

How Do We Become Perfect?

Christ is Enough Series

Hebrews 7:11-28

Pastor Bryan Clark

Our mission statement here at Lincoln Berean is: *To glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ.* It does raise the question, “How, exactly, does that happen? How does someone become complete in Christ?” Is it through programs and a lot of religious activity, or is it some other way? That’s what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Hebrews, Chapter 7, continuing our discussion of Melchizedek, to which some of you are groaning, “Oh, no!” Last week the comments ranged from, “That was really great; it cleared a lot of things up,” to, “I have no idea what you’re talking about,” and everything in between—so just a normal weekend at Lincoln Berean. (*laughter*)

But this whole discussion about Melchizedek, it is complicated, so a couple of things to keep in mind. One is it’s helpful to remember that the first readers are struggling. They’re primarily Jewish Christians that are headed into persecution, but there is clearly some influence seeking to convince them to return to the old covenant, to the old ways. I don’t think it was so much abandoning Jesus as much as it was blending Jesus into the old covenant. This was a problem. For example, when Paul wrote to the Galatians, the concern was not an abandonment of Jesus but kind of the blending of Jesus into the old covenant system—and that’s what these people are wrestling with, and that’s what the writer is talking about. If something far better has come, why would you do that? Why would you go back to something that was highly ineffective?

The second thing is Melchizedek is a very mysterious figure. He shows up one time in the narrative, in the story, and that’s Genesis chapter 14, in four verses—17, 18, 19 and 20. Melchizedek then is mentioned by David in Psalm 110, verse 4, and is only mentioned by the writer of Hebrews in the New Testament. He was a real person; he was a real king; he ruled over a real kingdom, but Melchizedek is put forth as what we refer to as a *type*, a kind of a foreshadowing, a picture of ultimately the fulfillment of the promise of the Savior to come. And that’s not unusual; there are a number of *types* in the Old Testament. So in order to do that, it’s kind of a creative prophecy, just a creative way to foreshadow something that is to come. So to do that, the writers present Melchizedek very skillfully with limited details, and all the details are meant to fit this picture or type. We refer to it as a *literary figure*. The writer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is presenting Melchizedek with certain details in order to foreshadow someone ultimately to come. So we learned last week that Melchizedek is the *king of righteousness*; he’s the *king of Salem* or the *king of flourishing*. We learned that he is the ultimate king priest and we learned that he’s greater than Abraham and greater than the Levitical priesthood. That’s pretty much where we left it last week. We pick it up in verse 11:

Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood...

(that word **perfection** is the exact same word that’s in our mission statement—*complete* in Christ. So we get our mission statement from Colossians chapter 1, the end of it, when Paul talks about presenting every person *complete*, that’s this word *perfect* in Christ. So that’s what this whole discussion is about. How does that happen? How is someone presented perfect or complete before a holy God? Again,

Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), 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? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. (*NASB Hebrews 7:11-14)

So what is he talking about there? He's basically saying, "If the Levitical priesthood, which is by necessity tied into the Law—in other words the two are inseparable—so the Law is connected to the priesthood; the priesthood is connected to the Law, one thing he's not saying is that when this ultimate priest in the order of Melchizedek was to come, he was not just going to open a new line of priesthood within the old covenant. What he's saying is this would be a *complete and total change*. The change in the priesthood would mean a change in the law and the entirety of the old covenant. It's not a little change; it's a complete change. Now to understand how tense this was felt with the Judaizers, the first Christian martyr that we know of is in Acts chapters 6 and 7—Stephen. When the Judaizers are preparing to stone Stephen to death, they identify two reasons why he must die. One is because Stephen was proclaiming that Jesus was going to replace the temple, and number two is that Jesus was going to replace the Law. So it's the exact same two things that the writer of Hebrews is talking about here. They found that message so offensive that they stoned Stephen to death! So this was pretty intense stuff. What the writer, then, is saying is that this change of priesthood—a priesthood from a completely different line, not of the line of Aaron which is the Levitical priesthood but actually from the line of Judah—that there's nothing in the old covenant law that identifies anyone from the tribe of Judah to somehow be qualified for the priesthood. So the opening discussion is, "If the old covenant system—a bunch of religious activity—could make someone complete in Christ, why is it necessary to make a change?"

