

Just over a week ago the 2021 Nobel prizes were awarded once again to recipients in the areas of physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, economics, and of course peace. I'm sure heaps of you all crowded onto your Ikea couches to livestream the awards announcements at your own Swedish-themed watch party.

The awards have become synonymous with spectacular achievements for the benefit of people everywhere. Yet as widely known about the prize and their recipients, comparatively little is known of the person for whom they're named.

Alfred Nobel was born in Sweden and grew up in Russia in a pretty well-to-do family. And he went on to be quite successful himself. He was crazy smart. He was fluent in 5 languages by the age of 17, which allowed him to get educated, do research, work in many countries on his way to becoming an accomplished scientist, engineer, and inventor.

His widest professional acclaim were due to his developments of a compound that would be used in civil engineering projects such as building bridges and mining. This compound was a combination of nitric and sulfuric acid, combined with glycerine. We call it Nitroglycerin. And though he didn't actually discover this combination he

certainly developed and enhanced its use into something we now know as *dynamite*.

TITLE SLIDE:

Nobel Peace in My Heart: How the Priesthood of Jesus brings Wholeness to All Mankind

Nobel spent a large portion of his life working with this dangerous substance. When formed into dynamite it was used to blast through rock more quickly than one could drill. This made building bridges a more efficient process.

To make a long story short this helped him make a lot of money. At the end of his life Nobel wrote into his will that his remaining estate was to fund prizes to those who have “conferred the greatest benefit to humankind.” Still today the prizes awarded in his name have honored those who have sought to bring about greater flourishing of people around the world.

This morning we’re going to be looking at Hebrews 7. In it we find out how another obscure person established a system that would also bring about the flourishing of all humankind ultimately paving the way for Jesus.

If you’ve got a bible you can go ahead and make your way to Hebrews 7 now. If you don’t have a bible we have

several free copies available to you today in the back corner. Please take one with you if you don't already have one. It is our gift to you.

I'll not be reading every verse in this chapter. Not trying to hide anything. You have it all right there in case you want to see later. I just think for our purposes this morning we will want to not get lost in the many details and rabbit trails I could go down. This is certainly become a fascinating study for me this week but for today I want to try and keep things as simple as possible.

HEBREWS 7

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, met Abraham and blessed him as he returned from defeating the kings, ² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means king of righteousness, then also, king of Salem, meaning king of peace. ³ Without father, mother, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

⁴ Now consider how great this man was: even Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the plunder to him.

⁷ Without a doubt, the inferior is blessed by the superior.

¹¹ Now if perfection came through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the law), what further need was there for another priest to appear, said to be according to the order of Melchizedek and not according to the order of Aaron?

¹² For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must be a change of law as well.

¹⁷ For it has been testified: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

¹⁸ So the previous command is annulled because it was weak and unprofitable ¹⁹ (for the law perfected nothing), but a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

²⁰ None of this happened without an oath. For others became priests without an oath, ²¹ but he became a priest with an oath made by the one who said to him:

**The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever.”**

²² Because of this oath, Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant.

²³ Now many have become Levitical priests, since they are prevented by death from remaining in office. ²⁴ But because he remains forever, he holds his priesthood permanently. ²⁵ Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them.

²⁶ For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do—first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all time when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak, but the promise of the oath, which came after the law, appoints a Son, who has been perfected forever.

As a reminder, the letter to the Hebrews was written to people who were dealing with significant difficulty, hardship, and perhaps persecution. And these Christians who had come from ethnic and religious Jewish heritage are trying to find their way and answer difficult questions.

I realize it is odd to make a hard turn into an obscure OT figure and the Levitical priesthood to grapple with the problem of evil. But this is at the heart of the author's argument at this point in the letter. Of course, who doesn't

deal with existential problems by looking into the granular characters found in the Pentateuch? Am I right?

Well my goal this morning as we unpack this rather theologically rich passage is to make a clear and understandable path forward, ultimately that leads us back to Jesus. So I want us to think about three questions as we wrestle through our own difficulty. Here's the first:

1. How are you dealing with your need for deep wholeness and peace?

The Jewish-background Christians receiving this letter seem to be turning back to their familiar, religious upbringing in the midst of their difficulty.

And who can blame them? Isn't that what we do? We have a problem or hardship in our life? How do we typically deal with it? We do it the way we've always done it. We very easily default to old, deeply ingrained patterns of behavior when the heat is on.

