

“The Bringing in of a Better Hope”
(Hebrews 7:11-25)

Introduction: Last week, the author introduced us to a very mysterious person in the Old Testament by the name of Melchizedek. This man was the king of a city called Salem, which perhaps was the ancient name of Jerusalem. He was also a priest of the Most High God. He was the one who came out to meet Abraham after the slaughter of the kings, after Abraham had led the men of his house out in battle against them, in order to rescue his nephew Lot. Remember that the author held this man out to us as an early picture or type of our Lord Jesus Christ in His priestly office. He was the one who was “made like the Son of God,” who, “abides a priest forever.” He also pointed out to us that, whoever this person was, he was even greater than the greatest of the patriarchs, namely Abraham. This was significant, because if he was, that also made him greater than Levi, one of Abraham’s yet unborn great-grandchildren, for the father is always considered to be greater than his children. Now the reason why the author pointed out this man was to prepare us for what we will see tonight. He was laying the groundwork of what will take up a large portion of the remainder of his sermon, namely, that God has brought in, through Jesus, a better covenant than that of the Old Covenant, and a better priesthood than that of Aaron’s. And with the bringing in of the New, the Old is obsolete and about to be abolished.

What he shows us this evening is that

Because the Levitical priesthood was not able to make us perfect, it has now been set aside to make room for a better hope in Christ.

I. First of all, how do we know that God has set aside the Levitical priesthood? This would not be difficult for you or me to accept. But for the Jewish mind, it would be quite a bit different. This was something they were raised with. This was something that was instituted by God through the prophet Moses. There would have to be some pretty good reasons for leaving it and something pretty good put in its place, if you were still to have any hope of finding fellowship with God and being received into His favor. The author here provides his audience with some very good reasons.

- A. The first reason he gives is that God Himself has raised up another priest according to the order of Melchizedek, and not that of Aaron.
1. He writes, “Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood . . . 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” (v. 11)?
 2. If the Aaronic priesthood could have brought perfection, that is, if it was able to make a man perfect, and therefore worthy to enter into heaven and eternal glory, why would the Lord need to raise up another priest of a different order? The point is that He wouldn’t.
 - a. If you had something that could do a perfect job, you wouldn’t look around for something to take its place.
 - b. If you had a car that was the fastest in the world, you wouldn’t be busy looking around for one that was faster.
 - c. If you had more money than you could ever spend or give away, you wouldn’t

- worry about trying to make any more money. There wouldn't be any need for it.
- d. And if you had a priesthood which was able to make you perfect before God, you wouldn't need to replace it. It already fulfills what a priesthood was made for.
 - e. Therefore, the fact that God raised up another priest, of another order, besides that which already existed, meant that that priesthood could not make a person perfect. This is why God raised up another priesthood, and this is why the Levitical priesthood is being abolished.
- B. The second reason he gives so that his audience would know that God has set aside the Levitical priesthood, is that God has changed the Law. He writes, "For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also."
1. Now when a priesthood is instituted, there must be a law which goes with it to explain how it works.
 - a. It is like the set of directions that comes with something that you buy. It tells you how to put it together and how to make it work.
 - b. Or these laws are like the rules and regulations in the army, navy or airforce which tell each person in them how to conduct themselves in their different offices and responsibilities, so that there will be order and regularity.
 - c. God set down a law at the institution of the Levitical priesthood to regulate who may be a priest, what the priest was to do, and how he was to do it.
 - d. I believe that it is this law which the author has in mind here.
 - (i) This would better fit the flow of the context, for it is the ceremonial law which was changed when Christ came, and it is the human requirements or qualifications of that law, which he will show us have changed.
 - (ii) This would also better fit what seems to be the most reasonable way of looking at things. If God gives us moral commandments because they are the right and good thing to do, then how could these possibly change? The rules and regulations for the priesthood could change, just as when you change from playing football to rugby, the rules change. But that which is moral cannot change as long as we are still faced with the same situations in life.
 - (iii) But thirdly, and most importantly, Christ tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that these moral commandments have not changed. He said, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:18-19). Since Christ tells us that His coming does not altar the moral Law, but rather enforces it, the author to the Hebrews cannot be speaking here of this law, but rather the ceremonial law.
 2. Well, the fact is that this law has been changed. And here the author shows us how it is.
 - a. First, he proves to us that it is by showing us that the priest we now have, namely Jesus, is not from the tribe from which all the Levitical priests must come from, namely Levi. "For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar" (v. 13). Jesus did not

belong to the tribe of Levi, and yet He is a priest. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, the tribe from which God chose to take a king. But no one from this tribe has ever officiated at the altar.

- b. The second reason is that Moses spoke nothing concerning priests from Judah, “For it is evident,” the author writes, “that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests” (v. 14). Moses was the one through whom the Lord gave His people the Law, and if Moses said nothing about it, then there must have been a change of law. If there wasn’t, then Moses would have said something, otherwise, Christ would have an illegitimate priesthood.
- c. The third proof that he gives us that the law has changed has to do with the fact that the Lord has raised up another priest according to the order of Melchizedek, and not that of Aaron. He writes, “And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek” (v. 15), that is, it is still clearer that the Law has changed. How could God raise up a man to be a priest, who was not from the tribe of Levi, unless He did away with the previous order and changed the Law? He couldn’t. If He brings in the new priesthood, the old one has to go out. If He brings in a new law, the old one has to change. Jesus wouldn’t even qualify according to the old law. He would not pass the physical requirement of having been born in the tribe of Levi. But according to the new law, He does. He has an indestructible life (v. 16). And therefore, He can remain a priest forever (v. 17).