Now some were probably arguing that Melchizedek showed up in Genesis 14, but after that would come Moses and the Law and the old covenant, so perhaps some were saying that the old covenant, the Law, the Levitical priesthood superseded Melchizedek. And that's why he keeps quoting from Psalm 110, another one of those heroes who David said in Psalm 110 verse 4 there is still coming one in the order of Melchizedek who would be the ultimate priest/king. So this one was still coming and the writer of Hebrews has already identified Jesus as the fulfillment of that prophecy or that type. Verse 15:

And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become *such* not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, (in other words genealogy) but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested *of Him*,

"YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER

ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." (Vs. 15-17)

Now that's the fourth time the writer has quoted Psalm 110, verse 4. What he's saying is, "If this new priest comes along—and he's already identified Jesus as that person—He does not qualify on the basis of His genealogy—what tribe He's from—but rather He qualifies on the basis of the fact that He lives forever—an **indestructible life**. This will be a critical part of the argument that he is going to make. I mentioned last week that Jesus is the King, not because of his genealogical record, but because he *is* King. He's the ultimate high priest, not because of his genealogical record but

because he *is* the ultimate high priest, and what are his credentials? His credentials are that He conquered sin and death once and for all, and He lives forever. Those are pretty good credentials. He goes on to say, verse 18:

For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment (meaning the old covenant; why?) **because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect)** (or complete)... (Vs. 18-19a)

So on the one hand, the old covenant is completed; it is fulfilled, it is set aside. Paul, in referring to the old covenant in 2 Corinthians 3, refers to the old covenant as *a ministry of death, a ministry of condemnation*. It is useless; it is weak in terms of its ability to make one perfect or complete or right before a holy God. In other words, if something didn't change, we're all in *real trouble*. Now this is not to say that somehow the old covenant failed. It accomplished exactly what God intended it to accomplish. It was never meant to be a means of salvation. It was never meant to make people right.

The fallacy of religion is to think religious activity somehow makes someone righteous in the presence of a holy God. The problem is *sin*, and sin is offensive to God and no amount of religious activity *un-sins* us. That's just a ridiculous notion. You can do religion until the day you die; it doesn't erase the sin. The old covenant was never meant to un-sin the people. It was meant to accomplish two things: One is it created a standard for those who think they can accomplish self-righteousness. Here's the standard by which everybody could measure themselves and realize, "We're in real trouble here!" The second thing it was meant to accomplish was to create a shadow, a foreshadowing of the one who would ultimately come to be the Messiah of the world. The temple, the furniture, the sacrificial system—all of that was meant to be a *foreshadowing* of the fulfillment of the promise.

The promise goes back to Genesis chapter 3, verse 15. God made a promise He would do something through the seed of a woman that would ultimately crush the head of the enemy and bring life back out of death. He re-ups the promise to Abraham in a covenant. It is pictured through the old covenant Law, but all the way through there was always an awareness that no amount of religious activity could make us perfect, could make us complete before a holy God. Therefore:

...on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (Vs. 19b)

How could we as sinful men and women ever **draw near** to a holy God? There has to be some other way. The old covenant, which is a bunch of activity—a religious programming—was weak and useless to do this. So God ushers in **a better hope**. This is language that the writer of Hebrews really likes and uses a lot. Why would you go back to something completely ineffective and useless, when God had provided something better? Something better is *Someone* better, who has done for you what you could never do for yourself.

This is Thanksgiving weekend. There is nothing that anyone in the room has to be thankful for, *greater* than what the writer just said. If all you had was just religious activity, all you had were your efforts to try to be good enough to merit favor with a holy God, you would have virtually no hope. You would be lost forever; you would be separated from God and condemned forever. What the text just said is when there was no hope, God ushered in **a better hope**—an actual way to stand right before a holy God. If God had not done that, there would be virtually no hope today. He told us earlier in Hebrews, "Hope is what we anchor our souls to." There's no promise that everything is

going to be rosy and make sense in this life. We anchor our hope to the promise that through Christ there is a world to come—a new heaven and a new earth—that will be everything that our souls long for today. How do we get there? Not through the old covenant, not through a religious system, but through a Person, **a better hope** through which we draw near to God. Verse 20:

And inasmuch as *it was* not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him,

“THE LORD HAS SWORN

AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND,

‘YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER’”); (Vs. 20-21)

So what is he saying there? He’s saying that when God brought forth the Levitical priesthood in the old covenant, there was never a moment where God promised that the Levitical priesthood would last forever. It was always understood to be temporary. But when God promised—this is the fifth time he’s quoted Psalm 110 verse 4—there is an oath, a promise, that this new priesthood, this fulfillment of the order of Melchizedek—the writer has already identified Jesus as the ultimate High Priest, the fulfillment of the order of Melchizedek—that when this one comes, this will be the ultimate high priest forever. God says, “I promise I will never change my mind on this.” Verse 22:

...so much the more also, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

This word **covenant** will be a really important term in the book of Hebrews, but this is the first time that he mentions it. This is the *new covenant*, this is **a better covenant**. The idea, then, is Jesus is the **guarantee**; literally the text says that he is the *guarantor* of the promise. We learned in the very first verses of Hebrews chapter one that Jesus is not *another* word from God; he is the *last* word from God. This is what the whole story has been working up to is the fulfillment of a promise from Genesis 3:15—that God would ultimately send one who would be the **better hope, who** would usher in a **better covenant** that would make it possible for sinful men and women to stand right before a holy God. How do we know that this covenant will endure? Answer: because God promised; He will not change his mind. How do we know? There’s a **guarantee**. What is the guarantee? It’s a *guarantor*. It’s a Person, and as long as this Person lives forever, the **guarantee** lives forever.

