

Getting Excited About Melchizedek (TGC 2011)

by D.A. Carson

This sermon delves into the significance of Melchizedek in the Old Testament, highlighting the anticipation of a priest king beyond the Levitical priesthood, pointing to Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of this role. It emphasizes the theological implications of Jesus being both King and Priest, offering salvation and intercession for believers. The sermon encourages a deep exploration of how the New Testament authors carefully interpret the Old Testament, revealing the intentional trajectories that lead to Jesus as the ultimate Priest King.

Scripture: Psalms 110:4, Hebrews 7:1, Hebrews 7:11, Hebrews 7:22

Topics: "Melchizedek", "Jesus as Priest and King"

Description

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Transcript

And so he says to me going down the stairs, excite me, Don. So if you come out of here merely understanding, milk is a deck and that's all. It's a bit of a flop, isn't it? Hear the word of God, Psalm 110.

Psalm 110. The chapter of the Old Testament that is quoted most often in the New Testament. The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion saying, rule in the midst of your enemies. Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy splendor, your young men will come to you like Jew from the morning's womb.

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. The Lord is at your right hand.

He will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge the nations heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth. He will drink from a brook along the way and so he will lift up his head.

This is the word of the Lord. Let us pray. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Most of the controlling themes in the Bible do not resonate very well with the dominant secular culture of the West and for that matter with many other cultures as well.

Think through many of the controlling categories. Covenant, priest, sacrifice, blood offering, Passover, Messiah, King, Day of Atonement, Year of Jubilee. I guarantee there are not a lot of people on the streets of Chicago asking themselves today, Boy, I wonder when the Year of Jubilee is coming.

King. We speak of King Jesus. When Jesus began to minister, he did not announce the dawning of the Republic of God.

The last king we had here in America was King George III. He didn't turn out too well. And if instead we come from a commonwealth country and we still have a lot of respect for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, then nevertheless we recognize she is a constitutional monarch.

She has very little real power. But the king of the Bible is not a constitutional monarch. So even a notion that's common enough, like king, means something very different in our culture.

It has different resonances. And meanwhile, most of us are not thinking on the streets of Chicago, hope my high priest is up to date on his repentance when he offers that blood sacrifice this year. I really feel the need for atonement.

Hope he does a good job in the most holy place. We're not thinking in those terms at all. Of course, some exposure to priesthood is found amongst Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, but that's pretty far removed from Levitical priesthood or Melchizedekian priesthood.

Yet Melchizedek turns out to be one of the most instructive figures in the entire Bible for helping us put our Bibles together. And then beyond that, not only helping us put our Bibles together, but seeing clearly who Jesus is. This is going to involve some hard mental work.

But I tell you the truth, God has put these things together in the Bible in this way. Not only for our instruction, but for our good. Melchizedek shows up only two times in the Old Testament.

Two little snippets. One in Genesis 14, the other one is here. And then he shows up in only one book in the New Testament.

That's it. Several points, but that's it. And yet he turns out to be utterly revolutionary in opening our eyes to the glories of our Savior.

We begin with Psalm 110. Here we must ask two questions. The first one will sound out of place.

Psalm 110, who wrote it? And you think, Don, for goodness sake, stay in the classroom. In the classroom you ask a whole lot of questions about who wrote what and when it was written, and those matters are called introduction. And we burden our students with them and they have to pass exams on them.

Just get us to the text. And in many instances it doesn't make a lot of difference who wrote what. But in this instance it makes a huge amount of difference, so we have to ask the question and answer it.

In most of our English printed Bibles there's a little superscription. You get a bowl face, Psalm 110. And then italics, perhaps, and a little smaller font of David, a psalm, or something of that order.

But there are an awful lot of contemporary people who don't think that David wrote it. They think that those superscriptions came in later. Supposing David didn't write it, how would you read it? If David didn't write it, the Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

Now it sounds as if the Lord, Yahweh, notice those capital letters, the living covenant God, Yahweh, says to my Lord, apparently, my Lord the King. In which case the person who's writing it is not the king, but a courtier, someone in the king's court. There are a lot of psalms written by a courtier.

So if we get rid of the superscription, this was written by a courtier saying, the Lord says to my Lord the King, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool. And then it sounds quite a lot like Psalm 2 and other psalms that are royal and Davidic and promise conquest over the enemies and so on. But the superscription won't go away.

Of the various manuscripts that have come down to us, not one leaves it out. In fact, in our printed Bibles, we have a little italicized font for of David and then bigger font for the psalm. But of course, they didn't have different fonts in those days.

They didn't have printing. And so in all the manuscripts that have come down to us, it's part of the psalm. It is not to be seen as an add-on that came along later.

It is part of the psalm. It was counted as part of the psalm. But if those were not arguments enough, in this instance, we rely on the words of the Lord Jesus himself.

For the validity of one of Christ's arguments turns on the Davidic authorship of this psalm. You can find it in both Matthew and Mark. In Mark's version of the account, Mark chapter 12, we read, while Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, Mark 12, 35, he asked, why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Spirit, declared, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.

