

(Hebrews - Part 19): Melchizedek

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon explores the significance of Melchizedek as a precursor to Christ's eternal priesthood and the transition from the Levitical order to the new covenant established by Jesus.

Duration: 33:11

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 6:18-19, Hebrews 7:24-25, Hebrews 7:28, Hebrews 13:8

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the seventh chapter of Hebrews and its meaning. He acknowledges the difficulty of preaching a sermon that is clear enough to understand but not too clear that it bores the congregation. The preacher shares his personal testimony of conversion at the age of 17, highlighting that one's background or past sins do not determine the power of God's salvation. He emphasizes the importance of focusing on where we are going and who we are seeking, rather than where we came from. The preacher also addresses the worship practices of the Jews, stating that their faith has lost its true essence and that salvation rests not on the Levitical priesthood but on the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

...made a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. And so we have introduced here a strange personality. He has brought him an aura of mystery, and he's puzzled a great many people.

You go into the country places, into the hill places, and they will talk about Melchizedek with a sense of awe. And they'll discuss who this man Melchizedek was. All this may seem to be doing what one man wrote me.

A fellow wrote me a letter, and he said that he thought that what the liberals were saying about us evangelicals might be true, that we were attacking mosquitos, or insects, when there were tigers roaming the land. And I wrote him back, and I told him that I had had, I had known that the liberals believed that there were great tiger hunters, but that I personally had never seen any skins tacked on their church doors, but that the evangelical church, the Church of Jesus Christ, back to the Pentecost, had accounted for some pretty big tigers. I said it in a nice way, but I said it.

I wanted him to know that I wasn't going to run with my tail down and whimper like a spanked puppy, because he said that witty thing about me. Anyhow, here's the fellow Melchizedek, and it's a long way

from being an insect. He is, as scripture says, Behold how great this man was.

Look, look how great this man was, this man Melchizedek. In the 7th chapter of Hebrews, For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham and blessed him, to whom Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being by interpretation king of righteousness, and after that also king of Salem. That's another thing that intensifies the mystery that lies around the man.

He is called Melchizedek, meaning king of righteousness, and then he's king of Jerusalem, Salem, which is king of peace. And there's this thing about him, Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, he abided a priest continually. Now, you know that the Jews were great for genealogical tablets.

Everybody knew who he was descended from, or from whom he was descended. Abraham, and then Isaac, and then Jacob, and then on down the line. Everybody in the kingdom of Israel knew exactly who his parents were, back to Abraham.

He knew the line, because it was all kept there. The reason it was kept was that the Messiah was coming finally, and when the Messiah got here, he had to prove his genealogy. It had to be known where he could go back in lineal descent from Abraham through David on down.

And an odd and wonderful thing is that when the Messiah had come and been crucified and had risen and gone to God's right hand again, the genealogical tablets were destroyed. So that nobody that came after him could say, I am descendant of Abraham through David and so on, because there was no proof of it. So when it says here that this man Melchizedek was without father and without mother and without descent, it doesn't mean that he had no father and he had no mother.

It means that there was nothing recorded about him. The priests all had their genealogy, and the tablets were there, and every priest knew who his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, great-grandfather, back to Levi. But Melchizedek had no such a record.

He appears suddenly in Old Testament history, and he appears from nowhere, then he is not heard of again, he goes out into nowhere, they don't know who his father and mother were, we don't know what his line of descent was. He came not according to the Jewish priestly manner, but came in a manner all of his own. And so the man that wrote Hebrews said, This man, this Melchizedek, was like Jesus in that, consider how great he was, he was like Jesus in that he came out of another world, sort of, and there is no way to identify him.

It was a tight question altogether. Then he said, Abraham gave him a tenth of the spoils, and verily they that are of the sons of Levi will not read it, because I won't explain it. And if I read it, I've got 28 verses to read, and then after that I'll explain, so I'll explain as I go along.

Now the writer sets out to show five things. The writer sets out to show that according to the Old Testament, the Levitical priesthood was not permanent. He sets out to show that according to the Old Testament, the Mosaic law was not to be permanent, and that the Eternal Son, when he came, would institute a superior priesthood that would be permanent, and that the priesthood should be eternal, and that the salvation of man rests not upon the Levitical priesthood, but the priesthood of the man that was to come.

Now that's what he's saying. You see, my friends, this all may sound very dull to us, who are brought up on television and comic strips and Reader's Digest and everything cut out for us and put in little capsules which we swallow, and we don't have to do any thinking. Here you have to do a little bit of thinking.

