

## **It's All About Jesus**

### **Hebrews 7:1-10**

Pastor Bryan Clark

I want to start by reading a parable this morning from a book that many of you were reading this week. It's called *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. (laughter) It's a real zinger! The parable goes like this:

*There once was a man who lived in a country that had no fruit trees. This man was a scholar and spent a great deal of time reading. In his readings he often came across references to fruit. The descriptions of fruit were so enticing that he decided to undertake a journey to experience fruit for himself. He went to the market and asked if anyone there knew where he could find fruit. After much searching, he located a man who knew the directions to the country and place where he could find fruit. The man drew out elaborate directions for the scholar to follow. With his map in hand, the scholar carefully followed all the directions. He was very careful to make all the right turns and to check out all the landmarks that he was supposed to observe. Finally he came to the end of the directions and found himself at the entrance to a large apple orchard. It was springtime and the apple trees were in blossom. The scholar entered the orchard and proceeded immediately to take one of the blossoms and taste it. He liked neither the texture of the flower nor the taste. He went to another tree and sampled another blossom, then another and another; each blossom though quite beautiful, was distasteful to him. He left the orchard and returned to his home country reporting to his fellow villagers that fruit was a much-overrated food. Being unable to recognize the difference between the spring blossom and the summer fruit, the scholar never realized that he had not experienced what he was looking for.*

The first time I read that parable I found myself thinking about the hundreds of thousands of people in the world who have gone on a search for God. As people made in the image of God, there is something deep within us that longs to know God. But what they experience is religion, and religion ends up being distasteful and greatly dissatisfying. Many of them walk away, not realizing that what they experienced that was so distasteful was religion, and it didn't satisfy because what their souls were actually longing for is an encounter with the resurrected Jesus. That's what we want to talk about this morning.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to Hebrews, Chapter 7. Continuing our study in the book of Hebrews, the writer of Hebrews introduced us to a very mysterious Old Testament figure by the name of Melchizedek in chapter 5. He quoted from Psalm 110 verse 4, and then he talked about Melchizedek again in chapter 5 verse 10, identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of the Melchizedek type in the Old Testament. Starting then at verse 11 of chapter 5, all the way through chapter 6, the writer diverts into what we refer to as one of the warning passages of Hebrews. But now, having given the warning at the end of chapter 6, he moves back to this ongoing discussion of Melchizedek. We pick it up then in Chapter 7, verse 1:

**For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God...**

(\*NASB, Hebrews 7:1a)

So this Melchizedek is both a **king** and a **priest**. There may have been kings in the pagan world that were both kings and priests, but not for the nation of Israel. Either you were a king, or you were a priest, but you weren't both. As a matter of fact, there were a couple of kings in Israel's history that tried to function as priests, and it did not go well. So this is quite a puzzling introduction—this one who is both king and priest.

As king, he is the **king of Salem**. Now there is some discussion, but most scholars think Salem is a reference to Jerusalem before Jerusalem was called Jerusalem. There are psalms where Salem is clearly a reference to Jerusalem, so that seems to make the most sense. Salem, the word itself, is derived from the word *shalom*, which is a word that means *peace* or probably better *flourishing*. So, **king of Salem, priest of the Most High God**.

Now Melchizedek was not Jewish; he was not from the line of Israel but he wasn't priest over some pagan God. He was **priest of the Most High God**, the God of Abraham, the one true God, which again makes him kind of a mysterious, puzzling figure.

**...priest of the Most High God who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, (Vs. 1b)**

So, at this point it's helpful to know the back story, to begin to make sense of this. One of the challenges of a section like this—there are two real challenges—is to just try to understand what the writer is saying. It's very complex. The second would be: what is the relevance to us today? This is one of the passages you read before you go to work in the morning and you say, "Whatever," and then you go on because it's like, "I have no idea what this is saying!"

