



A Better Hope

Hebrews 7:11-19

I love the book of Psalms. Some of my go-to verses for fighting sin and pursuing the Lord are found in the Psalms: “¹¹You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”¹ “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”² I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”³ So many verses in the psalm talk about not only the superiority of God, but also the yearning of the psalmist to be *with* God himself. God is fullness of joy; therefore, we ought to delight in him. Just to be a doorkeeper brings superior joy because we are in the Lord’s presence.

These psalms were sung by the nation of Israel. They celebrated being able to be in God’s presence. But I want you to think about that. How much of God’s presence did the Israelite nation enjoy? In C.S. Lewis’s book *Reflections on the Psalms*, he said the following:

These poets knew far less reason than we for loving God. . . . Yet they express a longing for him, for His mere presence, which comes only. . . to Christians in their best moments. They long to live all their days in the Temple so that they may constantly see “the fair beauty of the Lord” (27,4). . . . Lacking that encounter with Him, their souls are parched like a waterless countryside (63,2). (as quot. in R.K. Hughes, p. 195).

I agree with Lewis, but what does he mean when he says they knew far less reason than we for loving God? The point is that in the Old Testament, there was a different system for approaching God. There were priests who served as mediators for the people. A more intense manifestation of God’s presence was revealed only to the High Priest once a year behind a veil as thick as a human hand. God’s special presence was behind a veil. Within a sacrificial system, there seemed to be a lack of closeness with God. God veiled himself. So, when we read the psalms, while there should be rejoicing in what we read, we as Christians should also be thinking of the privileges we have in our day.

We as humans were created for God – and our greatest delight can be found in him. Apart from his presence, we are a shell of what we were made for. Many humans recognize this. We were made for more. We were made for God. But we also know that we cannot have God on our own terms or in our

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ps 16:11.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ps 37:4.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ps 84:10.

own strength. Those of us who have trusted Jesus for forgiveness and restoration with God now have greater delights than what people in the Old Testament realized. We have immediate access to the Lord. There's no need for a temple and a sacrificial system because the Lord Jesus has given us unrestricted access to God! Therefore, **Jesus has provided a better hope than the Levitical priesthood.**

This is the main idea of the verses we'll be studying this morning. The author of Hebrews is still talking about how the *order of Melchizedek* is superior to *the order of Aaron*. In other words, there are two priesthoods: Melchizedek's and the Levites. The Levite priesthood began after the exodus from Egypt and continued for hundreds of years. Even in the days of writing this letter, Jerusalem still had a temple with priests and a high priest. It would seem that the temple priesthood was superior because it's talked more about and it came after Melchizedek – maybe giving an indication that it superseded Melchizedek? Yet, the author of Hebrews says that's not the case. Since Melchizedek was the one to bless Abraham and thus the Levites, the Melchizedekian priesthood is superior to Levites.

But you could think, "Why does this matter?" Well, verse 19 of chapter 7 says this matters because "a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God."⁴ The author of Hebrews is concerned about people being able to draw near to God. Could the Levitical priesthood actually bring people close to God? The answer of verse 19 is "no." Yet, verse 19 does say that there is hope of drawing near to God – and that is through and because of Jesus. He is our better hope. And, by the way, when the Bible uses the word "hope," it's not how we use that word. Someone might say to us, "What are you planning on doing tomorrow," and you say, "I hope to do this or that," and in that sense, the word "hope," is a thing that you desire to do, but may or may not happen. Scripturally speaking, the word hope is many times (if not all the time) something you look forward to that is certain. So, when the author says that Jesus gives a better hope – and that this hope is nearness with God – he is saying that Jesus, and Jesus alone, assuredly brings people near to God! Jesus gives us what we were created for. Money, power, sex, food cannot give us eternal fulfillment. They all fade away. But God remains forever – and in his presence is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore!