I like to preach, though, to get people to think. You don't get as many of them, but you get a better quality. And I like to stir you a little to think about this.

It involves thinking and puzzling and very hard to get at. But as we go along, you will see these five things. Now let's discuss them.

That the Levitical priesthood was not to be permanent. And what do we mean by the Levitical priesthood? We mean the priest that came from the tribe of Levi. Remember that there were twelve tribes of Israel, and there was the tribe of Levi.

And the tribe of Levi had no inheritance with the other tribes. They were a people apart altogether. And the priests came from them.

Not only the priests, but the Levites also came from them. But the priests, nobody could bring an offering and make it in Israel, you know. It took priests to do that.

And the priests had to come of the tribe of Levi and of nobody else. The high priests were all of the tribe of Levi. The tribe of Judah could give no high priest and no priest.

The tribe of Benjamin, no high priest, no priest. The tribe of Gad, Dan, Zebulun, Issachar, all the rest of them, no priest. They had to come of the tribe of Levi.

And of course this was built into the Jewish religion. The religion of the Jew, of the Hebrew, was built around this. The law was given, and the sacrifices, and the temple, and the altar, and the priesthood, and the prayer.

All these were built on this one thing, the Levitical covenant, and built around the Levitical priesthood. Now, the man of God tends to show that the Levitical priesthood was never intended to be permanent. Now, saying that to a Jew would be like saying to an American that the Constitution was not supposed to be permanent, or to a Canadian that the Articles of Confederation were not intended to be permanent, or to an Englishman that the Magna Carta was not intended to be permanent, because this was what was built upon, you see.

The Jewish religion was built upon this priesthood and upon this order. And so when Jesus Christ came, they went out saying that this Jesus Christ is a priest. And they said, hold on, he's not a priest because he didn't come of the tribe of Levi, he came of the tribe of Judah, therefore he isn't a priest.

And they said, how can you say he's a priest? We've got an altar, and we've got a tabernacle, and we've got priests and rabbis. So the man of God wrote Hebrews in order that he might straighten them all out, in order that he might show to them that Jesus Christ fulfilled all of the Levitical order, and that now the Levitical order drops away and is no more. He does that by showing that in Psalm 110, written 400 years after the Levitical order was established, that God said about somebody, he is to be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

The writer says, this was Jesus he was talking about. He was to be a priest forever, not after the order of Aaron or Levi, but after the order of Melchizedek, who was somebody other than the Levitical priest altogether. Who was this Melchizedek? Notice in Genesis 14, and the King of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of the cattle of Laomer, and all of the kings that were with him at the valley of Sheva, which is the Kingsdale.

And Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought forth bread and wine, and he was the priest of the Most High God. And Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and said, Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. That is, the Most High God was possessor of heaven and earth.

And blessed be the Most High God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand. And Abraham gave to Melchizedek tithes of all. Here is the involved reasoning here.

That's what makes you skip it when you're reading through the Bible, or hastily hurry over it and say, I don't get it. Here is what the man of God said. He said, Abraham was the father of Levi, and Levi was the father of all the priests.

And the people gave to the priests tithes of all they had, because the priests were above the people. And Abraham was above the priests because he was the great father of all of the priests. And yet, remember, said the man of God, that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, which shows that Melchizedek was higher than Abraham because the lower pays tithes to the higher.

And therefore, Melchizedek was above Abraham. And when the scripture says that there was a priest coming who should be after the order of Melchizedek, he couldn't be after the order of Levi or of Aaron or the Levitical priests, because he was already higher in that the Levitical priests and their high priests and all the rest had paid tithes in Abraham. Now, is that confusing enough? I don't know, but I enjoy these things and like to think about them.

And I like to have you walk along with me and look the scenery over. So there is the proof, said the man of God, that the priesthood must pass away to make room for another priest who was to be after a higher order. Then the second thing he proved was that the Mosaic law was not to be permanent.

The law and the priesthood were interdependent according to verse 12. For the priesthood being changed, there is made necessary a change also of the law. And when the priesthood was changed, the law passed away.

Now, there is where we stand, men and women. We stand not under the shadow of Moses' law. We stand not in the lighter power of an Old Testament Jewish priest.

But we stand in the light of Christ, who is superior to all Old Testament priests and who made the law pass away when he instituted his new covenant, which was made after a better sacrifice. So the weight of the argument in verses 18 and 19, For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof, for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh unto God. Now, here is a very strange thing, an ominous thing, that when Jesus died on the cross, the finger of God stretched out and tore the veil apart.

