

Hebrews Study Session 11 - Chapter 7:11-28

The author now pivots from the shadow, the priesthood of Melchizedek, to the reality, which is the priesthood of Christ. He is going to spend the rest of this chapter explaining the links he made in 7:1-10 about Melchizedek and how they apply to Christ and what makes the priesthood of Christ superior to that of the Aaron.

Why does the author spend so much time on this topic? For the Jews, there was an air of finality to the law, it was God's definitive word to man. For the Jew, there was also the thought that the Levitical priesthood was superior to Melchizedek's because it came later and thus superseded it. However, as pointed out repeatedly by the author, the priesthood of Melchizedek was spoken of prophetically by David in Psalm 110:4, which was certainly much later than the law given to Moses. Since the priesthood, when boiled down, is really a means by which man relates to God, it is critical that those professing to be of the new covenant know how to relate to God now and how fundamentally different it is than under the old covenant.

Another thing we are going to see the author do is something he's been doing all along this sermon. He begins an argument, then moves on only to pick up the argument again later with more explanation. We're going to see him do that a few times in this passage. He's going to elaborate on a comment or brief truth he pointed to earlier in the message and bring out its relevance to the current thrust of his sermon. He's also going to make a brief statement which he will develop more fully later.

There is an overarching question that is answered by this passage. *"Who provides the superior basis for relating to God?"* This passage deals with the two options for answering this question. There are really just two sections to this passage. 1) The transition from the priesthood of Melchizedek to the priesthood of Christ, 2) the superiority of the priesthood of Christ. To make his case, this last section has three supports: Christ's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood because a) it is founded on a divine oath, b) it's permanent, & c) it's based on a better sacrifice.

[Read Hebrews 7:11-19]

Verse 11 contains the word "perfection". This has a different definition than we use it today. It means "fulfilment" or "completion" or "reaching the desired goal or end", not moral perfection. In this case the author uses the word to describe the type of relationship established between God and His people under the new covenant which is to say that men could draw close to God. While it was possible to draw near to God under the old covenant, there is a better hope by which we draw near to God now. Under the new priesthood, the certainty of drawing near to God is stronger, surer and more complete than under the Levitical priesthood.

Keep in mind that the law required the priesthood in order to operate. Without a priesthood, the law (the old way of relating to God) would cease to function.

Q: What is God's ultimate goal? *(to establish an eternal relationship between Himself and His people)*

Q: In the oracle David made in Psalm 110:4, why did David discuss the need for a new priesthood like that of Melchizedek's? *(Because he saw the Levitical priesthood as ineffective in bringing people to God thus the Melchizedek priesthood foreshadowed one that would be effective, that of Christ's.)*

Q: Why is there a necessity of changing the law if the priesthood changes? *(the law is administered through the priesthood. If the priesthood changes, there must be changes in the law to accommodate the new way to relate to God.)*

Q: Reviewing from last week, what are the traits of Melchizedek and his priesthood which pertain to Christ? *(he had no Levitical genealogy, he was a king and priest, his priesthood was eternal, among others)*

One thing we see at the end of v.11 and v.12 is that the author sees a different kind of priest that is needed, not just another man filling the office.

Q: According to v.13 - what was the change in the law that signified a change in the priesthood to that of Christ? *(no one from Judah had ever served at the altar before)*

In v.13 - the word "belongs" is in the perfect tense. It is an action that was fully completed in the past. There is nothing more that can be done to alter the finished state. The word "officiated" is in the aorist tense. This is an event that happened in the past but has continuing effect into the present time. When you put these two together it means that no one from Judah had ever attended to the altar of the Lord and that Jesus forever has a permanent share in that tribe thus He would never be acceptable to serve as a priest under the old covenant.

In v.14 - "descended" does not mean lineage as we might expect but rather "to rise up or spring up" like a plant or spring of water.

[Read Jeremiah 23:5]

This verse is probably the reference the author had in mind when using this word concerning Jesus. The Father's plan was to have Jesus rise up into the office of high priest in the new priesthood like that of Melchizedek's.

Q: While the law speaks to no priest being from the tribe of Judah, who and what did come from the line of Judah? *(David and the kings of Judah - it was the tribe of royalty)*

What is of note is that Jesus was not always a priest. However, Jesus was always a king. It was His birthright as He was from the line of Judah.

In vv.15-6, the author splits a conditional clause in order to maintain the listener's attention. They hear the "if" statement but then have to wait, causing anticipation, for the conclusion or condition to complete. *"And it is still more obvious that He does so not by virtue of but by virtue of"*

Q: According to v.16, on what basis does Christ not fill the office of high priest but on what basis

does He fill the new office of high priest? *(He doesn't fill it on law of physical requirement but He does fill it on the basis of an indestructible life)*

“law of physical requirement” - literally “law of fleshly requirement”. It refers to not only the lineage the law required of a priest to possess but also all that is fleshly about the law. The law belonged to the realm of man’s physical nature and bears only indirectly upon his spiritual being. Think of all the aspects of the law and how they prescribe how this physical life was to be lived out, including the requirements for a priest.