II. Granted that God has changed the old priesthood and the law which regulates it, the question still remains as to why He has done this.

- A. The first reason that is given is that the former priesthood was weak and useless.
 1. He says the Law made nothing perfect (v. 18-19a).
 - a. Now this certainly applies to the Law as a whole, as a covenant of works.
 - b. No one has been, is, or ever will be able to earn their salvation through the Law. But the problem is not with the Law. Paul says, “The Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). There is no defect in the Law. The problem is with us. We cannot keep it. It does not have the power to give what it commands, and so we all fall short.
 - c. It does little good if someone promises us something great for something we can not do. If someone says to you, “I will give you a billion dollars if you can stand anywhere on the beaches of California and jump to Hawaii in one jump,” what good is that? You know that you are never going to be able to claim that money because it is humanly impossible for you to meet the requirement for collecting it.
 - d. The same is true with respect to the Law. If the Lord says to you, “I will give you eternal life if you will keep My commandments perfectly,” that is a good promise. But it is one that you will never be able to collect on, because you cannot keep it perfectly. The Law does not have the power to give you what it requires. Paul writes that the Law was “weak through the flesh.” The problem is with us. We are weak and useless, apart from the grace of Christ.
 2. Now this is true. But I think that the primary focus here is on the weakness and uselessness of the institution of the Levitical priesthood.
 - a. Those priests and their sacrifices were not able to perfect those who drew near to

God through them.

- b. It is true that when a person came to God through them, they were received. But it was not on the basis of the sacrifices or the mediation of the priests themselves. But rather on the basis of what they pointed to. They were only pictures of Christ. It was through Christ and faith in His name that they were accepted. And now that the reality has arrived, the pictures are seen for what they really are: weak and useless.

B. The second reason why God set aside the old priesthood with its law was because of what He was going to replace it with. He writes, "For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness . . . , and on the other hand, there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." There is the bringing in of *a better hope*. Through this means we can draw near to God. The inferior was set aside to bring in the superior. And those things which made it superior are the following:

1. The first thing is that it came with an oath.
 - a. The old priests were made priests without an oath, that is, God swore nothing concerning them.
 - b. But God instituted Christ as a priest through an oath. The oath is that God will never change His mind. Christ is a priest forever! And because God guarantees that Christ will forever remain a priest, He has become the One who can guarantee the blessings of the covenant for us.
 - c. What good would it be if a man promised to give you great riches and land and honor in this world, if he could not guarantee that he could fulfill that promise? What good would a doctor be who guarantees that he can cure your terminal illness, when there are several patients with the same sickness that he has already lost?
 - d. God is the One who guarantees to Christ that He will forever remain a priest. And Christ is the One who guarantees to us that He will give us what He has promised.
2. The second way in which our new priest is better is that He holds His priesthood forever.
 - a. We no longer have earthly priests who need to be replaced because they die.
 - b. We have a priest who never dies, and, because of this, "He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (v. 25). He can save completely, and He can save eternally. He is the perfect advocate, who intercedes perfectly, who has a perfect sacrifice which is able perfectly to remove all sin, and who, because He lives forever, can do so throughout the rest of time. His intercession for us as His children will never cease. Therefore, we will never fall from His mercy and grace.
 - c. Christ is the fulfillment of the Aaronic and Melchizedekian priesthoods. He is the last priest that we will ever need.
3. Therefore, we should seek to come to God through Him and not through any other means.
 - a. The Jews would have been tempted to come through the old priesthood. But as

- the author argues, this was about to be done away with. They should not go back to this, or they may very well be destroyed with it.
- b. Today, we might be tempted to come to God through our works or through our own acts of devotion to God. We might think that God won't accept us unless we do so many good deeds. Although it is true that we should do all that we can to honor and glorify God in this life, when we fail to live up to God's standards, He will still receive us in His Son.
 - c. We must never allow ourselves to believe that we must be good enough before we can come to Him. All the righteousness we need is in Christ. And so we must come in complete reliance on Him, on His righteousness and atonement.
4. Secondly, we should not be afraid that Christ will not receive us if we come to Him.
 - a. If Christ died for us while we were still His enemies, will He refuse us now that we are called His friends? (Rom. 5:10). No. He will openly receive us and warmly welcome us.
 - b. True, He is faithful to discipline us when we stray from His paths of obedience. But He does so that we might draw near again to God through Him.
 - c. Therefore, do not fear. You will always be welcomed by Christ, if you flee from your sins and embrace Him with all your heart.
 5. And thirdly, we must never fear that what the Lord has begun will ever fail to be completed.
 - a. Christ is able to save completely, to the uttermost. What He has begun He is able to finish.
 - b. Because He abides a priest forever, He will forever keep us and uphold us in His grace throughout the rest of time and eternity, so that we might say with the hymnwriter, "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!" (Scriven *What a Friend*).
 6. Do you know Jesus as your friend? Is He your Savior? If He isn't then come to Him now and trust in Him. He will receive you. He will save you. His blood will wash you of your sins. His perfect righteousness will cover all of your faults. There is no greater priest, no greater friend. There is salvation in no one else. If you don't know the Lord this evening, believe on Him, trust Him to deliver your soul from death, and He will do it. Amen.