The high priest used to go in behind a great veil, a veil so thick that it took four or five men to pull it aside. And when Jesus died, the finger of God split that veil, rent in the middle to show that he was finished with that now, that there was a transfer of priests and priesthood and covenants and altars and everything

that belonged to the Old Testament was now done, and that the new priest was Jesus, the new sacrifice was the Lamb of God, and the new altar was in heaven, and that the old had passed away. But do you know what our friends the Jewish priests did? They went back after Jesus had died and had risen again, they went back and sewed up that veil, according to history, according at least to tradition, they went back and sewed up that red veil and tried to use the old altar and the old sacrifices that God had set aside by ripping them down and saying, out they go, we have the priest, not the fulfillment of the Aaronic Levitical order, but the fulfillment of a higher order than Levi, that of Mechizedeh, to whom Levi paid tithe.

Now, if you open your mouth these days to say anything, you are accused of being anti-Semitic. I remember once in the city of Chicago, the Anti-Defamation League, of the B'nai B'rith, wrote to the station where I was preaching, and they said, this man Tozer said that all the trouble in the world, we heard him on the radio, and he said all the trouble in the world was caused by the Jews and that things would never be right until the Jews were eliminated. And I called the B'nai B'rith people and I said, an interesting thing, I understand, I'm supposed to have said that I don't like Jews, and that this was a Jew I was talking to, of course, and I said I'm supposed to believe that all Jews should be cast out and all the trouble in the world came from the Jews.

Well, he said, that's the report we get. I said, maybe just hold still while I tell you a few things. He said, only recently that I had as assistant pastor a Jew.

He was my assistant pastor, a Christian Jew. I said, I belong to two different societies dedicated to the prosperity and salvation of the Jew. I'm a believer in the future glory of the Jew when Jesus Christ, the great Jewish Messiah, comes back to the world again.

And I have been a crusader in favor of the Jew and the Jewish Messiah, the Christ of God, for the last 30 years. And I have written in favor of the Jew and I have given to help the Jew and I have baptized Jews in my church and have Jewish members in my congregation and I repeat, just got over having a Jewish assistant pastor. Oh, he backed down immediately.

So I called the station, but I didn't call fast enough. I said, I just talked to the B'nai B'rith man. He said, and how? He said, he just called us now and hung up.

He said, what did you say to him? I said, nothing. I just told him what I thought of the Jews. He said, you apologized all over the place and said they had you all wrong.

It must have been somebody else. I said, two other fellows. It certainly wasn't me.

I never said it. I don't believe in this. I don't believe that the Jews cause all the trouble in the world and I don't believe that anything would at all be availed if the Jew was gotten rid of.

I believe in the future glory of Israel when the Messiah returns and Israel goes back to the land in faith, not in unbelief as she is now. Think of it, the President of Israel is now taking lessons from Buddhism. So there's no belief there.

But there will be a day when Israel shall shine forth and the word of the law shall go forth from Zion and the word of God shall go forth from Jerusalem. But I can still say what I'm going to say and if anybody says I'm anti-Semitic, I live at 5 Old Orchard Grove. Come out and see me.

Now, I'm not anti-Semitic, but I'm not going to run around and paw over Jews in order to keep from telling truth. The truth is, the Jews are worshiping after they know not what, because the heart and living, beating life of their faith has gone out of them long ago. There is no altar, no shrine, no sacrifice, no lamb, no priest, no high priest, no Jerusalem, no Zion, no tabernacle.

They're still trying to carry on. They will never be satisfied until they admit that when that veil was rinsed, it was rinsed by God for a purpose, to say to everybody, Jew and Gentile, salvation is not of Levitical order. Salvation is of the eternal Son who was made flesh to dwell among us and who became not only the lamb that died, but the priest who offered himself as a lamb that died for the sins of the world.

So the Mosaic law was not to be permanent. That's why I have a great freedom about the Mosaic law. That's why I'm a free man from fools.

Some people go back to the Old Testament. I have a young fellow. He's the son of a missionary, and he's a very bright fellow.

He writes me from time to time and pesters me like a mosquito at a picnic, always after me. He wants me to start preaching that I show you shouldn't eat chicken and you shouldn't eat pork and you shouldn't eat. I look up to God and say that all that passed away.