But these Christ-followers seem to be turning completely away from Jesus and the church he established as they wrestle with these questions. Their attempt at exodus from the Christian faith, no pun intended, in order to turn back to their Jewish roots is their attempt at coping with these

very real difficulties. Their goal, just like all of ours in the midst of hardship, is to find peace not just in our circumstances, but in our souls. Deep peace and wholeness.

The desire and longing they have is right. But the problem, as the author of Hebrews points out, is that old broken religious systems will never solve the deeper problem.

So of course the author brings up Melchizedek. Obvi! Well, not really but hopefully I'll help us get there.

These Jewish believers seem to be reattaching to their former way of religious life, particularly through the sacrificial system. That's why all the references to the Levites, priesthood, and sacrifice seem to be made. The Levites were the tribe of priests, the ones who offered sacrifices on behalf of the Israelites. They were the mediators between God and the Jewish people.

But here's this guy, named Melchizedek. He's an OT deep cut of all deep cuts.

He's not a levite. In fact Aaron, through whom the Levites would come, is generations away from being born. Melchizedek's name is a Hebrew mash-up meaning King of Righteousness. And He has this title as King of Salem

or shalom, where we translate the word peace or wholeness. So in his name and the titles he carries, here is this mysterious character who carries both kingly and spiritual authority.

Not to mention there are multiple references in Hebrews to Psalm 110:4 like the one found in verse 17 and 20 of this chapter:

Hebrews 7:17

For it has been testified: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:20

**The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever.”**

What we find in Psalm 110 is that Melchizedek is the forerunner of priests. He is the prototype. “I thought you said he was a king?” Yes, he’s both. He’s a king, twice-over. Both of a king of righteousness and a king of peace. But he is also a priest.

So when do we see him doing priestly stuff? Think back to Abram’s post Liam Neeson retaking of his nephew Lot. These kings greet him and Melchizedek does something

very un-kinglike. He pronounces a blessing over Abraham. That seems like a priestly thing to do.

Then Abraham offers to him his tithe from the score of treasure he just plundered from these kings who'd captured Lot. "ALL IN is a 2-year generosity initiative....."

But seriously the priests were the ones who collected the tithes in OT Israel. And Abraham seemed to set the example by giving his tenth to Melchizedek.

So what does all this mean? Here's what I think.

I think the author is reminding these Jewish Christians that if they're going to go back into their heritage to sort through these big issues, they should at least follow the smoke all the way back to the fire.

You might as well see where this whole sacrificial system originated to begin with because Melchizedek is pointing you to Jesus.

Furthermore, he says the levitical priesthood was flawed anyway.

Hebrews 7:18

So the previous command is annulled because it was weak and unprofitable (for the law perfected nothing), but a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

The old system was broken. It was weak and unprofitable because it would never make you clean and complete permanently. You could say it treated the symptoms but wasn't the cure. The Levitical sacrificial system was always pointing forward to a better provision of peace and wholeness, one it could never provide.

Jesus is where you'll find that peace and righteousness and he is a priest also. He is where your soul will be made whole. He is reminding these people that they seem to have forgotten about Christ's sufficiency to meet the needs of their deepest longings.

So why does that matter to you? It goes back to my original question. Where do you find your peace and wholeness?

We all want inner peace. We all want to live a life that matters. I don't know anyone who wants to live a divided, broken life filled with shame and anxiety. But many times we just default right back to the same 'ol, same 'ol junk

we're already familiar with and never fully find the peace and wholeness our souls are looking for.

Maybe you don't visit a priest or become a messianic Jew, but I'm sure there are many of us who lay our tithes down at the altar of substitute high priests.

Have you allowed escape to become your high priest? You numb your pain through escape with distractions, video games, Instagram, porn, bottles of bourbon or wine, or another episode on Netflix. You know ignoring the deep questions inside your heart still doesn't answer them.

Or maybe you've bowed down to the priest of achievement. Be a better student. Be a better employee. Be a better husband, wife, father, or mother. Lose weight. Bulk up. Save more money. Give more money away. Work more. Volunteer more. Vacation more. Are you becoming your own priest? How's that working out for you?

Or maybe you've succumbed to the priest of scoffing and doubt and you're wondering why any of this matters at all. You have doubts about God. Maybe you've been betrayed by the church or abused by others. Perhaps your suffering is greater than you think you deserve. Have you considered how Jesus, the great high priest has experienced those things also?

At the end of the day we all have to answer the question of where we find peace and wholeness. Don't just settle for the default answer.

