

A Better Hope by Which We Draw Near to God

Hebrew 7:11-19

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Introduction:

Today, before we move on in Hebrews, I want to take a minute to help some of you that are newer to the faith.

- In this part of Hebrews, the author assumes that you know about Abraham, Moses, the Levites, and such things.
- The people Hebrews is written to were Hebrews (Jews) who had grown up with the Old Testament, but for many of you, it is not so familiar.
 - Some of you who have been Christians for a long time may also be unfamiliar, because you were in churches where the Old Testament was rarely mentioned, and where you were not encouraged to read it, or because even though you had encouragement, you neglected it.
- So let me take a little time today to introduce or remind you about some of the people that Hebrews keeps referring to.

First, there is Abraham.

- He lived about 2000 years before Jesus came, so about 4000 years ago from us.
- God came to him at a time when sin had grown up in world so that people were either ignoring the true God or busy making their own versions of Him (as if they could change the truth about who He is). They were also trying to control Him.
- God singled Abraham out and made a remarkable promise to him that has a whole lot to do with us today.
 - We saw this promise referred to in Hebrews 6:13-20 where it told us that God said, “Blessing I will bless you.”
 - That is a huge thing, because, like us, Abraham was a sinner, worthy of condemnation; yet God told him that He would bless him and his descendants through a Son that would be born to them.
 - He said that this blessing would reach all the families, or nations, of the world.
 - For God to bless meant that He would turn them away from Satan and the rebellion Satan began in the human race, and that He would provide forgiveness for their sins and make them righteous in His sight so they could live with Him forever in glory, knowing God and serving Him with joy.
 - Hebrews 6 goes on to tell us that God added an oath to this promise to make it certain to those who would inherit the promise—that is, those who believe.
 - Hebrew 6:18 says that God did this for the purpose... vs. 18: **“that we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.”**
 - Notice. He did it to make the promise of blessing certain to Abraham, but this says He promised and swore that *we* might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge... He wanted to make it certain to *us* too.
 - How kind it is for Him to do this so that whoever comes to Him to be blessed can be certain that he will indeed be blessed.

That's Abraham. Now let's consider Melchizedek.

- We learned a lot about Him last week when we looked at Hebrews chapter 7:1-10.
 - We learned that He was a king who appeared to Abraham after Abraham returned from a battle with success by the hand of the LORD.
 - We learned that the name Melchizedek means “King of righteousness,” and that He also had the title, “King of peace.”
 - We learned that Melchizedek was not only a king, but also a priest who was able to bless Abraham with righteousness and peace—
 - He was the One who would bring the blessing that God had promised to us and to Abraham when He promised and swore, “Blessing I will bless you.” Righteousness and peace would come by the priest who was king of righteousness and king of peace!
- We saw that He was presented as one who was “like the Son of God” in that He was without father and without mother, and in that He had “neither beginning of life nor end of days.”
 - It was emphasised in that passage, that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham and greater than the Levites.
 - From this it appears that Melchizedek was a pre-incarnate Jesus—the eternal Son of God appearing in the form of man who would later actually become a man.
 - We know that He came to Abraham in that way in Genesis 18, so there good reason to think that He did it in Genesis 14 as well.
 - In any case, we were told at the end of Hebrews chapter 6 that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek—and indeed, Jesus is the only priest who, though born of Mary, can also be said to have neither beginning of days nor end of life because He is Son of God who became flesh.
 - He is, as the prophet Micah said, from of old, from everlasting.
 - That is Melchizedek.

But what about the Levites who were mentioned? Who were the Levites?

- Abraham had a great-grandson who was named Levi—one of the twelve sons of Abraham's grandson Jacob from whom the nation of Israel came.
- About 500 years after Abraham (1500 years before Christ), God sent Moses.
 - Moses was one of Abraham's descendants—he was also a descendant of Levi.
 - God called Moses to lead the nation of Israel out of Egypt that they might serve God as an independent nation in the land that God promised to give them.
 - Remember that Israel was the nation that came from Abraham with the promise that they would bring forth the Son of righteousness through whom God's blessing would come to them and to the whole world.
 - God gave Moses a law for Israel to follow, and in that law God appointed the Levites to be priests who would offer ritual sacrifices at the place God said—first a tent and then a temple.
 - The Levites were busy doing that at the great temple in Jerusalem 1500 years later when Jesus came.