And with the passing away of the priesthood, there passed away also the law and the covenant, and it all passed away. And Jesus said, I give unto you a new covenant, a new covenant sealed in my blood. And when you drink, you do drink in memory of that covenant, not the old covenant but the new.

So nobody is going to come and lay upon me a burden which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear. Nobody is going to look at me in a shocked and hurt manner and say, Would you dare to eat that piece of ham? Sure, a second one if I can have it. And I can do it as long as it doesn't do me any harm physically and as long as I can take it.

Some things I don't eat, bananas and raw apples, but apart from that I can take anything that's too thick to be drunk. And I can eat it. And I can eat it because I am not laboring along under Levitical order.

I am now from under that in the New Testament. And my lamb is not a lamb with four legs offered by a priest. My lamb is the lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

My altar is not the altar in Jerusalem behind that veil. My altar was Calvary where he offered himself, a lamb without spot unto God. Freedom there, my brothers and sisters, in the book of Galatians.

Paul really acts as eloquent in that book of Galatians. He condemns these people who follow Christians around and tries to make Jews out of them. He says, you ought to stop it.

He says, why is the grace of God doing you no good? So the Mosaic law was not to be permanent. Third thing, the Son, when he came, should establish a priesthood, superior priesthood, and it should come of the line of David and not of the line of Judah, and not of the line of Levi. He came from David, David came from Judah, therefore Jesus descended from Judah, about the tribe about which says the scripture here, no priesthood was ever mentioned.

So when Jesus came, keep this in mind, dear friends, he did not simply come as a detailed item by item fulfillment of the Old Testament. He came from above. He was the Old Testament.

He was superior to it. And when he came, he said, he have heard it been said, but I say unto you, and he put himself above all the Old Testament and above everything, and he was a priest forever. So he could not be a Levitical priest at all, for his priesthood had to be eternal.

Thou art a priest forever. Kind of pathetic, it seems to me, those priests of the Old Testament times. God bless them.

A man would get to be 30 years old and then he became a priest. You know, they had it pretty nice. I was thinking about it yesterday when I was reading up on this.

They began their work when they were 30 and retired when they were 50. They just had 20 years of work and no more. Just 20 years of work.

Nowadays you start as soon as you can get out of school and work until they make you quit. And some men worked beyond. Look at Adenauer, 86 years old, 84 yesterday.

Still as tough as ever, 86. He could have been retired if he'd been an Old Testament priest 36 years before. He'd been loafing around fishing.

But the priests hadn't anything to do after they were 50. I don't know yet what they did. When a man gets to be 50 years old, he's not old and he's not young.

And what they did with themselves, I wouldn't know. I said and have said, and maybe the Lord will make me take this back sometime, but I have said this, that all the priests retired when they were 50, but the prophets, they never retired at all. They died in the harness.

And I'd rather be a prophet than a priest so that I can preach on until I fall over. I pray God that I may not get to be so that I have to be silent and have silent Sabbaths, as Rutherford called them. I want to preach and labor and write and work and pray and serve God's people until I'm finished.

And then when I'm finished, why hang around here? But anyhow, the Levitical priests couldn't continue because they retired and then they died. And even the high priest, he couldn't continue. He had to die.

But now we are, we have a priest who abided continually and has an ever and unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. And the fifth thing is that this priesthood guarantees the covenant by which we have salvation.

His priesthood, that is the priesthood of Jesus Christ our Lord, is non-transferable by an oath, thou art a priest forever, and of perpetual efficacy. I want to stop here and talk a little bit about that. You know, another thing they'll condemn you for if you don't get down and pet the Pope.

And I won't pet the old boy. And I won't say that I think that all religions are alike and that I think every road leads to heaven and all roads lead to Rome. I don't think so at all.

I think that the Catholic doctrine of the perpetual mass, the perpetuation of the mass, is a very vile and evil thing. For every time the priest says his Latin words over the bread and wine, they become the very body and blood of Christ, offered again for our salvation, so that Christ is offered every Sunday all over the world and many times in between wherever the mass is said and the sacrifice of the Eucharist is offered. Now that, they say, they're returning constantly a repeated sacrifice of the mass.

Now the Bible doesn't teach this at all. The Bible teaches that there was one sacrifice of everlasting efficacy. It was done once, not repeated every Sunday, but done once.

You can't, by repeating Latin words over a great cup of grape juice or wine and some biscuits, you can't call the man of glory back who's been immortal since he went there. You can't call him back to die again on the cross, to bleed again in his veins and say, Father, into thy hands I come in my spirit. Death has no more dominion over him.