So, part of this is built on the backstory. Melchizedek only shows up in four verses in the book of Genesis, chapter 14—verses 17, 18, 19, and 20. What's happening is four kings from the East come together and basically attack the five kings around Sodom and Gomorrah. For convenience, we are just going to call them the kings of Sodom. They defeat the kings of Sodom; they plunder the cities, and they capture the people. Among those captured is the nephew of Abraham, Lot. So Lot and his family are taken away by the four kings of the East. Someone escapes, gets to Abraham, and tells Abraham, "This is what has happened!" So Abraham musters an army—three hundred and eighteen fighting men to be exact. They trace down the four kings of the East, and in the middle of the night they attack and win a resounding victory. The plunder is given back; the captives are set free. Abraham and his men are headed back home and they are coming through what most people think was probably the Valley of the Kings, or the Kidron Valley. There they encounter the king of Sodom but then also encounter this mysterious figure, the king of Salem by the name of Melchizedek. So the Kidron Valley would be right below Jerusalem, and that's again a reason why most people think that's what Salem is referring to. So that's what the text—**who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him**—is talking about.

Now when we see that language of a *blessing*, we probably don't think that much of it. But in an ancient Near East culture, in an honor culture, this terminology was not just thrown about. As a matter of fact it was very strategic. Even today, in an honor culture, this has to do with the fact of one who is greater passing a blessing on to one who is lesser. The greater is called the patron or the benefactor; the lesser is called the client, and the idea is that it establishes a social relationship—the greater and the lesser. Abraham is the superstar for Israel but yet, in this moment, Abraham is identified as the lesser because it is Melchizedek, the greater, the benefactor, the patron, who is offering this blessing. He **blessed him**. Verse 2:

**...to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part (a tithe) of all *the spoils*...**

So the response of Abraham was to give Melchizedek a tithe. Now this again would indicate that Abraham was entering into this relationship. He didn't argue; he didn't push back. He didn't say, "Hey wait a minute, I'm greater than you." As a matter of fact he was agreeing. He received the blessing and in return gave a tithe, which in essence would say he was in agreement and entering into this social relationship. Now, why did he do that? The text tells us.

**...was first of all, by the translation of *his name*, king of righteousness, (Vs. 2b)**

Now in the ancient world, names were often descriptive. They weren't just names; they were descriptive of the person. So the name Melchizedek literally means **king of righteousness**. The Hebrew *melek*, which means king, and then the rest of his name is a word we are pretty familiar with because of our studies in the book of Proverbs. It is the Hebrew word or a derivation of *tzadik*. We've talked a lot about the *Tzadik* in the book of Proverbs; it is the righteous one. Melchizedek's name literally could be pronounced *Melek-tzadik*. He is the **king of righteousness**. The text goes on:

**...and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. (Vs. 2c)**

I mentioned **Salem** is a derivative of the word *shalom*, which again is a critical term in the book of Proverbs. So two of the most significant terms in Proverbs—the *tzadik* and *shalom*—are part of the story. It's also familiar Christmas language—that the One who was to come was the One that would be the righteous King and the Prince of Peace. So you've got a lot of significant language here. So *Jerusalem* means *Jeru*—foundation—*salem*—of peace. So Melchizedek, the **king of righteousness**, is also king over flourishing, in essence what the names are saying. Abraham knows that. That's why he responds the way that he does. Verse 3:

**Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually (or continually).**

So what does that mean? There are a couple of different views. One view is that Melchizedek was what was referred to as a theophany, an appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament—the preincarnate Christ. Very few people hold that view. Even the text itself—when it says **but made like the Son of God**—if this was a theophany, it's not *like* the Son of God; He *is* the Son of God, so even that language really rules that out. Some scholars think it's a reference to a supernatural being, some sort of angelic being in human form, because he doesn't have a mother, doesn't have a father, doesn't have a beginning and ending, doesn't have a genealogy. While that is possible, it's probably not likely. There are not a lot of scholars that hold that view. Most people, most scholars rather—and I think most likely—believe that Melchizedek is what we would refer to as a "*literary type*." Now this is common in the Old Testament: he is a real person, a real king, over real people, but he is presented in a specific way as a "*literary type*," or a "*shadow*" of one who would come later, who would be the fulfillment of that shadow. So the idea is not that Melchizedek literally didn't have a mom or a dad or a birthdate or a death date. As a human, of course he did, but as this literary type, he doesn't, and so you have someone that we don't know his father; we don't know his mother; we don't know his genealogy.