“indestructible life” - this is an oxymoron of sorts in that Jesus’ human life was exposed to destruction through the crucifixion. Yet His life was not destroyed by that death. There was a new quality of life which was endowed upon Jesus at His resurrection and exaltation to heaven and it was at this exaltation when He was installed in the office by God as the great high priest. This indestructible life describes the objective reality of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ rather than the quality of His life which He had always had. The power of the life that came through the resurrection conferred upon Him the eternal priesthood. He is a priest because of the resurrection. The priesthood of Aaron assigned men as priests based merely upon their fleshly lineage but not due to the quality of their lives. (This goes back to Hebrews 5:5, when the author discusses Christ becoming a priest.)

Q: What is the quality of Jesus’ life that makes Him suited for this new priesthood? *(His life doesn't end)*

V.17 reiterates what is known about Christ’s priesthood. It will be forever and it will be according to that of Melchizedek as opposed to the Levitical priesthood.

Q: Why is the Levitical (former) priesthood set aside? *(it was weak and useless)*

The word for “weakness” is actually the word for strength with the negative particle stuck on the front. In modern speak we’d say “strong - NOT!”. The old priesthood has no strength to do anything for those it serves.

The word for “useless” is the same in that it is the word for profit with the negative particle stuck on the front end meaning “not profitable” or “useless” or “unuseable”. In other words the old priesthood is now not useable any longer.

Q: Why does the author say that the law was weak and useless? *(v.19 - the law could make nothing perfect)*

Q: What did we say the word “perfect” means in this chapter? *(completed, fulfilled, reached the desired end, etc.)*

In this context “made perfect” has the connotation of being made fit for God. While the law had some merits, it could not meet the deeper needs of man, that of being made fit for being with God.

Q: So what could the law not do? *(bring a person to God’s desired end which is salvation)*

[Read Romans 3:19-20]

The author ends v.19 by reminding them that hope is better than the regulation or commandment because it allows and encourages them to draw near to God. Notice it isn't saying there was no hope in the law but only that the hope offered by Christ is superior to that of the old covenant.

Q: What sort of hope do you think those early Christian needed as they heard this message preached? *(many different answers - one sort of hope was that Christ would be with them and would continually allow them to have direct access to God.)*

Now the author moves forward with three specific ways the priesthood of Christ is superior to the Aaronic priesthood under the old covenant.

[Read Hebrews 7:20-22]

Q: How was the new priesthood of Christ established? *(by an oath)*

Q: Does anyone any of the aspects of this oath we studied back in chapter 6? If so, what were some of them? *(6:16-18 - the oath of God is unchangeable, it is guaranteed as God is the guarantor, it ends disputes)*

The oath declares the purpose of God in absolute fashion. While the Levitical priesthood was not based on an oath and thus was able to be changed and abolished at God's time, the priesthood of Christ stands unchangeable. Thus the priesthood of Christ established upon the oath of God is the superior priesthood.

Q: What does it mean for believers that the priesthood of Christ is based upon an oath? *(the covenant will never change again. There will never be another, revision to the priesthood as this one will always be in force. It is permanent and thus, the way in which we come to relate to God will never change - it will always be through Jesus Christ (thus John 14:6)).*

[Read I Timothy 2:5-6]

Jesus is the ONE mediator between God and man. The mediator is the priest who stands before God on behalf of man. He became the priest after giving Himself as the ransom for our lives and was resurrected and exalted.

Q: How do we know that there will never be any changes to the priesthood under the new covenant? *(v.22 - Jesus is the guarantor of this new better covenant)*

The word "guarantee" is only found here in the New Testament. It brings out an unusual idea. The old covenant was established with a mediator (the high priest and other priests) but with no one to guarantee that the people would fulfill their side of the covenant. But Jesus stands as a guarantor - a continuing, eternal, perpetual guarantor in two ways. 1) He guarantees to man

that God will fulfill His covenant of forgiveness and 2) that those who are in God are acceptable to God forever. Think of this. Jesus is our guarantor of eternal acceptance to God. Jesus guarantees our place before the throne of God forever without any chance of this condition being changed.

Q: What implications does this have for believers? (*many answers possible*)

Notice that the new covenant is a better covenant. The reason it is better is because it allows men direct access to God and this access is granted forever. Are you seeing the relational differences between the two covenants? (This is also the author's first use of the word 'covenant' in Hebrews.)

[Read Hebrews 7:23-25]

Q: According to this passage, why is the priesthood of Christ superior to the Levitical priesthood? (*Christ's is permanent, forever*)

In the same way that Melchizedek's death was not recorded in Scripture, thus in that sense, he lived forever, Christ truly does live forever. It is reality.

In v.24 - "permanently" - inviolable, something that cannot be transgressed. Plutarch used this word to describe the constancy of the sun's course through the sky. In the same way, the constancy of Jesus' priesthood is unchangeable or inviolable - forever in force.