David himself calls him Lord. How then can he be his son? The large crowd listened to him with delight. The point is, if David has written this, it's not a courtier addressing the king, but David the king is actually writing, the Lord said to my Lord, and then to whom does my Lord refer? It can't be David.

He's not talking about himself. And so the conclusion is drawn, he must be talking to someone yet greater. To whom does King David say my Lord? Apart from Yahweh himself.

The Lord says to my Lord, the conclusion is drawn, this has to be the anticipated Messiah. It has to be. And Jesus himself takes it that way.

In fact, Jesus says, you're used to thinking of the Messiah as the son of David. And in one sense, of course, he is the son of David. Jesus doesn't deny that.

But if he's just the son of David, then in the order of thinking of the day, that would make you ultimately inferior to David. We don't understand that well in the West because we think that the really important people are the young people. And of course, in a sense, that's true.

But in many cultures of the world, the really important people are the older people. So I am always of less honor than my father, who is of less honor than his father, who is of less honor than his father. And that means David's greater son can't be greater.

He's got to be somewhat inferior down there. If you think of Jesus as only David's son and nothing else, you've got too small a Jesus. But if you have, in fact, David himself anticipating this person coming, saying, the Lord said to my Lord, then you've got a picture of Messiahship that escapes mere sonship to David, as important as that sonship is in fulfilling the promise of the Davidic line.

So we have to see that this psalm is talking about the Messiah. It's talking about Jesus. It's talking about the one who was to come.

Written about a thousand years before Christ, during the time of David. Now that date is important. I'm not just throwing it out there because, you know, I'm paid to do it.

I'm a professor. It's important. Hang on to it.

So now we must ask, what then does the psalm say? That's the second question. If you look at it closely, it's divided into two oracles. And after each oracle, there is comment and explanation.

The first oracle is found in verse one. The Lord says to my Lord, then the oracle, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. The second oracle, verse four, the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind.

Then the words of the oracle, you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. Now let's take those oracles one by one. The Lord says to my Lord.

The exact words pick up an expression that is very common in the prophets, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Literally, Yahweh's utterance to my Lord. That's the way it literally reads.

A very common prophetic declaration. Which is a way of saying that David here is functioning as a prophet. David is the one who is declaring what God is saying now to the one whom David himself refers to as my Lord.

And what he says is, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. That little expression, sit at my right hand. Do you have any idea how often it's quoted in the New Testament? It comes up again and again.

Listen to some of the inferences that the New Testament writers draw just from this little expression. Here is Yahweh, the great sovereign creator, covenant God, addressing the Messiah and saying, sit at my right hand. What do we infer from that? Number one, he is greater than David.

Acts 2.34, for David did not ascend into heaven, but he ascends into heaven and sits at God's right hand. Number two, he is greater than angels. Hebrews 1.13, for to which of the angels has he said, sit at my right hand.

There is no other mediating person that sits at the right hand of God. Number three, he is exalted to God's side. As one author has put it, God exalted him as emphatically as man rejected him.

Again, Acts 5.30 and 31, Jesus whom you killed, God exalted at his right hand. Number four, his session, his being seated at the right hand of God, grounds his intercession for us. Romans 8.34, Acts 5.31, Christ who is at the right hand of God and who intercedes for us.

Number five, his session, his being seated at the right hand of God, signals the completion of his sacrifice. Hebrews 10, every Levitical priest stands daily offering sacrifices repeatedly, but Christ sat down at the right hand of God. It signaled that his cross work was utterly finished.

The sacrifice of Christ does not have to be repeated. Number six, he awaits the ultimate conquest and surrender of his enemies. Hebrews 10, he sits to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet.

You pick up the stool language as well here, do you see? All inferring things about the Messiah from this one little phrase in Psalm 110. And after that phrase, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. That is, what is envisaged here is conquest.

His active, controlling, confrontation of the enemies. And God himself is going to do it now that the sacrifice has been paid. All of God's people, we are told, will be so transformed that they will serve willingly in Messiah's army.

The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion saying, rule in the midst of your enemies. This is an astonishing passage. It's not simply that God confronts the enemies all by himself.

Somehow he's calling together Messiah's army and makes them willing to do his bidding. Here you have an anticipation of the transformation that comes about in the gospel. God's people become willing on the day of his power, on the day of his judgment.

When he wants to use them, well, he makes them willing, he transforms them. And that is part of what we mean, is it not, by regeneration and conversion so that our hearts now want to do his bidding when at one time we wanted to do only our own. His troops become willing on the day of his power, which already is telling you something about the strange nature of this army, the strange nature of this service.

You find the same sort of overtone in a different context, a more military context in Judges 5 too. When the princes of Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves, praise the Lord. So here we have a picture of the rulers of Israel operating in justice, taking the lead against the enemies, and the people follow them willingly.

Here, now, the Messiah at God's right hand, displaying his power. Now, so transforms his people in the day of this power that they willingly follow him and constitute the Lord's army as the enemies themselves are pushed back. That's the vision.

The last part of verse 3, ah, the text is translated in a lot of different ways. I'm not going to go through those debates. It sounds to me, however, as if it envisages a splendid army of the young arising freshly, silently, and in holy splendor to do their master's bidding.