Since that's the case, the Hebrew Christians can live in persecution because they have everything even though they may lose everything. Even we today have encouragement from this because whether we have abundance or need, we have Jesus who draws us near to God and therefore gives us a better and steadfast hope. But how can that be and what does this mean? Well, if you haven't already, turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 7, and I'm going to read verses 11-19 for us this morning. Before I read, let's pray together:

¹¹ Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ¹³ For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. ¹⁵ This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 7:19.

¹⁷ For it is witnessed of him, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”
¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. ⁵

What we discover in these verses is a comparison between the Levite and Melchizedek priesthoods. One is inferior. The other superior. In trying to explain this passage, I am going to be jumping to various verses. I hope, though, that in doing so, it’s helpful to get the bigger picture. So, let’s start out by talking about the inferior Levite priesthood.

1. The Levite priesthood was useless and limited.

A few years ago on a Sunday night, Dave Rininger (many of you know him), was sharing the story of when he came to faith in Jesus. He grew up in the Catholic Church – and he wasn’t just a nominal Catholic. He was a practicing Catholic. He was trained up in the church. He was an altar boy, and he went to the confessional regularly. I remember at one point during the story, he spoke of how he went to the confessional, walked outside of the church, and then thought to himself that God could have figured out a better system for forgiveness. He knew that immediately walking out of that confessional, he was still unclean. He was going to sin again. How could he be *sure* that he was going to be with God forever and not be punished in Hell? Wasn’t there a better way? Of course, he learned that there was – and that was through Jesus, not through his own works.

But, I thought of this story because of the verses we’re studying this morning. In talking about the Levite priesthood, the author wants us to see that the Old Testament system really could never have succeeded in guaranteeing any hope of reconciliation with God. Sure, there were laws and rules, but those rules only further exacerbated the problem. It made people more aware of their sin.

Look at verses 11-12 again with me: ¹¹ Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?
¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ⁶

The word “perfection” can have various meanings in the Bible, but in the book of Hebrews, it often has a more specific definition. It’s not talking about a moral perfection, but instead, it has the idea of being restored in relationship to God. Something is perfect if it can unite us with God because if we have God, we have wholeness – even as we talked about last week, we have righteousness and peace with God.

But the author here says in verse 11 that this perfection was not attainable through the Levitical priesthood. He says this through a question. If perfection had been attainable, then why even have a prophecy talking about the priesthood of Melchizedek coming back? In other words, because there’s Melchizedek’s priesthood is coming back, clearly the Levite priesthood is limited in time and limited in ability.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 7:11–19.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 7:11–12.

And, it truly was limited in ability. One commentator said that from the Old Testament perspective, “[the] worshipper comes to sacrifice with a consciousness of sin and failure and hopes thereby to find a new and unbroken relationship with God; but every time these hopes of a ‘perfect’ resolution to the problem of sin have been disappointed, and the round of sacrifice must be endlessly repeated” (Longman, p. 95). You can see why I thought of Dave Ringer’s story. And, many of us can resonate with this. I can remember seasons where I was angry with God because I felt similarly. You know you need God, but you feel God is distant. You ask for forgiveness for certain sins, and then you sin that same sin again the next week. You keep going back to God and you feel as though every time you go back to confess, God is making you grovel lower and lower in the dust in order to shame you?

Think about the Jewish people in Israel. They sinned, and their confession involved sacrificing an animal. Sin, death, blood. Sin, death, blood. Sin, death, blood. These sacrifices constantly spoke to the fact that every infraction of the Law required death because sin leads to death. So, the Israelites saw what they deserved. God, in his mercy, spoke to them of how sinful their sin was. And, in those sacrifices, he also revealed to them that there was a need for atonement. Atonement refers to being brought back to God. Think of the word “atonement” and think of “at one” (i.e. – being brought together). We can be brought together with God through the blood of another. But clearly, the blood of animals couldn’t do it because the animals had to keep dying after every sin. Isn’t there a better way?