In the ancient world, being a king was all about the family line. Being a priest was all about the family line. It's all about the genealogy. As a matter of fact, if you were a priest and you could not prove your genealogy, you were determined to be unclean, and you could not be a functioning priest. And yet along comes this one who is not Jewish, who is identified as greater than Abraham, who is a king, not because of his family line...just because he is king....who is not a priest because of his family line...just because he's a priest...and he's identified as one who will be a priest *forever*.

So the text is saying the literary figure doesn't die. Go back and read the Old Testament. Abraham died. Isaac died. Jacob died. David died. Moses died. Aaron died. The text records the death of all those people, but all we know is in these four verses, this mysterious figure, the literary figure, doesn't die. His priesthood continues forever. So that's Genesis 14.

So that would have been written let's say roughly about 2000 BC. Melchizedek is then brought up in one place in Psalm 110, verse 4 a thousand years later—just identified as this priesthood that goes on forever. And then he is brought up another thousand years later by the writer of the book of Hebrews, and the book of Hebrews identifies Jesus as the fulfillment of this ultimate King Priest that would remain a priest forever—very consistent with what we've already learned in the book of Hebrews. Okay, verse 4:

**Now observe** (We would probably say in our language, “Now pay careful attention to this.”) **how great this man** (Melchizedek) **was to whom Abraham, the patriarch** (the superstar of Israel), **gave a tenth** (a tithe) **of the choicest spoils. And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham.** (Vs: 4-5)

Okay, what does that mean? What the text is saying is, “Now pay attention to this.” This one who is greater than Abraham—Melchizedek—is the one that received a tithe from Abraham. The priests, according to the Law, according to **commandment**, their job was to collect the tithe from the people, the temple tithe. But they did not collect the tithe because they were considered *greater than*. It simply was the **commandment of the Law**; that was their job. Go out and collect the tithe. So, that's what the text is saying. It wasn't because they were identified as greater. It simply was their job according to the commandment. Verse 6:

**But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them** (Melchizedek) **collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises.**

So what's he is saying is, “But Melchizedek is different. He didn't collect a tithe like the priest because that was his job; he actually received a tithe from Abraham because Abraham was agreeing that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham. And, again, the language is that Melchizedek blessed Abraham, the one who received the promises, and Abraham agreed with that and gave him the tithe in return. Now, again, in an ancient Near East culture this would be abundantly clear that Melchizedek was identifying himself as the greater, and Abraham was agreeing with that, which is then affirmed in Verse 7:

**But without any dispute** (nobody would argue with this) **the lesser is blessed by the greater.** (That just affirms what we just said.) Verse 8:

**In this case** (meaning right now, today, while he is writing the book of Hebrews, present tense verbs) **mortal men receive tithes...** (The priests in Jerusalem are still doing their jobs. Mortal men, priests that have no ability to save them, are going out and collecting tithes.)

**...but in that case** (meaning Melchizedek) **one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on.**

The Jewish people understood that this fulfillment of this shadow by the name of Melchizedek would one day come who would be even greater than Abraham, who would be the ultimate king priest, not because of his genealogy, but simply because he is king and simply because he is the ultimate high priest! Verse 9:

**And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.** (Vs. 9-10)

So, Levi was the great grandson of Abraham. Abraham...Isaac...Jacob...Levi—and you had to be within the tribe of Levi to be a priest, and specifically within the family of Aaron. So what the writer is saying is even though it is the tribe of Levi, the priest that collects tithes, in this story Levi was still in Abraham, so he is in Abraham's biology. He's in his genetic code; he's in there somewhere. So technically, even Levi, representing all the priests, paid tithes to Melchizedek, even the priests affirming that Melchizedek is the great high priest.