Arrayed in holy splendor, your young men will come to you like Jew from the morning's womb. That's the first oracle. The second oracle still is addressed to the Messiah, or the sequence of thought makes no sense.

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. You are a priest forever. It's still being addressed to the Messiah.

You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. Now, we'll return to this verse in a few moments, but on first reading, it is staggeringly out of place. After all, according to the law of Moses, which had been given some centuries earlier, before a thousand B.C., a priest couldn't be a king, and a king couldn't be a priest.

In fact, the first king of the United Monarchy, Saul himself, was destroyed by God himself because he tried to mingle those two roles. David certainly understood that. So what is David doing now, envisaging a Messiah who is transparently the king? The king from Jerusalem, the king in David's line, now being a priest, regardless of the order.

It really does seem very strange. And then, Melchizedek, what is he doing here? What is going on in David's mind as he writes this? Now, we'll come back to that in a moment. Look at the commentary that follows first, and you get another slight shock.

Once you've seen the two oracles and the two commentaries, then you expect oracle one, all about the king, then some comment on his reign and his rule and his confrontation of the enemies. Oracle number two, all about the priest, so you expect some commentary on the priesthood. That's not what you get.

What you get is more commentary on the kingship, on the rule. Look at the words. The Lord is at your right hand.

He will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge the nations heaping up the dead, crushing rulers of the whole earth. He will drink from a brook along the way, so he will lift up his head.

You are really in the domain, still, of kingship and ruling and authority and confrontation and war. In fact, here, the enthronement of the priest king, his session at the right hand of God, is therefore not the final setting, but the prelude to world conquest. Now, look closely.

Yahweh and his Messiah act as one. On the one hand, verse five, the Lord is at your right hand. He will crush kings on the day of his wrath.

He will judge the nations. He is also this human figure who drinks from a brook along the way, so he will lift up his head. Here is God bringing about conquest, but somehow doing it through this human figure who takes a drink along the way.

You know what the closest New Testament language to this passage is? Revelation. Especially chapter 19. For here you have moved from Hebrews and Melchizedek to the apocalypse and destruction.

Revelation 19.11. I saw heaven standing open, and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called faithful and true. With justice, he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns.

He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean, coming out of his mouth as a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.

He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

We have moved from the Melchizedekian vision of a priest in Hebrews to ultimate consummation in conquest and judgment. But what that does is make verse 4, the second oracle, all the stranger. Because not only are we mingling priest and king, but even after we've introduced the priest, which seems strange enough, we don't treat it.

So what is going on in David's head? What is he thinking about? I thought about that one for a long time, and for a long time I think I got it wrong. The fact of the matter is that inspiration in the Bible is by many modes. Sometimes it's by direct dictation.

God gives the words to Jeremiah, Jeremiah dictates them to Baruch, Baruch writes them down. That's why when the enemies come along and pick up the scroll and start ripping it up, you, the reader, are supposed to be laughing. This came from God.

Do you really think God's forgotten it? Baruch might not be able to get it down again, and Jeremiah may have forgotten a few lines here and there, but this was dictated by God. You're supposed to give a belly laugh. You don't have to wipe a disc clean.

God's mental discs never get wiped clean. So here the enemy's trying to destroy the word of God. Does God have forgotten it? No.

All he does is give it to Jeremiah again. Jeremiah dictates it to Baruch, Baruch has to write it all down. The only person who comes out as a loser on this one is Baruch because he's got to write it all down again.

But you're not going to lose the word of God. In this case, you have inspiration by direct copying. Do you see? By direct dictation.

And sometimes it's by vision and word that the human agent himself does not even understand. Think Daniel. Daniel asks what one of his visions mean, and God says, frankly Daniel, none of your business.

Just seal up the book. It'll get sorted out later. He's a transcriber, he's a witness, but he doesn't understand the text says so.

On the other hand, you're not supposed to think of David coming in one night, you know, from a long session with his counselors. Time to go to bed. This has been a tough day.

And he stretches out, and then a voice comes to him, not yet, David, I've got another psalm for you to write. Take out your quill pen so he takes out his quill pen. Already, ready.

The Lord, the Lord, is my shepherd, is my shepherd. I shall not want, I shall not want. He makes me, there's no way Psalm 23 was written that way.

He writes out of the fullness of his heart, of his own experience. He writes out of the overflow of creativity, and his knowledge of the living God, and his own background and experience in the shepherd fields around Bethlehem. But, born along by the Spirit of God, so superintended by the sovereignty of God, the words that come out are David's words! And they are the word of God.

It's another mode of inspiration. Do you see? And one could easily mention several more. So what's going on here? Is David writing down these words and saying, I don't have a clue what verse four means, but it's going down.

Do you see? Well, it's possible. I just couldn't figure out how to read verse four in such a way that David could actually be making sense of it. So I thought, this can't be a Psalm 23 sort of thing.

It looks a bit more like a Daniel thing to me. Although it's not in an apocalyptic framework like Daniel. What do you do with this? And so for a long time, I thought it was one of those relatively rare places in the Bible where it seems as if the human authors themselves don't really have much of a clue about what's going on.