This morning I could promise you all sorts of things, but the moment I die, I’m no longer here to fulfill those promises. This is why it’s so important to understand that the ultimate high priest who made the ultimate sacrifice for sin guarantees we stand right before a holy God. What are His qualifications? An indestructible life! He will be that high priest *forever*, so forever He will be the guarantee. He functions as the guarantor—“I am the ultimate high priest forever”—and as long as He lives, then the salvation is valid. That’s in essence what he just said. Verse 23:

The *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers (Why?) because they were prevented by death from continuing, (in other words they died) but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God (How?) through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Vs. 23-25)

So what he just said is under the old covenant there were hundreds of priests. Why? Because they died. They lived and they died; they lived and they died. But along comes the ultimate high priest.

What are His qualifications? An indestructible life! He's conquered sin and death once and for all! Because He lives forever, He will be a priest forever! Therefore He holds the priesthood permanently; therefore the salvation that He offers is permanent. It will endure forever.

Can you imagine getting to heaven, getting a thousand years down the road and having God show up and say, "Alright, we have a problem! The ultimate high priest who was your salvation; He's died. Therefore I'm changing my mind: you're out!" The whole idea is that could never happen. God made a promise; this priest has an indestructible life; this priest will last forever! He will be the priest forever; therefore His salvation will be forever. How do we know that? He's the *guarantee* and He's *forever*.

The last verse then, 25, is often misunderstood, where it says **...since He always lives to make intercession for them**. Now **intercession** is not the same as *making payment for sin*. Nowhere in the Bible do the Scriptures say that Jesus is continuing to make payment for sin. He's not! When He hung on the cross, Jesus himself uttered the words, "Tetelestai," meaning, "It's finished...paid in full." Even this text will say, "*He did it once for all*." We learned in the first part of Hebrews that as the ultimate high priest He offered the sacrifice, rose from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, indicating, "Mission accomplished; ultimate price paid; work is done; He is seated." So it is just wrong that Jesus still hangs on the cross and is still somehow making payment for sin. That's not what he's talking about. As a matter of fact, when we read it incorrectly, here's how we read it. "He always lives to make intercession for them," as if this is some sort of a payment that is ongoing.

Think about the context in which this verse is found. What is the emphasis; what is the point? The point is that He is the priest forever. He is the guarantor forever. Therefore, correctly read, it reads like this: "Since He always lives—that's the point—since He always lives to make intercession for them. The point is: "As long as the Savior lives, there is one mediator between sinful men and women and a holy God, and that is the man Christ Jesus! As long as He lives, the intercession is good." How long will He live? Forever! How long is our salvation? Forever! How do we know? He guarantees it with a promise. He is the guarantor; He is the eternal son of God. Verse 26:

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest...

Now in modern English that can be misleading. We sometimes say, "Well, that's fitting," kind of meaning, "Well, that's what the person deserved." That's not what this is saying. It's not saying that we somehow deserve this. What it is saying is what Jesus the ultimate high priest did, fit the problem. The solution fit the problem. We have a huge problem; we needed an ultimate high priest. What Jesus did for us fit the problem. That's what he means: **For it is fitting for us to have such a high priest**. And then he gives some characteristics: **holy**, (other than all other priests,) **innocent**, (which has to do with motive,) **undefiled**, (which has to do with no sin in His behavior,) **separated from sinners** (meaning He wasn't a sinner. Basically it looks like this: all those in the world who have sinned, go stand over there. All those who have never sinned, go stand over there. There's a big separation. Everybody's there except Jesus and Jesus was sinless, separated from sinners. **...and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all** (not for some, for everyone,) **when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, (the promise) which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.** (Vs. 26-28)

So what the text is saying is that the Levitical priest had to first offer sacrifice for their own sins before they could offer sacrifice for the sins of the people, but because Jesus was sinless, He did not sacrifice for His own sins but rather, as the perfect spotless lamb of God, He sacrificed Himself for the sins of the world.

The very last line, **a Son made perfect forever**. This has been the discussion, starting in verse 11: “How does one become complete, perfect before a holy God?” If it could be done through the old covenant, if it could be done through religious activity, if it could be done through good works, why the need for a Savior, why the need for the ultimate high priest making the ultimate sacrifice for sin? Answer is, “Because there is no other way.” We need a *better way*, a *better hope*, a *better covenant* that would come with a guarantee that as long as this Savior lives, then you stand right before a holy God if you have received His salvation.