So, having said all that, the application is abundantly clear, is it not? (*laughter*) The writer will continue to talk about this next week, and we will continue to move on step by step. But for us today, we want to talk about what makes this relevant; it goes to the, "So what?" question. The point that the writer of Hebrews has been trying to make to a group of mostly Jewish Christian believers who seem to be tempted to go back to Judaism—and this has come up again and again in the book of Hebrews—is that there is a concern, and it's likely that the Judaizers were talking to them saying things like, "If this was really true, if this was really what God wanted, you wouldn't be persecuted. This must be God's punishment. You need to go back to the old covenant, back to the old ways." So, the writer of Hebrews is trying to remind them, "Wait a minute. Jesus is greater than the angels. He's greater than Abraham. He's greater than Moses. He's greater than the Law. He's greater than the Sabbath. He's greater than all these. He is the fulfillment of the Melchizedek type from that story, the long-awaited Messiah."

Now stop and think about this. Everything in the temple system was set up to be a shadow, a picture of the promise of a coming Messiah. The temple, the priest, everything within the temple, the sacrificial system, the Sabbath—all of those things were meant to be a shadow, or a picture, of the One who would come and would be the fulfillment of the promise—the One greater than Abraham, the long-awaited ultimate King Priest. But when that Messiah actually came, you would think there would have been the celebration of all celebrations, that finally, after all these years, the long-awaited Messiah has come. "Shut everything down! He is finally here!" But as you know, that's not what happened. As a matter of fact, rather, they rejected Him and executed Him in order to keep their religious machinery going. That is just a staggering concept! That at some point the shadows and pictures that were meant to reveal the Christ, actually become the substitute for the Christ when He comes. This is the point the writer of Hebrews is trying to make. "Those were just pictures and shadows. He's here! He's come! The fulfillment of what Melchizedek foreshadowed has actually come! The ultimate King Priest is here!"

Advance two thousand years: Certainly we don't have the same problem, do we? The world is filled with religion—always has been, always will be—because religion appeals to our flesh. There's something deep within us that wants to believe, "I can do this myself." Religion is all about self-righteousness. "Here is the practice. Here are the rules. Here is the liturgy. Here are the steps. Here is everything you do. Ultimately, if you do this, God will accept you." How many thousands and thousands and thousands of people who were honestly, sincerely seeking God, experienced cold dead religion, and for them it was so distasteful, so dissatisfying, they walked away, not realizing what their soul was longing for was not religion but an encounter with a person—the resurrected Christ!

We live in a world today where we have convinced ourselves there's no absolute truth; there's no absolute morality. Nothing's really nailed down and everything is kind of loose and up for grabs, and what that creates in people is anxiety and fear and confusion. And so many people in today's culture then are turning to something that feels like it's nailed down, that feels like it is rooted, that feels like it has some sort of substance to deal with my anxiety, to deal with my fear and my struggles. So where do they turn? They turn to religion. They think that somehow they are going to find what they are looking for in a building. They are going to find what they are looking for in a practice. They are going to find what they are looking for in a liturgy. They are going to find what they are looking for in a discipline or a practice or a ritual of some sort. Many of them are not seeking to experience Jesus. They're seeking to experience an experience. But at the end of the day, religion will never be enough. Religion can't deliver the goods.

It's easy for us this morning to think, "Oh I know just what you are talking about. It's *those* people. It's *that* religion. It's *that* denomination. It's *that* church. Oh, I know exactly what you are talking about—but it certainly wouldn't be us." Here's the deal: I'm not talking to them; I'm talking to *us*, and it would be a huge mistake for us to think the same thing can't happen to us. Somewhere along the way we start to think it's a practice; it's a program; it's a group; it's a methodology; it's something that we are doing that was originally intended to lead us into a more dynamic relationship with Jesus, but at some stage that thing that was supposed to lead us to Christ comes to an end in itself.