But I've changed my mind. I think David got this in very substantial measure out of his devotions. After all, Deuteronomy 17 says that what the kings are supposed to do when they come to power is copy up the book of the law and make a nice, clean copy.

There were no photocopy machines in those days. Make it a nice, clean copy, because that copy was supposed to be their reading copy, which they were then supposed to read every day for the rest of their lives so they would not swerve from the law to the left or the right, but they would know the Lord God, they would please Him, and they would not think of themselves too highly. That was what the kings were supposed to do.

And although there were many, many kings who didn't do it, David, at his best, was certainly doing this sort of thing. Some of them were probably semi-literate, but David was the sweet psalmist of Israel. He had a decent education behind him.

So he was having his devotions out of the word of God. Now remember the account of David. He begins his reign in Hebron, down in the south, just over the bottom two tribes.

After seven years, he takes Jerusalem and becomes king over the twelve tribes. So he's moved to Jerusalem. 2 Samuel 6 says that once he's in Jerusalem, then the tabernacle is moved to Jerusalem.

And 2 Samuel 7 establishes the Davidic dynasty. Now do you hear that concatenation of things? The tabernacle, and thus the entire priestly system in Jerusalem, for the first time in the same place as the king. And the king in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. And now there's David having his devotions. And he comes to Genesis 14.

So now we turn to Genesis 14 and try to think through what David read. Genesis 14. That's the first time the Melchizedek figure appears.

Let me remind you of the context. There were four, we're told, kings. Now, by kings, you're not supposed to think Charles III or Queen Elizabeth II.

You're really thinking of small-town mayor. A lot of so-called cities in the ancient world had 5,000 people. A big one was 10 or 15,000.

It was only really, really, really, really big ones that went to 200,000 or this sort of thing. So these are small-town mayors. They're kings of these communities.

And they make armies that are really little raiding parties. And four of these get together under Cato Leomer and they start these raiding parties that go all over the place. And eventually, they're moving farther south and farther south until they're coming into the area where Abraham lives.

And eventually, he attacks the king of Sodom. Sodom and the king of Gomorrah who themselves are allied with three others. So now there are five kings there.

Four kings against five kings. And there's a nasty battle in the tar pits and so on. And the four, under Cato Leomer, they win.

And what they do then is steal the women and children, steal the cattle, kill as many of the men as possible, and take off beating it back up toward the north. Then we're told, verse 13, a man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram himself was living near the great trees of Mamre, the Amorite, who was also apparently a small-town mayor king, if you like, a brother of Eshcol and Aner.

So Abram allies himself with them. Now it's Abram and these three. And they go after this raiding party.

That's what we're told. We're told that Abram heard that his relative Lot, who had been in Sodom, had been taken captive. So he called out the 318 trained men born in his household.

Now, again, trained men. They're not trained with RPGs. They're not trained with the latest in martial arts techniques.

I've got a son who's a marine. I punched him in the shoulder a couple of years ago. He's trained in the martial arts.

I don't know how many weapons. He put his big arm around my shoulder and he said, Dad, do you have any idea how many ways I could kill you with my bare hands? I don't punch him in the shoulder anymore. They weren't trained in that sense, you see.

They were fit. They could do some stick fighting, maybe the odd sword or two. But they take off, you see, with whatever numbers came along from the other three.

And they pursue the others as far as Dan. Now, that's something like 120, 130 miles to the north. So, these guys are really moving.

They're pushing, pushing, pushing, picking up things on the way. But they're fit. They can run, walk, run, walk all the way up there.

And they confront them during the night. Abram then divides his men. He attacks them.

He pursues them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. Not just to Damascus, but north of that. Because that's the way a lot of those fights went.

It's not that they draw battle lines like World War I, trench warfare, 2,200 miles, and lob howitzer shells at each other. That's not what's going on. There's a big clash.

And then one side is losing. They start to run. And the other side keeps chasing it, chasing it, chasing it, chasing it.

They go another hundred kilometers or so. That's what happens. And as they're doing so, they're picking up the gain.

They're picking up the material that had been stolen. They're picking up the wives that had been left behind, and so on, until they're really not a threat anymore. And they've collected all that they're going to collect.

And they start the long trek back. 17. After Abram returned from defeating Caerleon and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh.

That is, the king's valley. Skip 18, 19, 20. Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.

He wasn't being generous. That's the way it was done. That is, the reward for these mercenary groups was, in fact, the booty.

And you just get the people back, but the booty, Abram had every right to keep. Sodom's not being generous. He's just following the custom of the day.

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, I made Abram rich. I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me, to Anab, Eshcol, and Mamre. Let them have their share.

So if you skip verses 18, 19, 20, the account is entirely coherent. We don't need verses 18, 19, 20. Just as the mention of Melchizedek in Psalm 110 seems a bit anomalous, what's it doing there? The mention of Melchizedek in 18, 19, 20 is already anomalous.

What's that doing there? But, in fact, not only is it there, it actually breaks up the account of the interchange between Sodom and Abram. Have you noticed that? Verse 17, Abram returned, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh, and then you'd want to read on, and the king of Sodom said to him, but breaking it up, we read, Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth, and praise be to God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand.