2. What does your sin have to do with your need for a priest?

Alfred Nobel was highly driven to succeed. His years of education, travel, research, and successful business dealings helped him travel all across Europe. He was smart. He was successful. And yet he never had a home and contentment always seemed beyond his grasp.

He was quoted as saying once, that his home is wherever his work is. Some of y'all know what that's like, especially since the pandemic hit. But on a different level I think we can also hear the plea of self-justification of his life through his words. He *had* to succeed. He had to prove himself.

He spent years developing and improving this thing called dynamite. It made him a lot of money. But it didn't come without a cost. First, not only did people acquire his dynamite to blast rock to build bridges. They also wanted it to use in war to blow up ships and people.

And more personally dynamite is very dangerous as is nitroglycerine, one of its key ingredients. It wasn't uncommon for things to blow up when they *weren't* planned. Nobel tragically lost his brother, Emil, in a blast at a nitroglycerin plant. I'm sure all of these things weighed heavily on him. Some have even said that these things led him to establish the fund for the Nobel prize as a way to atone for all the destruction he brought into the world.

You see, Nobel needed a priest to deal with his sin also.

We all carry this guilt. This is why regardless of your success or lack of it. Healthy relationships or lack of them. We all carry a transcendent sense of guilt. This is the ultimate reason for the lack of peace and wholeness in your life. And it is the reason why we all want to justify our existence and that we're good enough. The truth is that the problem of sin isn't just out there in the brokenness of our world. It is also deep within each human heart.

Over the last few weeks, Lori, myself, and a few others have been going through this course called Alpha. Its a way to have conversations about Jesus in a very open, discussion oriented manner. This past week the topic of sin was brought up. And they presented four aspects of sin that I would say also are the reasons behind our sense of longing and not feeling good enough. These are

aspects why we feel so divided, not at peace, and un-whole:

Pollution- sin makes us dirty.

Power- sin puts a weight over us we cannot break

Penalty- sin demands a payment for justice to be done

Partition- sin separates us from God

So for all these reasons, sin is a big deal. It's why God instituted means like a sacrificial system, run by a group of levitical priests to atone for sin.

The problem is that even that system was not sufficient. It was a temporary holdover until we got to the great high priest. The great high priest is the one that Melchizedek is pointing us toward.

We all want a priest in our lives to help us deal with our sin. But we really need a great high priest, one who will deal with our sin permanently. Namely, Jesus.

3. Will you return to Jesus as your Priest?

All other systems and people will fail you. But Jesus is the great high priest we all need to deal with our sin.

The author of Hebrews tells us why and it addresses all the aspects of our sin.

Our sin pollutes us and our world. But in Christ we have the **“high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.” (HEB 7:26)**

Jesus is holy and clean and cleanses us of our sin.

We need someone to rescue us from the power of death that sin holds over us.

Hebrews 7:15-16

And this becomes clearer if another priest like Melchizedek appears, who did not become a priest based on a legal regulation about physical descent but based on the power of an indestructible life.

Jesus' resurrection means he has power over sin and death for you.

Jesus also pays the penalty on our behalf.

Hebrews 7:27

He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do- first for their own sins, then for those of

the people. He did this once for all time when he offered himself.

Jesus has paid the penalty of your sin with his sacrifice.

And finally he has broken down the partition that separates you from God.

Hebrews 7:19

(for the law perfected nothing), but a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

Jesus has removed the partition that separates you from God because of your sin. And instead he invites you into close relationship. He draws you near to God.

So will you turn to Jesus?

Alfred Nobel struggled much of his life with poor health. He sought and was frustrated by many of the treatments he had received over the course of his life. But later in life he was diagnosed with a particular heart condition that was treatable with a specific medicine he was very familiar with. They prescribed him nitroglycerine to relieve his heart condition.

He wrote jokingly of the irony of this. Not only had he been a mass developer of this substance, he was now being asked to ingest it. This substance that had presented the threat of death to him and others was now being used to continue his life.

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.

Jesus' gospel is the dynamite the sinful condition our hearts need to find life. You only need to receive it.

The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded each year to someone who has helped promote peace for the greatest benefit of humankind. But the peace that Jesus provides far surpasses. He is not just a philanthropist who hangs a medal on your neck and writes a check. He is a priest who is perpetually interceding for you and me to bring your heart peace and wholeness for all time.

You and I need Jesus as our high priest. He is faithful to usher into our lives both righteousness and peace, cleansing from sin and purpose. But in order to heal your heart you have to swallow the dynamite.