

Hebrews 7:1-10

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the superiority of Melchisedec's priesthood and the importance of humility, repentance, and cleanliness.

Scripture: Psalm 121:4, Isaiah 1:16, Matthew 5:8, Matthew 15:19, Romans 9:16, Hebrews 7:4, Hebrews 7:8

Topics: "Christology", "Priesthood Of Christ"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the significance of Melchisedec, King of Salem, Priest of the Most High God, as a type of Christ, emphasizing his titles 'King of Righteousness' and 'King of Peace' which point to Jesus. Chrysostom explains the mysterious nature of Melchisedec, being without father, mother, genealogy, beginning of days, or end of life, likening him to the Son of God. He highlights Melchisedec's superiority over Abraham, the Levites, and the Jewish priesthood, showing how the priesthood of Melchisedec foreshadows the eternal priesthood of Christ. Chrysostom urges believers to guard themselves against spiritual slumber, emphasizing the importance of free will in choosing righteousness and the need for repentance to cleanse the soul from sin.

Transcript

For this Melchisedec, King of Salem, Priest of the most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the Kings, and blessed him: to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of Righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of Peace, without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, abides a Priest continually.

1. Paul wishing to show the difference between the New and Old [Covenant], scatters it everywhere; and shoots from afar, and noises it abroad, and prepares beforehand. For at once even from the introduction, he laid down this saying, that to them indeed He spoke by prophets, but to us by the Son c. i. 1, 2, and to them at sundry times and in various manners, but to us through the Son. Afterwards, having discoursed concerning the Son, who He was and what He had wrought, and given an exhortation to obey Him, lest we should suffer the same things as the Jews; and having said that He is High Priest after the order of Melchisedec Hebrews 6:20, and having oftentimes wished to enter into [the subject of] this difference, and having used much preparatory management; and having rebuked them as weak, and again soothed and restored them to confidence; then at last he introduces the discussion on the difference [of the two dispensations] to ears in their full vigor. For he who is depressed in spirits would not be a ready hearer.

And that you may understand this, hear the Scripture saying, They hearkened not to Moses for anguish of spirit. Exodus 6:9 Therefore having first cleared away their despondency by many considerations, some fearful, some more gentle, he then from this point enters upon the discussion of the difference [of the dispensations].

2. And what does he say? For this Melchisedec, King of Salem, Priest of the Most High God. And, what is especially noteworthy, he shows the difference to be great by the Type itself. For as I said, he continually confirms the truth from the Type, from things past, on account of the weakness of the hearers. For (he says) this Melchisedec, King of Salem, Priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the Kings, and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all. Having concisely set down the whole narrative, he looked at it mystically.

And first from the name. First (he says) being by interpretation King of righteousness: for Sedec means righteousness; and Melchi, King: Melchisedec, King of righteousness. Do you see his exactness even in the names? But who is King of righteousness, save our Lord Jesus Christ? King of righteousness. And after that also King of Salem, from his city, that is, King of Peace, which again is [characteristic] of Christ. For He has made us righteous, and has made peace for things in Heaven and things on earth. Colossians 1:20 What man is King of Righteousness and of Peace? None, save only our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. He then adds another distinction, Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, abides a Priest continually. Since then there lay in his way [as an objection] the [words] You are a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec, whereas he [Melchisedec] was dead, and was not Priest for ever, see how he explained it mystically.

'And who can say this concerning a man?' I do not assert this in fact (he says); the meaning is, we do not know when [or] what father he had, nor what mother, nor when he received his beginning, nor when he died. And what of this (one says)? For does it follow, because we do not know it, that he did not die, [or] had no parents? You say well: he both died and had parents. How then [was he] without father, without mother? How having neither beginning of days nor end of life? How? [Why] from its not being expressed. And what of this? That as this man is so, from his genealogy not being given, so is Christ from the very nature of the reality.

See the without beginning; see the without end. As in case of this man, we know not either beginning of days, or end of life, because they have not been written; so we know [them] not in the case of Jesus, not because they have not been written, but because they do not exist. For that indeed is a type, and therefore [we say] 'because it is not written,' but this is the reality, and therefore [we say] 'because it does not exist.' For as in regard to the names also (for there King of Righteousness and of Peace are appellations, but here the reality) so these too are appellations in that case, in this the reality. How then has He a beginning? You see that the Son is without beginning, not in respect of His not having a cause; (for this is impossible: for He has a Father, otherwise how is He Son?) but in respect of His not having beginning or end of life.

But made like the Son of God. Where is the likeness? That we know not of the one or of the other either the end or the beginning. Of the one because they are not written; of the other, because they do not exist. Here is the likeness. But if the likeness were to exist in all respects, there would no longer be type and reality; but both would be type. [Here] then just as in representations [by painting or drawing], there is somewhat that is like and somewhat that is unlike. By means of the lines indeed there is a likeness of

features, but when the colors are put on, then the difference is plainly shown, both the likeness and the unlikeness.