- In the passage we looked at last week, Heb 7:1-10, we were told that Melchizedek was greater than the Levites.
 - He was given a superior priesthood, as shown by the fact that even Abraham looked to Him for blessing—
 - He paid tithes to Melchizedek, showing that he recognised Him as the One who was appointed by God to bless him and his descendants.
 - And Hebrews points out that if Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, He is also greater than the Levites that came from Abraham 500 years later to serve as priests when Israel was established as a nation for God.
 - Hebrews is pointing this out to these Hebrews (people of Israel)—that Jesus is greater than the Levites who had served for 1500 years at God’s command.
 - These Levites were dependent on Melchizedek (Christ) to bless them—to obtain the blessing that God swore to Abraham.
 - They were in fact, if they had faith, looking for God to send the Messiah (Jesus Christ) to bless them with the blessing God swore to Abraham.

It is from here that we pick up today.

- We have come to Hebrews 7:11-19.
 - I will read the passage and then explain it so that, with God’s help, you can benefit from it and praise God for Jesus.
 - This is the word of God.

Hebrews 7:11-19: Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need *was there* that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? ¹² For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. ¹³ For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. ¹⁴ For *it is* evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. ¹⁵ And it is

yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest ¹⁶ who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. ¹⁷ For He testifies: “You *are* a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” ¹⁸ For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, ¹⁹ for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, *there is the* bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

Thanks be to God for His precious word.

In this passage, we are told why God appointed a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Jesus) to be priest when He had already appointed the Levites to be priests.

I. God appointed Jesus because He wanted a priest who could perfect the people He had promised to bless—even all who have fled to Him for refuge.

A. Notice that the passage I read begins and ends with discussion about perfection.

1. It begins, “If perfection were through the Levitical priesthood, [implying that it was not,] what further need *was there* that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?”

- Of course, the answer is that if Levi could have brought perfection, there would have been no need at all for Jesus to come as a priest.
 - Verse 19, the verse at the end of our reading, says that thing about perfection in another way—it tells us that **“the law made nothing perfect.”**
 - We will see more about this later, but that speaks of the law of Moses that appointed the Levites, and again, it says that they could not make anything perfect.
2. The word translated *perfect* or *perfection* is one that we have already run into in Hebrews—it is a key word in this letter.
 - The word speaks of that which completely reaches a goal—it does what is required or what it was supposed to do. It accomplishes its purpose.
- B. What does it mean for a priesthood to bring perfection?
1. The function of a priest is to offer sacrifices to God for sinners for their pardon.
 - A priest of God brings about perfection when he, by his work, successfully reconciles sinners to God who were once cut off.
 - He offers a sacrifice and intercedes for them with the result that they are fully pardoned and are enabled to have communion and fellowship with God.
 2. When God promised and swore that He would bless Abraham and his seed as well as those who would believe, He was in effect promising that He would provide a priest with a sacrifice and intercession to take away their sin.
 - No one whose sin has not been pardoned is blessed by God.
 - They are rather condemned for all eternity.
 - And we are told here that the Levitical priesthood was not able to secure pardon for sinners who fled to God for refuge.
 - It did not have what was required to make anyone perfect. It only did this in a ritual way, and even when the people were ritually purified, they were still even symbolically kept at a distance... thereby showing that they were not made perfect.
 - It was like being in a play—and you have to be purified by sacrifices and washings to be acceptable to God, but even then, you still cannot come before Him in the most holy place.
 - God was testifying to them that something more needed to be done than what the priests did before they could come to Him.