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Now what should we learn from this, from the most immediate context? Melchizedek clearly is a foil to Sodom. Abram won't have anything to do with Sodom, doesn't want anything from him, won't receive anything from him, won't give anything to him.

There's a coldness. Sodom represents part of the wickedness of the valleys, but Melchizedek is in another order. His name itself is significant, as so often in the Old Testament.

It means, quite literally, king of righteousness. The Melch root means king. The Zedek, it's from Zavaq, it means right.

He's king of righteousness. That's what his name means. Your majesty, king of righteousness.

So he's the king whose name is king of righteousness. At the same time, we're told that he rules over Salem. He's the king of Salem.

Now, in Hebrew, you work by the consonants. S-L-M, S-L-M, those are the same consonants as Shalom, which all of us know about. In one context, it can just mean high.

But more richly, Shalom refers to well-being, well-being with God, well-being with human beings, well-being in the richest sense of human flourishing. But undoubtedly, this was the town of Salem. There were lots and lots of towns of Salem in the ancient Near East.

It was a pretty common name. And the chances are very high. Not 100%, but the chances are very good since this is the area in which Abram is living at the time, that this is Jerusalem.

There were lots of Salem's. Salem here, Salem there. This was Jerusalem.

Apparently, he was king of Jerusalem. Now, whether he was Jerusalem king or just Salem's king, I don't know. But he was king of peace in terms of what the word means.

And geographically, apparently, king of Jerusalem. And his name means king of righteousness. He brings out bread and wine.

This is the only detail in these three verses that is not picked up in the New Testament. It's not picked up in terms of Eucharistic symbolism or anything like that. It's the only detail that's not picked up.

And in fact, there is no Eucharistic symbolism here. He brings out bread, which was the staple of the time, and wine. In those days, wine was cut with water between three parts to one and ten parts to one.

It was a common table drink. These poor chaps are famished and hungry and thirsty after their long trek back. And he meets them with huge supplies as he is able to provide food and nourishment for these troops that have come back bringing all the booty with them.

He was priest of God Most High. Now, when Abram speaks of God, verse 22, he says, I have sworn an oath to the Lord, to Yahweh, God Most High, the covenant name for God, creator of heaven and earth. But Melchizedek doesn't mention any of this covenantal association.

He was a priest of God Most High and he blessed Abram saying, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth, which is exactly what then Abram picks up on when he speaks about God. And praise be to God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand. This is not, finally, in the last analysis, your military prowess and the fitness of your 318.

This is the work of God. Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. That's all it said.

But if you're a good reader, you have to start scratching your head and saying, okay, just within the context of Genesis, what's going on here? This is really strange. It breaks up the account. What's it contributing? Not only so, but everybody who is anybody in Genesis, everybody who is anybody is connected genealogically to other people.

So, so-and-so begat so-and-so, lived so many years and then he died. So-and-so lived so many years, begat so-and-so, then he lived so many years and then he died. Or alternatively, you can flip it the other way.

He was the son of so-and-so and so-and-so was the son of so-and-so. Zephani, we found this morning, was the son of three or four back just to identify him. Do you see? This chap pops up, disappears, and there's no mommy, there's no daddy, and there's no genealogy.

Now, there are a few others in the book of Genesis without any mention of their genealogy, but at least they have the decency not to be important so you don't raise any questions. But this one is so important that Abram actually pays him a tent, he pays him a tithe, and he receives a blessing from him. It's as if Abram himself, the vast landowner that he is, rich man that he is, impressive figure that he cuts, nevertheless is receiving a blessing from him.

He recognizes him as a superior. So what's going on? In the history of the church, there have been two explanations for the figure of Melchizedek. One is that this is a pre-incarnate visitation of Jesus.

That is, before you have the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth, the Eternal Son appears in bodily form as if were an incarnation before the incarnation, and this is Melchizedek. So Jesus is here on that reading, explicitly in the Old Testament. I'm sure there are many, many Christians in this room who think that that's what's going on here.

It's possible. If you want to hold that, I won't criticize. And in fact, nothing in my argument to the rest of this sermon depends on saying that you're wrong.

And I think you're wrong. That is, there is no direct hint that this is a divine figure in this context at all. And interestingly, he does not use the name of Yahweh.

Why should we think that Abram was the only person in the entire ancient Near East who believed there was only one God? You're not that far removed from the judgments of the flood and Babel and so on. There had to be some memory here and there. So there were pagan kings around who did all kinds of ridiculous and cruel things.

Why shouldn't there be a king or two around who acknowledged God, Most High, Creator of Heaven and Earth? In which case, Abram may well have found in him a rather sympathetic figure. He may have become more intimately tied with him than he was with Mamre and Anab and Eshgal. And so when he receives some supplies from him, he pays him Jew homage.

Now the passage is still strange because there's nothing said about this Melchizedek. That's not accidental. God is putting this passage together for our learning.

But there are two other indications that make me think this really is unlikely to be a pre-incarnate presentation of Jesus. Although we'll see he points to Jesus. One indication is found in Psalm 110.