Now back to that description in verse 26 **...exalted above the heavens**. We see this throughout the New Testament. He sits above all rule and authority. He is the King of the universe. He is the King in heaven. He is *in charge*!

Now we live in a culture where there’s a lot of argument as to whether or not all roads lead to God. Are all religions equally valid? A lot of people argue that all religions are equally valid and ultimately make their way to God as they’ve defined Him. So we can argue that as long as we want on earth, but when you get to the other side, when you get to heaven, the One who settles it once and for all is the King of heaven; He’s the One in charge. There’s going to be no argument. He’s the One who says, “And the King of heaven says, ‘There’s only one way.’” It’s through a better hope; it’s through a better covenant; it’s through the One who came as the ultimate high priest to offer Himself as the ultimate sacrifice in payment for sin, in order that we as sinful men and women might stand right before a holy God. There’s only one way. Who says? The King of heaven says! He rules over heaven; He’s in charge, and as long as the King of heaven lives as the ultimate high priest who offered Himself, He will say, “My sacrifice was sufficient for sin,” and on the basis of what He has done for us, we as sinful men and women can stand right before a holy God. Who says so? He does! And as long as He lives, He says so! God promised, “I won’t change my mind; this is the way it’s going to be.” What are His credentials? An indestructible life! He will be the high priest forever...for the rest of eternity. He will acknowledge, “My payment was sufficient;” *Christ is enough*! Not Jesus plus some religion, not Jesus plus some other activity, not Jesus plus anything. Paul in writing to the Galatians says that if you add one single religious work or activity to Jesus, it’s no longer grace. It’s Christ and Christ alone for salvation!

There may be some of you here this morning, maybe some of you tuning into the livecast who’ve convinced yourself there’s no way I could ever be right before a holy God. I don’t know what you’ve done. I don’t know what’s been done to you. I only know that God offers everyone salvation freely as a gift of His grace if you choose by faith to receive it. Christ died for your sins and He’s willing to offer you salvation today and forever as the ultimate high priest, if you just choose by faith to receive it.

There may be others who are up to your eyebrows in religion. One of the earmarks of religion is fear. There’s this restlessness, because in religion you never know how much is enough? How good is good enough? It’s full of despair; it’s full of fear; it’s full of this restlessness. Religion is this endless effort to somehow try to make yourself right before God. But what Hebrews tells us is that is weak and useless because you cannot un-sin yourself. Someone had to pay your debt. Someone had to die for you. Someone had to sacrifice for you and make payment for your sin in order to offer

you salvation freely as a gift. It's not religion; it's not programming; it's not activities. It's a Person. It's a Person, the ultimate high priest, who sacrificed Himself in order that you might know salvation forever! It seems to me, on this weekend, that is something to be very thankful for!

Our Father, we are thankful this morning that when there was no hope, You sent Your Son to be the Savior of the world. Lord, you couldn't be clearer. It can't come through religion; it can't come through religious activity or good works. Those ultimately are weak and useless to make us perfect. It would have to come through the ultimate high priest who would make the ultimate sacrifice for sin. God, my prayer is that none of us who are here this morning, none of those who are tuned in by the livecast would end this day without having the experience, the salvation you freely offer. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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.

How Do We Become Perfect?

Christ is Enough

Hebrews 7:11-28

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What is the difference between religious activity and a relationship with Christ?
2. Do all roads lead to God? Why or why not? How can we know?
3. Based on our study from 7:1-10, how easy is it to lose sight of the relationship and power of Jesus in the midst of lots of good activity? Does this happen to you?

Bible Study

1. Review the basic points from Hebrews 7:1-10.
2. Read Hebrews 7:11-22 and Psalm 110:4. The stated issue is perfection according to verse 11. What clearly did not work? Why?
3. Why would the law and priests be tied together as one package? What happened to Stephen when he tried to present Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Covenant (Acts 6:14)? Were the law and priests more than just religious beliefs? Do you think many people today stay true to a belief system because they really believe that's the truth or are they loyal to something more? Explain.
4. State the writer's argument in 7:11-22. In one or two sentences.
5. What is the "better hope" and a "better covenant?" Why are they better?
6. Read Hebrews 7:23-28. What are the differences between Jesus and the former priests? Why would the people not accept something so obvious?
7. Summarize the writer's argument for Hebrews 7. Why is Jesus better?

Application

1. Are your true beliefs and convictions really formulated from the Scriptures or from your own experiences, traditions and personal preferences? How should you approach your opinions versus a true conviction of the Scripture?
2. In what ways might we be like the first century Jews? Are you more likely to dig in and resist necessary change or continue to learn and grow?
3. Why should you be thankful for a new covenant and a better hope? See if you can list 10 reasons from this text.