II. What was God’s intention for the Levitical priesthood?

- A. We should not think that it was ever His intention to use it to bring perfection.
1. It was not just that the Levitical priests and Israel’s elders were unfaithful—and that if only they had been faithful they would have been used to reconcile us.
 - Of course God called them to be faithful and often chastened them when they were unfaithful.
 - But even if they had done everything perfectly, their priesthood was not designed to actually provide what sinners need to come to God.
 - It is only symbolised and represented what must be done.

2. The very nature of the entire institution was shadows rather than substance.
 - When they went into the place called the holy of holies, it was only in a temple that represented the dwelling place of God.
 - When they wore their garments and had the label, 'Holiness to the Lord,' it was but a sign and symbol of a holy person, for they were sinners.
 - When they offered sacrifices as substitutes for sinful men, it was only animals that were offered—animals that had no blemishes rather than a man with no sin.
 - When they burned incense for intercession, it was symbolic of the prayers that were required—it was not the actual intercession that must be offered.
 - There was nothing here that could reconcile a sinner to God—nothing that God could make anyone perfect.

3. God made it very clear that the Levitical order was insufficient when He declared that there would be a different order of priest.
 - a. Already, we have seen how it says that if perfection had been possible by the Levitical priesthood, He would not have spoken of the Melchizedekian.
 - It would not be needed.
 - b. The Melchizedekian priesthood was different in many ways.
 - 1) Verse 12 explains that when the priesthood is changed, the law regarding the whole priestly system is changed.
 - 2) There was a change in the rules about who could be priest.
 - No longer must he be a Levite—it was a different priesthood.
 - Jesus was clearly from a different tribe, the tribe of Judah—the tribe of kings—the tribe that King David came from about 500 years after Moses (1000 BC).
 - God promised to David that the son promised to Abraham who would bring blessing to him and his descendants and all the families of the earth would be his Son (David's Son), and that He would reign on David's throne forever.
 - Psalm 110 is our Song of Focus.
 - In that Psalm, David speaks of this Son, only he calls Him 'my Lord' because He was to be the one who would reign forever.
 - Psalm 110 opens with David saying, **"The LORD [Yahweh] said to my Lord [the Son of David who was the Messiah that would reign forever], sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool."**
 - He is a king who will reign over all!
 - But then Yahweh says to Him in verse 4, **"You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."**
 - As we saw last week, He is both a king and a priest.
 - Here is the King of righteousness (the meaning of the name Melchizedek) who is also called the King of peace made a priest forever—because He lives forever and because He reconciled His people to God.

- He brings them into everlasting righteousness (rightness with God) and gives them everlasting peace (wholeness in God's house under His blessing).
 - He does not perpetually offer sacrifices the way the Levites were instructed to do because His sacrifice actually does something—it is not just a symbol.
 - His sacrifice actually makes sinners perfect who come to God by Him.
 - The rule for the Melchizedekian priest is not that He be a descendant of Levi, but that He must be one who lives forever.
 - He must be Son of God who has no beginning of days and no end of life, but who remains a priest forever so that God's people are never without Him who alone has reconciled them to God.
 - It is a completely different priesthood than the Levitical priesthood with a completely different law—a completely different set of rules.
 - More about that in a moment.
- B. But first, having seen that the purpose of the Levitical priesthood was not to make sinners perfect so that they can come to God—whatever was it for?
1. The purpose of the Levitical priesthood and law of Moses was to show God's people (and through them, all the world) what was required for sinners to be reconciled to God.
 - It showed that there must be a righteous priest (hence all the ceremonies of washing and purification of priests and all the clothes and labels).
 - It showed that there must be a sacrifice that bore the sin of the people who were being reconciled—that the sacrifice must be unblemished and that it must be killed in place of the sinner. All this represented by animals.
 - It showed that God could not be approached by anyone because He is holy and we are not... even the high priest could only enter the holy place, which was a mere copy, once per year, and that only with all kinds of purifications required first. No one else could enter at any time, nor could any other individual be acceptable to God apart from cleansing and sacrifices.
 - So you see the great contrast: the law of Moses and the Levitical priesthood show us what we need,
 - Jesus our priest actually gives us what we need.
 2. The law of Moses and the Levitical priesthood also held the people of Israel together until the Messiah came.
 - The ordinances were designed to keep them separate from other nations—their food laws for example and their rules about defilement.
 - Also, by keeping before them what God required of them, God also kept before them His promise to provide what was required.