He's alive forevermore, and his priesthood is an everlasting priesthood, and he guarantees the covenant. It's perpetual efficacy, you see, who needeth not daily as those high priests used to offer up sacrifices, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people. For this they did, for this he did, Jesus did once when he offered himself.

For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity, but the word of the oath which was since the law maketh the Son who is consecrated forevermore. So there's the Holy Evangelist. That's what that involved, highly complex 7th chapter of Hebrews says.

That's what it says. It's very hard to understand it. I admit it, there are passages that are hard to understand.

That's another reason why I think Paul may have written Hebrews. Remember what Peter said about him? He said he writes some things that are very hard to be understood, and the unlearned and the unstable rest them to their own destruction. Well, here is the Holy Evangelist then.

He lives forevermore. No age can heap its outward years on thee, dear Christ, thou art thyself thine own eternity. As God is timeless, so the man Christ Jesus is also timeless.

And he lives to intercede. His whole interest and work is to be our surety. Before the throne my surety stands, my name is written in his hands.

I believe in the security of the saints. That is, I believe they are secure, not by some technicality that Calvin might have thought up, but I believe they are secure because there is one who can't die, offering their name before the Father day and night. And I know, Father, thou hearest me always.

And no matter how much obliquely the world may heap on my name, there is a name before the Father kept bright day and night by the intercessory prayers of my brother and high priest Jesus Christ in the glory. And no matter how weak I may be or what poor sample of a Christian I may be, I am kept because my Lord Jesus Christ is my high priest, is there not hanging on the ropes waiting for the end, but there quietly, victoriously, triumphantly pleading his own blood for his children. He is able to save to the uttermost.

The week after next I'm going to preach on a rescue mission. And I preached a lot when I was younger in the rescue missions. And I heard and have heard, as you have heard, this verse used this way.

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him. And then they made the uttermost, they changed the preposition from to to from. They said he saved from the uttermost.

But Scripture doesn't say he saved from the uttermost. It saved to the uttermost. The Lord doesn't care where you came from.

It's where you're going that pleases him, you see. We get a fellow, he's a dope addict and a bum and a general no good and a ne'er-do-well and a wife-beater and a child-deserter, and he gets converted. And then for the rest of his life he spends it telling about what he was saved from.

Oh, no, that's not Scripture. The Bible doesn't say that we are to talk about what we were saved from. It says he's able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him.

It's where we're going and who we're going to see that matters, not where we came from. I was converted when I was 17. I'd never been in jail in my life.

I wasn't a dope fiend. I didn't smoke, I didn't chew, I didn't drink. I'd never deserted my wife.

I wasn't married. And I was rather good-looking. You wouldn't believe it now, but I was red-cheeked and rather good-looking.

And there I walked about and everybody thought, what a fine boy this is. Well, I was in a way, too. Mother thought I was.

What could I tell the people? What could I tell the people? My testimony was just as dull as they come. I couldn't say, I was a dope fiend and the Lord saved me from it. I was a slave to cigarettes and the Lord saved me from it.

I deserted my family and the Lord saved me and I came back. I couldn't say that. None of those things were true about me.

So my testimony wouldn't have been worth two lines of type. But I could say, I have been saved unto. And I'd spend the rest of my life telling about that, what I'm saved unto.

What I'm saved from doesn't matter. What I am saved to is what matters. He's able to save us to the uttermost.

All that come to God by him. You know there will be a day when your little past will seem only as a wink of the eye. With all your eternity out there.

For all your past is time and your future is eternity. So why match time over against eternity? And so he saved me from, spent a lot of time on from. He saved us to.

He saved the uttermost, the uttermost in time and the uttermost in condition. And he does it because we have a high priest, not after the Levitical order, but after the order of Melchizedek, that strange man who came out of nowhere and was a priest a while and then disappeared and so set up a type of the Son of God who was to follow. And that's what the 7th chapter of Hebrew means.

I hope that it's done you some good. Preaching a sermon like this isn't easy, as my preacher friends present here know. It's tough because if you don't make it clear enough, then you might as well stay at home.

And if you try to make it too clear, your congregation goes to sleep. But I hope we've had a happy medium here and I hope you'll all go home saying to yourself, His oath, his covenant, his blood support me in the whelming flood. And when all around my soul his way, he then is all my hope and stay.

On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. Amen.

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