The other indication is found in Hebrews 7. If this really is an incarnation of the second person of the Godhead, that is the way we're supposed to read the text, then the verse that we read in Psalm 110, verse 4, is more than passing strange. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

Why doesn't it just say he is Melchizedek? Why doesn't he just say you are a priest forever? You are indeed Melchizedek. That would solve the problem. But instead he's a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek provides something of a model here. Now what's going on in David's head? Don't forget he has succeeded Saul just a few years earlier and he knows that Saul has been bumped off because he tried to be a priest king. David's not going to make that mistake.

And now he's having his devotions. And as he's having his devotions, he reads Genesis 14 and he discovers, whoop, there is a priest king. What's going on? There can't be anything intrinsically wicked about being a priest king.

There can't be. Even Abraham recognized Melchizedek as the priest king, paid him homage, received blessing from him. David knows that he can't be a priest king, but there can't be anything intrinsically wicked about that.

David knows that Abraham lived about 2,000 B.C. He didn't use B.C. in those days, but nevertheless, Abraham lived about 1,000 B.C. And then the law came in the 500 years or so before David, and the law established you can't be priest and you can't be king. That's absolute. Well, that wasn't there, of course, when Abraham was around, but it's now absolute.

In David's day, he understands that, but he can't help thinking as he's having his devotions that maybe someday we'll have a priest king again. Because there is this enigmatic figure, Melchizedek, superior to Abraham, who sets off the entire covenantal race, who is priest king. Priest king of God Most High, creator of heaven and earth.

And by whatever insight beyond that, the Holy Spirit carries him along and he picks up his pen and he says, the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. This king at God's right hand is also priest king. You are a priest forever, not in the order of Leviticus.

That brings you back to Saul. You get bumped off for that. You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

And then that text hangs there for another thousand years. It just hangs there. When I say it hangs there, there were, in fact, lots of speculations in various Jewish sources that are just before Christ.

None of them come close to the clarity of thought of Hebrews. But now we do come to Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 7. Melchizedek is mentioned in other chapters, but we'll focus our attention on these verses.

The book of Hebrews is often said to distort the Old Testament when it quotes it, twists things around, gets them wrong. Listen to what the text says. This is serious exegesis.

It is reading what is there in the text. This Melchizedek was king of Salem. Well, those are the facts.

That's what the text says. And priest of God most high. Well, that's what Genesis 14 says.

He met Abram returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him. That's what the text says. Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Now you start getting the exegesis. That's just the summary of the text. Now the exegesis.

First, the name Melchizedek means king of righteousness. That works in Hebrew. So although this is written by a Greek-speaking writer with remarkable flourish, we can't be sure who the author is, nevertheless, he thinks that the Hebrew name is important.

It is theologically significant. And he knows that in Hebrew the name Melchizedek means king of righteousness. And he spells it out.

Then also he is king of Salem. That's what the text says, which means king of peace. Without father or mother, so far as the text goes, without genealogy, that's the point, without beginning of days or end of life, so far as the text goes, he is like the Son of God.

Like the Son of God, he remains a priest forever. Now, of course, if he really is the Son of God, he remains a priest forever because he is the eternal Son of God. But what the author is saying is there is theological weight, theological significance in what is left out.

Now, arguments of silence can be very weak. But an argument for silence is very strong if you're expecting noise. Read Sherlock Holmes, the dog that barked in the night.

The point is the dog didn't bark in the night. This dog always barks where there's a stranger around. Somebody came in and did something in the house.

The dog didn't bark. The silence is significant because this dog always barks where there are strangers. Therefore, it had to be somebody who was known to the dog.

Do you see? So, the fact that there's no genealogy, there's no mention mother or father, that's neither here nor there on some orders. But if everybody who's significant in the book does have a genealogy, and now suddenly you don't have any genealogy, and he's even more important than Abraham, he slipped in there, then you have to draw some inferences. And the author is saying, as God has given us this account, there is weight to the fact that there is no father, no mother, no genealogy.

As far as the record goes, no beginning of life, no end of days. After all, earlier on there were lots of beginnings of life and end of days. So-and-so was born, he lived so many years, he produced so-and-so, then he died.

So-and-so was born, he lived so many years, produced so-and-so, then he died. So-and-so was born, he lived so many years, produced so-and-so, then he died. Beginning of life and end of days, this chap, he shows up, he disappears.

And thus he is like an eternal priest who lives forever. So if you want to hold that this is a pre-incarnate appearance of the Eternal Son, I'm not going to enter into an argument with you, but I don't think that it's necessary to go down that route. I think what you're seeing is what you often see in the Old Testament, patterns and institutions and people put in place with all kinds of symbol-laden structures around them that are pointing forward, pointing forward, pointing forward, until you come to the reality itself.

Now listen further to the exegesis. Just think how great he was. Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder.

Now, the law, that is the law of Moses, which comes, after all, more than half a millennium after Abraham, it requires the descendants of Levi, who become priests to collect a tenth from the people, that is from their kindred, even though their kindred are descended from Abraham. The Levites, the ultimate grandchildren of Abraham, were authorized by the law, given a millennium, a little less than a millennium, a few quarters of a millennium after Abraham, it authorized them to collect tithes. But this man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi.