- The ordinances were designed to keep them looking for the promised Son and for sacrifice that God promised to provide that would take away their sin... it pointed them to Jesus who was to come as the object of their faith.
3. After Jesus came, the law of Moses is still used to show us what we need in Christ when we read about it.
- For example, He is presented as our high priest who is without spot and who lives forever—we have presented in Moses what a high priest is and what he does.
 - Jesus is likewise presented as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—that only makes sense when we understand from Moses how lambs were sacrificed to atone for sin.
 - We are taught to preach the gospel, calling all men everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus for forgiveness of sin and that apart from Him there is no salvation—
 - When the nations learn of the law of Moses, they see that sinners were not acceptable unless they had the priests offering sacrifices for them—this teaches us how we must look to Christ and His sacrifice to be saved.

TRANS> So Moses and the law of Moses with the Levitical priesthood had and has an important place, but the ordinances are abolished.

III. Now that Jesus has come, we must be sure that we fully embrace the change.

- There are two things that you need to embrace now that Jesus has come.
 - Embrace it, you are not under the law.
 - Embrace it, you have a better hope.
 - Let's examine these more closely.
- A. Embrace it! You are not under the law.
1. Understand that the law has to do with what was unique to Moses, namely, the ceremonial law related to the priesthood.
 - a. The ceremonial law includes everything about the temple and its ordinances, the priests and their work, the laws for ritual purity such as the food laws and the requirements for washing.
 - It also includes that there are priests, that they must offer sacrifices, that they must represent you before God—all of these things.
 - Those are all things that unique to Moses and the law.
 - b. The moral law, on the other hand, was not unique to Moses.
 - We were obliged to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength before Moses issued this command.
 - And we are obliged to love our neighbour as ourselves.
 - These are things that are always required of human beings who are made in the image of God.
 - We are always required to love God and love our neighbour, but we are not always required to offer bulls and goats for sin or to have a priest with robes representing us in an earthly sanctuary.

- The moral law is expressed in a more specific summary in the ten commandments.
 - Always, we are supposed to have no other God but God—we are to worship only Him as our God; we are never to worship Him by idols—in our own way; we are not to take His name in vain—as if He and all that pertains to Him is not important; we are to set aside one day in seven to worship Him.
 - And always, we are to honour our parents and those in authority; to enhance their lives instead of taking their lives; to maintain fidelity in our marriages; to respect our neighbours’ property and seek to further it as we are enabled; to speak the truth without gossip and slander; and to avoid coveting what our neighbour has—his wife or his house...
 - None of that is peculiar to Moses—it was true from creation and it remains true as long as the world stands—and really for eternity.
 - c. Furthermore, the way of restoration to God does not change.
 - Since the fall, we have always been instructed to look to the LORD to save us from our sins.
 - He has promised that He will turn our hearts against Satan and to Him, and that He is the one who will deal with our sin.
 - This was promised from the Fall and it was brought to great clarity with Abraham—
 - Moses teaches this too, but when we speak of the Law, we do not speak of that—we speak of what pertains to the Levitical priesthood and all the ordinances of the temple.
2. We must see that we are not under the law of Moses anymore.
- a. Now, we have faith replacing all the rituals and ceremonies.
 - We trust in the Saviour that God has provided for us—Jesus, the priest after the order of Melchizedek.
 - Instead of engaging in rituals of purification, we trust in what Jesus did for our purification.
 - b. No longer do we engage in ceremonies and rituals that merely show us what we need. We have Jesus who was crucified, raised, and accepted at God’s right hand where He intercedes for us.
 - We trust in Jesus as the priest that we need.
 - There was a silly book that came out a few years ago where a woman tried to keep every law in the Bible for a year, including all the ceremonies that are no longer to be observed now that Jesus has come.
 - She was trying to keep the rituals of the OT in the days when God had abolished them.
 - c. The ceremonies of the NT are fewer, simpler, and fundamentally different.
 - They are not shadows of what God is going to do, nor are they re-enactments of what He has done already in Christ.

