March 28, 2010 by Steve Brandon

A Better Priesthood (part 1)

Hebrews 7:11-17



- 1. A Perfect Priesthood (verses 11-12)
- 2. A Royal Priesthood (verses 13-14)
- 3. A Worthy Priesthood (verses 15-17)

Our text this morning is Hebrews 7:11-17. Let me read if for you now.

Hebrews 7:11-17

Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of Him, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

In the past few months, our family has had a new guest in our house. We purchased a bird as a pet for Hanna, our middle daughter, who loves animals. Hanna is thrilled to have a pet in the house. (She hopes that it will lead to bigger things in the future, like a dog, but dad isn't so sure.) We bought a parrotlet, which is the smallest species of the Parrots. It looks like a Parakeet. But, it has the brains of a parrot (or so I'm told). We have named him "Kevin" (after the bird in the movie "Up").

Anyway, we have begun the process of attempting to teach the bird to speak. In doing so, I had Hanna record something that she wanted her bird to say. And so, we recorded her saying, "I love Hanna." The idea is that if the bird hears this same phrase enough times, eventually, it might just begin to say it. So, one day when my family was gone, I set up Hanna's mp3 player in her room (where Kevin lives) and placed Hanna's little recording on repeat mode, so that our bird heard something like this, "I love Hanna ... I love Hanna .

And in some measure, I feel sorry for you at Rock Valley Bible Church. For the past 5 months (or so), I have preached the same message to you again and again and again and again and again. The message is this: Jesus Is Better! Oh, to be sure, I haven't simply said, "Jesus Is Better! Jesus Is Better! Jesus Is Better! Jesus Is Better!" I have sought to say it with different words. I have sought to use helpful and instructive and interesting illustrations. I have preached different passages, with different thoughts. But, all the same, my message has hardly wavered for the past 5 months.

The reason for this is quite simple, the writer to the book of Hebrews had struck this one note again and again and again. "Jesus Is Better!" Jesus is better than the prophets (Hebrews 1:1-3). Jesus is better than the angels (Hebrews 1-2). Jesus is better than Moses (Hebrews 3). Jesus is better than Joshua (Hebrews 4). Jesus is better than Aaron (Hebrews 5). And last week, we saw that Jesus is better than Melchizedek (Hebrews 7).

This week, we find out that Jesus is better than all of the priests of the Old Testament. My message this morning is entitled, "A Better Priesthood." I plead with you, don't get tired of listening to these messages. Because, they will only serve you in the end.

I'm convinced, that those who live the strongest lives of faith are those who have the clearest view of God! What allowed Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel all to preach so fervently, against so much opposition? They all had a clear view of God? What allowed Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldeans and head out, not knowing where he was going? What allowed Moses to consider the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt? He had a clear view of God and His reward. What gave Paul his great boldness for Christ? He had a clear view of Christ.

And, I have been saying these past 5 months, "Jesus Is Better, Jesus Is Be

And so, if you grasp what the writer to the Hebrews is saying, such glimpses of the greatness of Jesus will have a far-reaching practical effect upon your life. This morning, we will be talking about priesthood. Again, it might be your tendency to simply tune out. "What do I need with a priest? The only priests that I know of are in the Roman Catholic Church. We don't have priests at Rock Valley Bible Church. Priests were

something for those guys in the Old Testament. We don't need to have priests today. Isn't this right?"

I say, you are partially right. "Yes, we don't need priests today. That is, we don't need human priests. But, the reason why we don't need priests is because we already have a priest, Jesus Christ. Please don't lose sight of this. You need a priest.

The role of the priest is to bring you to God. Prophets were people who brought God to the people, in speaking and preaching His word. Priests were people who brought other people to God, through sacrifices and prayers. We need help in coming to God. Nobody can see the face of God and live. All who have tasted of the presence of God have cowered in fear. But, in order to come to God, we need someone to bridge the gap between us and Him. And Jesus Christ has done exactly that.

This morning, in my message, we are going to spend some time looking at the priesthood of Jesus. If you catch it, you will walk away from here rejoicing in your heavenly priest who brings you to God.

As we dig into Hebrews 7, here's my first point: the priesthood of Jesus is a better priesthood, because it is ... 1. A Perfect Priesthood (verses 11-12)

Hebrews 7:11-12

Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.

These verses are a bit like a riddle. Perhaps you remember when Jesus was being hounded by the Pharisees. They were asking Him question upon question, attempting to "trap Him in what He said" (Matt. 22:15).

First, they asked Him about paying taxes: is it lawful or not? Jesus said masterfully, "Render to Caesar the things that a Caesar's; and the God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). Then, they asked him about the resurrection, trying to paint a scenario that was difficult to understand. They put forth the scenario about a woman who had seven husbands, "in the resurrection, ... whose wife ... will she be?" Jesus again responded perfectly, saying that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matt. 22:29). Then, Jesus proved the resurrection from the Pentateuch, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matt. 22:32).

The third question had to do with the greatest commandment. Again, Jesus put forth a masterful summary of the law, quoting from two commandments, neither of which were from the Ten Commandments. He said, "Shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 22:37-40).

At that point, Jesus was done with receiving the question. Instead, He turned the tables and said, "All right. I'm done with you asking Me the difficult questions. Let's see how well you do at this game." Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" (Matt. 22:42). That was the easy question, because they all knew that the Messiah would come from the line of David. So, they said to Him, "The son of David" (Matt. 22:42).