He was even before Abraham. Yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt, the lesser is blessed by the greater.

So all of this argumentation is used to show just how important Melchizedek is. All of that is straightforward exegesis. And then we come to a big jump.

This one is huge. When we start talking about how do you preach Christ from the Old Testament, one of the ways into that sort of discussion is start examining how the New Testament quotes the Old. So you start from the back end and see how the New Testament actually quotes the Old.

And you discover it does so in a huge diversity of ways, sometimes by analogy, sometimes by direct prediction, sometimes word association games, sometimes common theological themes and so on, sometimes by something we call typology, that is where there is a pattern, an institution, a person-place thing that gets repeated and repeated and ratcheted up and repeated and ratcheted up and repeated and ratcheted up until you're taught to expect that there is something bigger that brings it to a climax. And then the fulfillment of that typology is the anti-type and it always ends up with Christ in one fashion or another related to him. This one's different again.

This one's different again. It shows up half a dozen times in the Bible and hinted at in other places, but this way of quoting the Old Testament is spectacularly insightful. I'm going to get at this one through the side door.

If you were a conservative first century Jew and you were asked the question, how do you please God? How would you answer? Well, by obeying the law. How did Daniel please God? He obeyed the law. How did David please God? He obeyed the law.

How did Isaiah please God? He obeyed the law. How did Abraham please God? He obeyed the law. Wait a minute.

Abraham didn't have the law. That was before the law. Oh, yes, but Genesis says that he obeyed all my statutes.

He must have had a private revelation of the law. He must have because it says he obeyed all of God's statutes. How did Enoch please God? Oh, he obeyed the law.

No, wait a minute. He was only seventh from Adam. He doesn't have the law.

You don't even have Abraham yet. That's really desperately anachronistic. Yes, but the text says that he walked with God.

That's common language after the giving of the law for obeying the law. So undoubtedly, Enoch, if he was to please God, he had to obey the law. Don't you understand? Now, what are you doing by this kind of reading of the Old Testament? What you're really doing is elevating the law to be the hermeneutical control over the entire text.

So now you have taken away the steps of progress in history, and all you've got instead is the law controlling things in an atemporal sort of way. Do you see that? Then you come to the New Testament writers. Paul almost certainly would have interpreted the Old Testament account the way I've just described to you before he became a Christian.

But now he's a Christian. And when Paul becomes a Christian, he sees that sequence is important. Reread Galatians 3. The promise came before the law, and the law can't annul the promise.

Abraham was justified by faith before the giving of the law. That is a grounding that is established before the law comes. That's a sequential reading of the Old Testament.

And first-century conservative Palestinian Jews just didn't do that. In other words, the sequence of the account was really important for the apostle to authorize that the gospel saves people by faith. Now you see something else of the same sort here.

Look at the argument in verse 11. If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood... Now skip the next bit. That's a parenthesis.

We'll come to it in a moment. If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood that came through the law, do you see? Why was there still need for another priest to come when in the order of Melchizedek not in the order of Aaron? Do you see what the author is saying? If the ultimate priesthood was the Levitical priesthood and the law of Moses was final, then why on earth is David saying what he's saying centuries after the law was given? You start announcing, who's going to be a priest in the order of Melchizedek? You're really saying implicitly that the Levitical priesthood somehow isn't good enough. It's not going to cut it.

It's got to be eclipsed. So a thousand years before Jesus comes, already David's psalm is saying, in effect, we have to have more than a Levitical priesthood. It's not enough.

It's an implicit announcement of the need for something that outstrips that priesthood. Then watch how the argument goes. When the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also.

Go back to that little parenthetical bit that I left out in verse 11. If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood, and the law and the priesthood are so tied together, one establishing the other, that if you take one away, then the other one's gone too. Now sometimes we think of the law as moral, civil, ceremonial law.

That's a common breakdown. It's got all kinds of utilitarian value to it. But what we tend to do with it is to say, and the civil law's not all that important, and the sacrificial law's not all that important, and the moral law's the really important thing.

And that means we meditate on Exodus 20, because that's the Ten Commandments, and we sort of skim through Leviticus. But this text says, you pull the priesthood out, you've changed the whole law covenant. That whole law covenant is principally obsolete.

As soon as you start announcing the obsolescence of the Levitical priesthood, you're announcing the obsolescence of the covenant. That's the very argument that is picked up in Chapter 8 of this book. Here you have, in David's time, a structure of thought, progress, from Abraham, with this vague figure of Melchizedek, then the giving of the law that says you can't have priest and covenant, then David, after that saying, yeah, yeah, yeah, but we are going to have a priest who is a priest king.

You can't have priest and king. Now you will have a priest king in the order of Melchizedek, which makes this one in principle obsolete. And now the writer is saying, we do have a priest king, not from the tribe of Levi, that would be illegitimate, from the tribe of Judah.

And that entire old covenant, that law covenant, is already announced as obsolete. And you covenant is already announced in principle a thousand years before the coming of Jesus. So we read, He of whom these things are said, belong to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar.

