of bulls and goats was “weak” and “useless” do so. And, yes, there was “hope” in the old covenant, but only as it pointed to the better hope of the high priest who, laid down his life as a sinless sacrifice, And, as we’ve seen, he conquered death. And, he ascended to heaven where He now sits where? . . . AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD. This is why Paul can say to the Ephesians and us: “We are seated in the heavenlies with him” (Eph. 2:6). According to v. 19, with this new covenant in Christ, we actually “draw near to God.”

Since the fall of Adam, sinful mankind has not been able to “draw near to God.” Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden where He walked with them. And this is the great problem of mankind, the loss of the presence of God. Now, it is true that God is omnipresent, and He holds all things together. And as Paul says to those in Athens, “**He is not far from each of us**” (Acts 17:27). But, at the end of the day, there is nothing we can do to regain God’s presence with us. And the best we can do under the old priesthood is for the high priest to enter the holy of holies once a year. And the holy of holies was only a picture of the throne room of God in heaven. This earthly priest could never take us there! But, today, Christ has gone beyond the curtain and entered heaven itself.

This means that NOW, in Christ, we have access to God 24/7. In closing look over to Heb. 19: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:19–23)