Then when we think about the priest themselves, the author of Hebrews says in verse 16, that the Levite priests got their position **“on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent. . .”**⁷ **I actually think the translation should be a little different here. I don’t think the author is only highlighting the descent of a priest, but he’s highlighting all the external rules. Another way of translating this is “the law of a fleshly commandment” (see Longman, p. 97).** The emphasis is on the external rules. So, what were some of them. Well, there was rule about ancestry. Your mother had to be an Israelite and your father had to have served as a priest. In addition, though, a priest could have none of the 142 physical blemishes listed in the Old Testament that would disqualify a priest from serving. Also, he had to bathe and clothe himself in certain ways – keeping himself externally pure.

Now, let me ask you, is external purity all that mattered? No. All of these things were meant to be greater pictures of a need for greater purity – a purity like what the psalmist speaks of having clean hands and a pure heart. We all know external looks don’t mean your heart is pure before the Lord. You can come to church, talk a certain way and seem all nice on the outside – but that doesn’t mean anything. Jesus himself said to wash the inside – not merely the outside. So, can a Levite priest rescue us simply because their mom was an Israelite and their dad served before them? No. As we look at the priests we should be thinking, “There has to be a better way.”

But not only should we see this by looking at the priests. We should see this in looking at the tabernacle itself. Through the Law, the people were commanded to make the ark of the covenant and a tabernacle. Were the people truly brought near to God through the tabernacle? Think of the beauty of the tabernacle and temple. I’m reading a book on it right now as it explains all the details of the embroidery on the walls and the different elements both inside and outside the tabernacle. The tabernacle reminds us of the perfect Garden where God was present with people. The angels barred Adam and Eve, but now in the tabernacle, we’re given hope that humanity can return to God’s presence in a perfect world. Yet, not everyone is welcome into the tabernacle. Priests can go to the holy place, but only the High Priest can go into the Holy of Holies – and he can only go there once a year.

⁷ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 7:16.

Is the tabernacle welcoming complete access to God? Not really. I mean, while God manifested more of his presence via the ark, he wasn't limited to the box. Instead, the Bible refers to the ark as God's footstool. The footstool is at the bottom of the throne. So, the psalmist says,⁷ "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!"⁸ There was excitement to experience a part of God's presence. Yet, still, it's a limited access, and it's an access that continuously reminded the people that God was infinitely holy (something good to be reminded of), and that they were continual sinners (something good to be reminded of). The tabernacle, priests and sacrifices under the law shouted out a need for atonement. They spoke to the fact that humans could come back to the Garden of God. Yet, none of these things provided a way back to God.

The author of Hebrews is correct in saying that the Law came through the old covenant, and that law, along with all the ceremonies could not give perfection. So, one man named F.F. Bruce wrote once that **"The whole apparatus of worship associated with sacrifice and ritual and priesthood was calculated rather to keep men at a distance from God than to bring them near"** (as quot. in R.K. Hughes, p. 197). I'm not sure I can go *that* far, but I do believe that the old covenant kept people at a safe distance, while also intending

The sacrificial system came into place by God, but it wasn't intended to save and forgive sins. It was to reveal God's holiness and point to someone who could actually save and forgive sins – to bring us back to the Garden of God's presence. For those in the Old Testament time period, they should have said, "Isn't there a better way?" And God's answer is a resounding YES! God even speaks that in the Old Testament time period. In Psalm 110:4, we read that there's a priesthood to come. Speaking of the Messiah that is to come, David prophecies that he will be ". . . a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."⁹ It's because of this prophecy that the writer of Hebrews says that the Levitical system was created as limited in both time and ability.

I can understand this argument. I'm the type of person who wants things to last – and if I find something that works nicely, I will try to keep it forever. I embrace the viewpoint that if it isn't broke, don't fix it. There's no need to fix something – no matter how old – if it is still working. We don't need to replace it! This is the idea here about the priesthoods. Verse 11 essentially says *Why would you need a priest after Melchizedek if Aaron was sufficient?* Well, Aaron's not sufficient. It's limited in time and it's limited in its ability. It cannot give hope – it does not give us access to God. Even verse 18 says that the Levite priesthood was weak and useless. And, by the way, when it says useless, we have to read in context. There was a use for it. But the use wasn't to make perfect. It wasn't to grant union with God. If you looked to Levi and the sacrifices and the temple to do that, then it is useless.