That's Jesus, who came from the tribe of Judah. Verse 14 explains it. It is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe, Moses said nothing about priests.

And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest, not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry, that's what the Levites were. They had to have the right mummy and daddy. They had to go back to Zadok before that, all the way to Aaron.

You couldn't be a high priest unless you had the right mummy and daddy. It was a regulation as to ancestry. But there is no ancestry in the historical figure of Melchizedek.

And Jesus' ancestry, according to the flesh, Joseph? Joseph? According to the flesh, yes, he's the son of Mary, but his ultimate ancestry is grounded in the God of eternity. Without father, without mother. For it is declared, you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

And there is Psalm 110. The former regulation, that is the regulation about Levitical priests, is set aside because it was weak and useless, for the law made nothing perfect, and a better hope is introduced by which we draw near to God. And it wasn't without an oath.

Others became priests without an oath. That is, when you became a priest in the Levitical system, no oath was taken. But he became a priest with an oath when God said to him, the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind.

You are a priest forever. Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant. And then, pastoral implications spelled out.

Because he lives forever, verse 25, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Let me draw this to a close. I've spent an undue amount of time explaining how these passages work, because I want you to see that the New Testament authors are actually reading the Old Testament carefully, and even observing their historical sequence in order to draw inferences that really can't easily be refuted.

You announce the coming of a priest king after God himself has said there must not be a priest king on the basis of a figure that shows up before that covenant, and you are saying that that covenant that forbids it has got to be obsolete. It's got to be temporary. And that means that when we're looking for is not only the Davidic Messiah, the kingly ruler, he is also the priest.

We need to learn to admire, to see, to understand, to follow the traces of the wisdom of God in putting together the whole canon in these long trajectories that bring us on axis after axis after axis to Jesus. I followed one that is in three passages and has taken me an hour. But you can follow similar trajectories regarding the temple and regarding Passover and regarding Yom Kippur.

You can follow similar trajectories on rest themes and Sabbath. You can follow similar trajectories on Day of Jubilee. You can follow similar trajectories on the Twelve Tribes, on the city of Jerusalem itself.

And all of these lines can be tracked out, tracked out, tracked out. You work hard at the New Testament handling of the Old Testament and you will discover how to preach the Old Testament. Because these New Testament passages are themselves showing these are the trajectories that God himself has put in place.

And they point forward and they bring you to Jesus. I'm telling you this not because anything I have said is clever. It's not.

It's right there on the surface of the text. But to give you confidence to read the Word of God, listen to it carefully, probe and discover for yourself how the New Testament writers themselves read the Old Testament, then go and do likewise. But I want to end with one more observation beyond all of that.

You see, I have focused a disproportionate amount of time, as I've said, on the mechanics of it, how it actually works, how it's handled together. But you must see the theological payoff. We have a Saviour who is not only the King, the promised King, who rules over our lives, who confronts the enemies of God, who brings in the consummation of which Mike Bullmore was speaking so eloquently a little earlier.

He is the King. He is the Conqueror. And we are to bow in submission to His Kingship.

But He's also the Priest. If He's just a King, we live in terror. That's it.

But He's also the Priest. He's the perfect mediator between God and human beings because He is God and He's a human being. He exactly takes up all the functions and purposes of the Old Testament priests, but He outstrips them in one huge particular.

He never sinned. The author goes on to talk about that here. That's why He's an even better high priest than they were because they had to offer sacrifices for their own sins.

Moreover, the sacrifices that they offered, does the blood of a bull and goat actually have some sort of intrinsic moral value? Does that make sense? The bullock is not saying, here's my throat. Go ahead and split it. I'm dying for you.

In that sense, it's a morally useless sacrifice. And what does it mean to take the blood of a goat and substitute it for the blood of a human being? It doesn't make sense. It's pointing forward to something else.

But this one, this one, the Lamb of God, wonderful, beautiful Savior, precious Redeemer and friend, who would have thought that a lamb could ransom the souls of men? What a lamb this one is. He's a priest, and he turns out to be the sacrifice, and he's the temple. He's the place where human beings meet the Holy God.

He's the temple. He's the priest. He's the lamb.

His body is the veil. Again and again and again, he takes all of these strands into himself, and we come to the New Testament text, and our eyes see how the Old Testament patterns in God's perfect wisdom have anticipated all of this, and we come before the fulfillment, and we bow, and we worship. Because God knows, I need a king to subdue me, and to bring in the consummation.

I need a priest to offer up himself as the supreme sacrifice, or I am undone, a perfect priest, one of our kind, a human being who is nevertheless one with God, ultimately without mother, without father, in the most ultimate sense, the everlasting of days. This is the Jesus of the gospel we proclaim. Let us bow in

prayer.

Before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, who strongly pleads for me. O Lord God, we do not want to make the reading of the Old Testament a merely cerebral exercise, but we do want to understand what your word says, that we may draw near in confidence to Christ Jesus, our beloved king, our priest, made for us everything we need, and we find confidence in him. Open our eyes that we may see, and in seeing, believe, and in believing, obey, for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/RY-qfjGaBpg.mp4>

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