Q: What are the limits to Jesus' ability to act as a mediator between God and man? (*v.25 - there are none based upon the word permanently in v.24*)

The old system offered temporary deliverance from sin but the new system offers complete and eternal deliverance from sin. The word "save" is used in an absolute sense here. Christ's capacity to save is in the most comprehensive sense possible. In other words, Jesus will save us from anything and everything we need to be saved from. This is Jesus' role as our great high priest who intercedes on our behalf perpetually. Notice that the word "save" is next door to the word "forever". This is not the usual word for forever but rather it means "completely". The only other time it's used in the New Testament is in Luke 13:11 when discussing the woman who could not straighten herself up completely. Christ's deliverance is able to straighten us up completely - not partially. The condition of the sinner doesn't matter; Christ's deliverance and salvation is so complete nothing else is needed. The phrase "is able" at the beginning of v.25 describe Christ's power to do these things. He is able because He is a different kind of priest - not just a recycled person filling another slot in a long line of human priests in the old covenant. The author makes the point clear that Christ is able to save all those who draw near to God through Him and to do so fully and completely. The old covenant didn't have this promise of salvation. The priests were not able to do this.

[Read Romans 8:31-34]

When we think of Jesus interceding for us, we shouldn't think of Him bowing down

before the throne of the Father in some lowly liturgical fashion. Jesus is lifted high in heaven, exalted to the right hand of the Father awaiting the full manifestation of the victory He has already achieved for us and for His Father. Christ is interceding for those believers who are facing temptations of various sorts but especially the temptation of denying the faith while living through persecution. This is the benefit and superiority of Christ's priesthood being eternal and without need for change ever.

[Read Hebrews 7:26-28]

Q: What is the author's reason given here for Christ's priesthood being superior to the Levitical priesthood? (*a better sacrifice*)

Q: What are the characteristics the author brings out concerning Christ? (*v.26-7 - holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens, does not need to daily offer sacrifice for His own sins*)

Let's examine the words used to describe Jesus.

1. "Holy" - this isn't the usual word for holiness. It is describing the character or intrinsic nature of Jesus. This word is only used of God and never man.
2. "innocent" - without malice, simple - what you see is what you get thought here
3. "undefiled" - pure - The Levitical priests were ceremonially pure but Christ was pure in His very nature.
4. Separated from sinners - not in the sense of uncaring for them but rather that He isn't one of them. He never sinned thus never needed to offer a sacrifice on His own behalf. While the high priest under the old covenant left his home 7 days before the Day of Atonement so that he would not become ceremonially defiled before he had to offer the ritual sacrifices for the people, Christ's separation was not ceremonial at all. He truly was separate from sinners by His sinless nature. He could not be defiled. In fact whenever He ran into ceremonially unclean people, He healed them and cleansed them - they never defiled Him. His power was too great.
5. exalted above the heavens - When Jesus offered Himself on the cross and then was resurrected, His work was done. He was then exalted and set apart by God to serve as our priest.

There is a bit of question on v.27 about the priests daily offering of sacrifices. While offerings were sacrificed daily in the temple, the high priest usually only needed to offer the one on the day of atonement. However, the high priest usually did offer the grain offerings daily which were expiatory (atoning). Yet, these had to be offered daily as the people were sinning daily. In fact the high priest himself may inadvertently sin and have to offer a sacrifice for himself. Jesus stands in contrast to these men and this system. (There is much more to say about this but it is the author's introductory thought on this topic and he'll loop around to dive into more detail in a later chapter.)

Q: In what ways is Christ different from the priests under the old covenant? (*v.28-9 - he only offered up one sacrifice but it was for all time never again to be repeated. He was not weak but sinless and thus His sacrifice was effective for as long as His priesthood is in force - forever.*)

Notice that the author goes back to the idea of an oath being the foundation for the priesthood of Christ. This goes back to Psalm 110:4. It is the lynchpin for this section of Scripture and what the author wants the people listening to him to walk away with.

Q: In what way could the Son possibly be made perfect since He was sinless by nature? (*The word perfect means completed the course, fulfilled the work God had for Him - not made qualitatively any better*)

If you recall our discussion on Hebrews 5:8 we had the same issue. This is another instance of the author bringing up a truth once in passing and then coming back to it later to hammer the details home.

So now at the end of v.28 the author finally uses the word we usually use for “forever”. This sets Jesus apart from the priests of the old covenant once and for all. Through this the author doesn’t show so much a difference between the “bad” and the “good” but rather the “old and past it’s usefulness” and “new and completed or fulfilled”.

Q: In what ways do you see the new covenant as more relational than the old one? (many answers)

One of the big reasons for the original hearers of this message to stumble over it was because of the greatness of the paradigm shift it represents from Judaism to Christianity. There truly was no going back. It wasn’t a change of God but a change in the way God’s revelation progressed - the way we saw and related to God now as opposed to the old covenant.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?