- Whenever you have a priest in the NT, something is wrong—because you have a man who is usurping the place that belongs only to Christ now.
- We don't need men in robes offering sacrifices because we have Jesus who has offered the sacrifice we need and is interceding at God's right hand.
 - You are not under the law—you are under grace.
 - You are not called to do rituals—but to trust in the one who has actually done everything that is required to reconcile you to God.
- Baptism and the LORD's supper are not re-enactments of Christ being crucified and rising again or of Him being sacrificed and offered up to God.
 - No. They are designed to set forth to us in a visible, tangible way the access we have to Him and His benefits.
 - We are not redoing the work that He did ritually, we are remembering what He did and looking to Him to apply the benefits of His work to us.
 - He has provided what we need, and we are receiving it.
 - We are not cooking a meal, but eating the meal that He cooked.
 - We are not doing the work that reconciles us to God, but receiving the work that He did.
 - We are not doing it actually or ritually. We are receiving benefits using rituals, but we are not doing work ritually.
 - Our focus is not on providing what is required in a ritual way, but in receiving the benefits really and truly with the aid of water and the bread and the wine to support our faith.
- 3. Closely related to this is the error of supposing that you must make the sacrifice that will make you acceptable to God.
 - That you think that to be accepted of Him you must do good works of some kind or attain some kind of perfection—
 - Or perhaps that you have to repent enough or pray enough or worship sincerely enough, or even believe enough.
 - No! The good news is that Jesus has done all that is required to make us perfect. He is the priest who does the saving and He does it quite well.
 - Look to Him to do the saving and all will be well.

TRANS> So I say, embrace it—you are not under the law of Moses.

- You are not doing rituals of what God requires for your salvation or performing works.
- You are rejoicing in and receiving the blessing that comes through Christ's finished work. You are looking at what He did with faith for your salvation—for forgiveness and for reconciliation to God.
 - Embrace it. You are not under the law. You have no priest but Jesus.

- Quit trying to offer sacrifices or look for priests to do it for you. You have a perfect priest.
 - Rejoice, the work is done. You are not under the law. Rest in what Jesus did.
- B. Embrace it! You have a better hope. That is the second thing we are told.
- Verse 19 says: **for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, *there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.***
1. Your hope is better because now Christ has done what was required.
 - You are no longer as people were when they were under the law—still waiting for the Messiah to come to do what was promised.
 - You have a much better situation because you can see that God has been faithful to His promise—that Christ has actually come.
 - And you can see what He actually did to secure your salvation.
 - That the Son of God Himself served as a perfect priest to make you perfect through His work.
 2. This means that you can draw near to God with confidence.
 - a. The whole world was so far off from Him because of our sin and guilt.
 - We were condemned.
 - We were unable to rejoice in His infinite glory or to experience His unfailing love and grace. Sin separated us from Him.
 - b. But now in Christ, sin has been cleared.
 - He has suffered its penalty and He has fulfilled all righteousness for us.
 - He has given us His Spirit and promises to transform us.
 - Our worship is primarily about the declaration of this glorious gospel by which we now draw near to God.
 - Yes, you are still a sinner and you still need to grow, but your hope is secure because Christ is our priest and you are accepted in Him.
 - God is at work in you, and He has promised that you will be conformed to the image of His Son.
 - He loves you and takes great delight in the progress that you make.
 - Certainly, He grieves when you harden your heart and do not trust Him, but He continues His work and will faithfully complete it in you.
 - Nothing is uncertain when Christ is set forth as our priest.
 3. If you are resting in Christ for your salvation, your hope is secure.
 - He who gave Himself for you has already reconciled you and He will not fail to bring you to full blessing of glory.
 - Move forward for Him with confidence, joy, and love.
 - Embrace it! You have a better hope than anyone had before Christ came and did His work.