Hebrews talks about Jesus and the gospel being the anchor for our soul in the midst of difficult times. But there's another kind of anchor and it's an anchor that holds us down into bondage, where we never really experience the life that God has called us to because somewhere along the way we lose sight and what was supposed to be, what was supposed to lead us to a deeper relationship to Christ, becomes an end in itself, which just becomes another form of idolatry.

Here is another way to ask the question this morning. Can you honestly tell me this morning that you are more deeply, passionately in love with Jesus today than you were a year ago? Really? And if not, why not? You're involved in a program. You're involved in a group. You're involved in a practice or a discipline or a liturgy or whatever it might be, but at some point we start thinking that's the answer: "I just *need* to be part of this group." That's the answer: "I just *need* to be in this program." Oh, that's the answer: "I just *need* to have this discipline. I just *need* to have this practice. I just *need* to have this liturgy. I just *need* to go through this ritual." We have our own rituals. We have our own liturgies and practices, and at some point we're thinking, "If I just plug in there," and we're losing sight of the fact that those programs and practices and disciplines have no power to change our lives if they don't ultimately lead us to Jesus.

No religion, no practice, no discipline, no ritual will ever be enough. Only Christ is enough. What a tragedy it is that thousands and thousands and thousands of people very sincerely search for God and encounter religion, and in their confused mind they think they have encountered God, and it's distasteful and it's dissatisfying, so they wander away and they fail to realize that actually what their soul was longing for was a meaningful encounter with a Person—a relationship with the resurrected living Christ! At the end of the day, Christ and Christ alone will be enough. So my prayer is that we wouldn't get lost in the programs, lost in the rituals, lost in the liturgies and the traditions, lost in the disciplines and the practices...that we think somehow it's a group...it's a program...it's a methodology, but instead we would never lose sight that it's a Person! It's the Person that ultimately sets me free. It's Christ and Christ alone that is enough!

*Our Father, we are aware that we are just as prone to getting lost in some sort of religious practice as anyone. Lord, well-intentioned, well-meaning, but at some point, we forget that it is Christ that sets us free! Lord, may we never forget that it is Christ and Christ alone that gives us life now and forever. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE  
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,  
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.  
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512  
Copyright 2018 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.





## **It's All About Jesus**

*Christ is Enough*

Hebrews 7:1-10

Pastor Bryan Clark

### **Opening Discussion**

1. What has been your experience with religion? How would you distinguish between your experience with religion and your relationship with Jesus?
2. Has your experience been that highly religious people are easier or more difficult to reach for Jesus? Why?

### **Bible Study**

1. Read Genesis 14 as background to the Hebrews text. Notice especially 14:17-20.
2. Read Hebrews 7:1-3. Also, review Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; Ps. 110:4. What do we know about Melchizedek and how is he a type or shadow of Jesus?
3. Read Hebrews 7:4-10. Trace the argument the writer is making. What makes Jesus greater than Abraham, the law, the temple, the Old Covenant or the priests?
4. Why did God direct Israel to set up the Temple, sacrifices, priests, sabbath, etc.? What happened when Jesus entered into human history as the fulfillment of those shadows? Was He celebrated or rejected by those who “ran the religious system?”
5. As of the time of the writing of Hebrews the temple, priests, law, etc., were all still functioning as if Jesus, the Messiah, has not come. The writer of Hebrews is making the case that the one greater than all *has* come. The fulfillment is greater than the shadows. How might modern religious activity and practices function as a substitute for what can only be found in Jesus? How might religion actually prevent people from experiencing Jesus?
6. What makes religion so attractive to people? Read II Corinthians 11:12-15. In this context, what does it mean that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light? Why does he do that?

## Application

2. What are one or two things you could do to prioritize your relationship with Jesus to make sure you're not just busy, but actually growing in your experience with Him?

Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512  
Copyright 2018 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.