That's why Melchizedek's order is essential. So, look with me at verses 12-15. These serve as some transitional verses to grasp a hold of the beauty of Jesus' priesthood. The author writes, "¹²For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ¹³For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. ¹⁵This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek. . . ."¹⁰

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ps 132:7.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 7:17.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 7:12–15.

We see Melchizedek's order is essential. We also see that if there's a transition to the order of Melchizedek, then the rules change. Verse 12 says that the priesthood and law go hand-in-hand. The Levite priesthood works with the Mosaic law. Since the Mosaic law and the levite priests can't save, then we need a new priesthood with a new law. Now, when I'm saying "law," I'm not saying new morals. Instead, I think the idea of law refers to the way by which one is given access to God. Levites had a law for access to God – and it didn't save anyone. But the law of Melchizedek's priesthood is perfect. It actually does grant access.

But since Melchizedek's priesthood has a different law, then he doesn't have to draw from the tribe of Levi. In verse 13, the author is talking about Jesus and says that he belonged to another tribe – a tribe that wasn't allowed to ever serve at the altar. Verse 14 says that it's obvious that Jesus, our Lord, was descended from Judah. By the way, when he refers to Jesus as Lord, I believe he's not simply saying "Master," but he's referring to Jesus' divinity. Our Lord is God and King. And, in the flesh, he is also the God-Man who descends from the kingly line of Judah. Now, Moses didn't give allowance to Judah to be priests. In fact, in King Uzziah's day, Uzziah actually tried to take the role of a priest, and this is what we read in 2 Chronicles 26:17-18: ¹⁷ But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the Lord who were men of valor, ¹⁸ and they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the Lord God."¹¹ Uzziah's response was anger. Then the Lord responded to Uzziah by giving him leprosy. God only intended Levites to be priests under the covenant of Moses. Now, many Jews probably assumed that this was the only and superior covenant. But the author of Hebrews tackles Psalm 110:4 and says that the Levites aren't the end-game goal for priests. There's another priesthood – from Melchizedek. And Melchizedek's order isn't limited.

There is a better way! There's a sure and steadfast hope! Now we can see that

2. The priesthood of Melchizedek is perfect and eternal.

Read verses 15-17 with me now: ¹⁵ This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."¹²

"This becomes even more evident. . . ." What becomes more evident? Answer: that a new law has arisen. We know that if there's a new priest, there's a new law that comes with it. Jesus didn't gain the priesthood on the basis of external qualifications. He didn't have a dad who served as priest. He had what the levites didn't possess: the power of an indestructible life!

Ponder this more. When Jesus healed people, he touched them in their impurity and that was against the Law because that would then make people unclean. Yet not with Jesus. People's uncleanliness didn't transfer to Jesus. Instead, Jesus' purity cleansed others. Every miracle of Jesus spoke to something greater about Jesus himself. He wasn't like anyone else. As Melchizedek is a picture in Genesis of one who has eternal life – Jesus is the fulfillment of Melchizedek. He literally is the I AM with no beginning

¹¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), 2 Ch 26:17–18.

¹² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 7:15–17.

and no end. So, when Jesus speaks of himself, he said that he is the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:16). He doesn't just give life. He *is* life!

When Jesus entered the scene of this world, a new order arose! And, actually, that word "arise" is important to mark in your Bible. Verse 15 says, "another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek."¹³ "Arise" more than likely speaks to Old Testament prophecy. Zechariah 6:12 says, "Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord."¹⁴ The word "branch" in Hebrews is related to the Greek word for "arise." And there's only One who's going to do this. The King-Priest, Jesus. The One who *is* life and cannot be destroyed.