Hebrews 7:4

4. Now consider (says he) how great this man is to whom even the Patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. Up to this point he has been applying the type: henceforward he boldly shows him [Melchisedec] to be more glorious than the Jewish realities. But if he who bears a type of Christ is so much better not merely than the priests, but even than the forefather himself of the priests, what should one say of the reality? You see how super-abundantly he shows the superiority.

Now consider (he says) how great this man is to whom even the Patriarch Abraham gave a tenth out of the choice portions. Spoils taken in battle are called choice portions. And it cannot be said that he gave them to him as having a part in the war, because (he said) he met him returning from the slaughter of the kings, for he had staid at home (he means), yet [Abraham] gave him the first-fruits of his labors.

Hebrews 7:5-6

And verily they that are of the sons of Levi who receive the office of Priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham.

So great (he would say) is the superiority of the priesthood, that they who from their ancestors are of the same dignity, and have the same forefather, are yet far better than the rest. At all events they receive tithes from them. When then one is found, who receives tithes from these very persons, are not they indeed in the rank of laymen, and he among the Priests?

And not only this; but neither was he of the same dignity with them, but of another race: so that he would not have given tithes to a stranger unless his dignity had been great. Astonishing! What has he accomplished? He has made quite clear a greater point than those relating to faith which he treated in the Epistle to the Romans. For there indeed he declares Abraham to be the forefather both of our polity and also of the Jewish. But here he is exceeding bold against him, and shows that the uncircumcised person is far superior. How then did he show that Levi paid tithes? Abraham (he says) paid them. 'And how does this concern us?' It especially concerns you: for you will not contend that the Levites are superior to Abraham. Hebrews 7:6 But he whose descent is not counted from them, received tithes of Abraham.

Hebrews 7:7

And after that he did not simply pass on, but added, and blessed him that had the promises. Inasmuch as throughout, this was regarded with reverence, he shows that [Melchisedec] was to be revered more than Abraham, from the common judgment of all men. Hebrews 7:7 And without all contradiction, he says, the less is blessed of the better, i.e. in the opinion of all men it is the inferior that is blessed by the superior. So then the type of Christ is superior even to him that had the promises.

Hebrews 7:8-10

Hebrews 7:8 And here men that die receive tithes: but there he of whom it is testified that he lives. But lest we should say, Tell us, why are you going so far back? He says, Hebrews 7:9 And as I may so say (and he did well in softening it) Levi also who receives tithes payed tithes in Abraham. How? Hebrews 7:10 For

he was yet in his loins when Melchisedec met him, i.e. Levi was in him, although he was not yet born. And he said not the Levites but Levi.

Have you seen the superiority? Have you seen how great is the interval between Abraham and Melchisedec, who bears the type of our High Priest? And he shows that the superiority had been caused by authority, not necessity. For the one paid the tithe, which indicates the priest: the other gave the blessing, which indicates the superior. This superiority passes on also to the descendants.

In a marvelous and triumphant way he cast out the Jewish [system]. On this account he said, You have become dull, Hebrews 5:12, because he wished to lay these foundations, that they might not start away. Such is the wisdom of Paul, first preparing them well, he so leads them into what he wishes. For the human race is hard to persuade, and needs much attention, even more than plants. Since in that case there is [only] the nature of material bodies, and earth, which yields to the hands of the husbandmen: but in this there is will, which is liable to many alterations, and now prefers this, now that. For it quickly turns to evil.

5. Wherefore we ought always to guard ourselves, lest at any time we should fall asleep. For Lo (it is said) he that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep Psalm 121:4, and Do not suffer your foot to be moved. Psalm 121:3 He did not say, 'be not moved' but do not thou suffer, etc. The suffering depends then on ourselves, and not on any other. For if we will stand steadfast and unmoveable 1 Corinthians 15:58, we shall not be shaken.

What then? Does nothing depend on God? All indeed depends on God, but not so that our free-will is hindered. 'If then it depend on God,' (one says), 'why does He blame us?' On this account I said, 'so that our free-will is not hindered.' It depends then on us, and on Him. For we must first choose the good; and then He leads us to His own. He does not anticipate our choice, lest our free-will should be outraged. But when we have chosen, then great is the assistance he brings to us.

How is it then that Paul says, not of him that wills, if it depend on ourselves also nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy. Romans 9:16

In the first place, he did not introduce it as his own opinion, but inferred it from what was before him and from what had been put forward [in the discussion]. For after saying, It is written, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion Romans 9:15, he says, It follows then that it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy. You will say then unto me, why does He yet find fault? Romans 9:16-19

And secondly the other explanation may be given, that he speaks of all as His, whose the greater part is. For it is ours to choose and to wish; but God's to complete and to bring to an end. Since therefore the greater part is of Him, he says all is of Him, speaking according to the custom of men. For so we ourselves also do. I mean for instance: we see a house well built, and we say the whole is the Architect's [doing], and yet certainly it is not all his, but the workmen's also, and the owner's, who supplies the materials, and many others', but nevertheless since he contributed the greatest share, we call the whole his. So then [it is] in this case also. Again, with respect to a number of people, where the many are, we say All are: where few, nobody. So also Paul says, not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.

And herein he establishes two great truths: one, that we should not be lifted up: even should you run (he would say), even should you be very earnest, do not consider that the well doing is your own. For if you

obtain not the impulse that is from above, all is to no purpose. Nevertheless that you will attain that which thou earnestly strivest after is very evident; so long as you run, so long as you will.

He did not then assert this, that we run in vain, but that, if we think the whole to be our own, if we do not assign the greater part to God, we run in vain. For neither has God willed that the whole should be His, lest He should appear to be crowning us without cause: nor again our's, lest we should fall away to pride. For if when we have the smaller [share], we think much of ourselves, what should we do if the whole depended on us?

6. Indeed God has done away many things for the purpose of cutting away our boastfulness, and still there is the high hand. With how many afflictions has He encompassed us, so as to cut away our proud spirit! With how many wild beasts has He encircled us! For indeed when some say, 'why is this?' 'Of what use is this?' They utter these things against the will of God. He has placed you in the midst of so great fear, and yet not even so are you lowly-minded; but if you ever attain a little success, you reach to Heaven itself in pride.

For this cause [come] rapid changes and reverses; and yet not even so are we instructed. For this cause are there continual and untimely deaths, but are minded as if we were immortal, as if we should never die. We plunder, we over-reach, as though we were never to give account. We build as if we were to abide here always. And not even the word of God daily sounded into our ears, nor the events themselves instruct us. Not a day, not an hour can be mentioned, in which we may not see continual funerals. But all in vain: and nothing reaches our hardness [of heart]: nor are we even able to become better by the calamities of others; or rather, we are not willing. When we ourselves only are afflicted, then we are subdued, and yet if God take off His hand, we again lift up our hand: no one considers what is proper for man, no one despises the things on earth; no one looks to Heaven. But as swine turn their heads downwards, stooping towards their belly, wallowing in the mire; so too the great body of mankind defile themselves with the most intolerable filth, without being conscious of it.

7. For better were it to be defiled with unclean mud than with sins; for he who is defiled with the one, washes it off in a little time, and becomes like one who had never from the first fallen into that slough; but he who has fallen into the deep pit of sin has contracted a defilement that is not cleansed by water, but needs long time, and strict repentance, and tears and lamentations, and more wailing, and that more fervent, than we show over the dearest friends. For this defilement attaches to us from without, wherefore we also speedily put it away; but the other is generated from within, wherefore also we wash it off with difficulty, and cleanse ourselves from it. For from the heart (it is said) proceed evil thoughts, fornications, adulteries, thefts, false witnesses. Matthew 15:19 Wherefore also the Prophet said, Create in me a clean heart, O God. Psalm 51:10 And another, Wash your heart from wickedness, O Jerusalem. Jeremiah 4:14 (You see that it is both our [work] and God's.) And again, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8

Let us become clean to the utmost of our power. Let us wipe away our sins. And how to wipe them away, the prophet teaches, saying, Wash you, make you clean, put away your wickedness from your souls, before My eyes. Isaiah 1:16 What is before My eyes? Because some seem to be free from wickedness, but only to men, while to God they are manifest as being whited sepulchers. Therefore He says, so put them away as I see. Learn to do well, seek judgment, do justice for the poor and lowly. Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: and though your sins be as scarlet, I will make you white as snow, and if they be as crimson, I will make you white as wool. Isaiah 1:17-18 You see that we must first cleanse

ourselves, and then God cleanses us. For having said first, Wash you, make you clean, He then added I will make you white.

Let no one then, [even] of those who have come to the extremest wickedness, despair of himself. For (He says) even if you have passed into the habit, yea and almost into the nature of wickedness itself, be not afraid. Therefore taking [the instance of] colors that are not superficial but almost of the substance of the materials, He said that He would bring them into the opposite state. For He did not simply say that He would wash us, but that He would make us white, as snow and as wool, in order to hold out good hopes before us. Great then is the power of repentance, at least if it makes us as snow, and whitens us as wool, even if sin have first got possession and dyed our souls.

Let us labor earnestly then to become clean; He has enjoined nothing burdensome. Judge the fatherless, and do justice for the widow. Isaiah 1:17 You see everywhere how great account God makes of mercy, and of standing forward in behalf of those that are wronged. These good deeds let us pursue after, and we shall be able also, by the grace of God, to attain to the blessings to come: which may we all be counted worthy of, in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom to the Father together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, power, honor, now and for ever and world without end. Amen.

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