Yet humanity sought to destroy him – even the priests of the temple. Outside the walls of Jerusalem, Jesus was crucified as a criminal. His crime was that he declared himself to be King of the Jews and also one who could forgive sins. Only God could forgive sins?! But that is who our Lord is. Yet, the people didn't believe. The priests sent him to the Romans, calling for execution. And Jesus went willingly. He was beaten and yet a greater curse was upon him. Remember how the sins in the Old Testament required an animal's death? Can you imagine the number of animals that died for sins? Can you imagine the stench of the temple with all the sacrifices? That's just a picture of what God's wrath means. And Jesus, the One perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world – is the one who could bring atonement. He took the punishment for myriads of people on himself once and for all. And then he died. But that death led to the presence of God.

Do you remember what happened when he died? The new order of Melchizedek arose. The thick temple veil was torn in two, and the Holy of Holies was exposed. As one man wrote, "**The insufficient Levitical priesthood was over. Perfection was attained. The new Melchizedek began his eternal ministry**" (R.K. Hughes, p. 198).

But you could say, "But Jesus died? I thought he was indestructible?!" He is indestructible. Death can't even destroy Jesus. The phrase "indestructible life," I believe, highlights Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus said in John 10:17-18 that he lays down his life and he has the power to raise it up again! And on the Sunday after his crucifixion, he rose from the dead. Forty days later, he ascended up to Heaven to the literal presence of the revelation of God's glory. If you have turned to Jesus for forgiveness and reconciliation with God – you have that! And now he continuously prays for us and speaks on our behalf. And he will never stop. He's a priest *forever*.

Do you see what the covenant of Moses could never do? Do you see what Jesus has granted?! The law made nothing perfect. But Jesus does. He unites people with God himself. It's true that a better hope is introduced! This steadfast confidence that we can draw near to God and receive all the blessings and promises of the Creator.

The ramifications of this are massive, Ventura. Remember that the reason the author brings all of this up is because he seeks to encourage this struggling church. They wonder if following Jesus is worth it. The author essentially asks, "Is being known and loved by the immortal and perfect God worth it?"

This past week, I read a true story about a protestant pastor who lived in France who became friends with a local Catholic priest. One time, the priest asked the pastor why protestants don't pray to saints.

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 7:15.

¹⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Zec 6:12.

The pastor asked, “Why should we?” And then the priest gave an illustration. He said that there are many different ways to get the attention of the French President. You could go to the Ministry of Agriculture or Department of Interior. In speaking to different important people, you could get a hearing with the President himself. The priest probably thought he had an airtight argument. Then the pastor responded. At that time, Raymond Poincare was president and lived in the Palace of Elysee. The pastor essentially said, “Imagine I’m the son of Monsieur Poincare? I live in Elysee. I wake up in the morning, and say good-bye to him. He goes to his office and then I go to some other ministry to ask if I can talk to the department head. Finally I get an interview with him and then I request to meet with my father.” We can see his point that it is absurd for a son to leave the father in order to go to an assistant to get back to the father!

This pastor then said to the priest that he was a child of God, and because of Jesus he now had immediate access to the Father. This is the better hope that the author of Hebrews is talking about! And if you have trusted in Jesus, you have *this access* to God. Yet, many times we, like the Hebrews, focus on the hardships of our circumstances. We think that if things are lighter or easier or nicer, then we have what we need. But what does it matter if you gain the whole world and lose your soul? What does it matter if you look as externally put together as the Levites? You don’t have perfection! You don’t have God!

Christian, you have access to God. And even more. I love how Pastor Timothy Keller puts it: “The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 AM for a glass of water is a child. We have that kind of access.” Oh, we have a Father. We’ve been reconciled because of Jesus. **We’ve been given a better hope: a superior priest who is indestructible. Therefore, our hope is indestructible. No matter what people may take from us. No matter what pain we endure – immovable our hope remains! Our indestructible Savior has given us an indestructible salvation that grants us eternal love, care and nearness with God. Do you trust him? Do you trust him?**

It’s true that we should have greater delight in God than even the psalmists understood. God has made a way that is perfect. And even this morning, we get to dive into more meaning as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper this morning!

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