And then, came the difficult question. Jesus asked them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, 'The LORD said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet'? If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" (Matt. 22:43-45). To that question, the Jews were dumbfounded. They had no answer. In the minds of the Jew of their day, the father was greater than the son. The father would never call the son, "Lord." Rather, it was always the other way around. But, it's as plain as day in the Scriptures that this isn't the case with the Messiah. Jesus had quoted Psalm 110, verse 1, in which David, speaking to His son, who is the Messiah, and calls Him "My Lord."

And so, the conundrum of the question is this. "How does David -- whose son (or one of his descendants) will be the Messiah -- call Him, "My Lord"? The answer can only come if the descendant is something other than a mere son. The answer can only be that the Messiah is something more than a mere human being, something that the Jews would never dare to admit.

We read in the next verse, "No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question" (Matt. 22:46). I wouldn't doubt that the Jews of the day knew full well what Jesus was getting at in asking this question. But, they wouldn't dare come to admit that the Messiah was something other than a mere man. He couldn't be "God in the flesh." He couldn't be "Immanuel." And so, they chose to remain silent.

Psalm 110 is one of those passages that clearly alludes to the deity of the Messiah, something that the Jews have rejected even to this day. In Psalm 110:4, we read a verse that has caused the Jews to scratch their heads. David is speaking of the Messiah with these words, "The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

I can easily imagine Jesus having the following conversation with the Pharisees. Jesus would first warm them up with the easy question, "Mr. Pharisee, what do you think about the priest? Whose son is he?" Without hesitation, every Pharisee would say, "Levi's son." And then, Jesus would ask the follow-up question, "Then, how does David in the Spirit call Him, 'Priest,' saying, 'The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."'? If the Messiah is David's son, how can He be a priest?"

Had Jesus asked that question to the Pharisees, I believe that the silence would have come in the same way that it did when Jesus asked about Psalm 110, verse 1. I doubt that they were willing to admit that there was another priesthood that was better than the priesthood of the Levites (which God, Himself) had ordained.

I believe that the writer here is equipping his readers to deal with the Jews of his day who were attempting to pull people back in to the Jewish system. The pull would have been strong. They would say, "We have the priests" Christians would say, "We have a priest." He was equipping them with the question to ask the Jews. "If the Messiah is David's son, how can He be a priest?"

Let's look again at Hebrews 7:11. Now, if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? Basically this text is saying, "Why the need for another priesthood?" The reason is that the Levitical priesthood was flawed. You could never obtain perfection through the Levitical priesthood. And this is a point that the writer to the Hebrews pounds over and over again.

He brings it up here in 7:11. It comes again down in verse 19, "The Law made nothing perfect." You see it again in 9:9, "Both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience." The point of 9:13 is that "the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify [only] for the cleansing of the flesh" because Jesus did far more (as mentioned in verse 14). "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. ... For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (10:1, 4). "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (10:11).

Everything about the priests of the Old Covenant screams of imperfection. They performed their sacrifices again and again and again. When you do things over and over again, it's because you just haven't got it right yet. When it's perfect, you can step away from it, without any changes ever needing to be made. And such is the priesthood of Jesus. He offered Himself once for sins. His sacrifice was a perfect sacrifice. "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10). "By one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (10:14).

His priesthood is A Perfect Priesthood (verses 11-12). With this new and perfect priesthood, much has changed. Verse 12, "For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also." Under our new priest, Jesus Christ, we have a new law. We are no longer bound to the Mosaic law! Rather, we are bound to the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), which is a law of love.

The law was never intended to fully bring us to God. Nobody is justified by the works of the law (Gal. 2:16). The priests, in offering up the same sacrifices year after year, never made us perfect (Heb. 10:1). Rather, the law was given to show us our sin. "Through the law that comes the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). The law was given to teach us that we need help coming to God. The law explained the role of the priests in that process. In the end, there is much about the law that is unpleasant.

I went to the dentist on Friday. It was much like experiencing the law. From the start, and throughout my visit, the hygienist was telling me over and over again what was wrong with my brushing habits and my flossing habits. I have a sensitivity to cold and sweets on several of my teeth. She told me how I need to brush properly: not up and down, not back and forth, but in small circles. But, not too hard. My gums are about 4mm deep, rather than the preferred 1-3mm. That allows bacteria to form in my gums, which will eventually eat away at my teeth. So, I need to floss every day. There is one spot in my teeth that is particularly difficult to floss because of a bridge that I have. She said, "You really need to make sure that you floss in that spot." She said to make sure that I come in for an appointment every 6 months (not the two years I had waited), so that the tartar on my teeth can be cleaned. As I was finishing up, she gave me some final instructions. She told me to purchase some special sensitive tooth paste that I should start using. She also told me to purchase some fluoride rinse that I should use as well.

Throughout my time lying on the chair, I heard nothing of encouragement. In general, I think that I take care of my teeth pretty well. I brush my teeth several times a day. I floss once or twice a week. But, I wasn't asked about my hygiene habits, nor was I commended in any way on these things. Rather, I was simply told of all of the things that I needed to do.

As I was finishing up by the counter, she stood right there, took out a sticky note and gave me my "homework." Who ever heard of getting "homework" at the dentist's office??? Anyway, it read, ...

Sensitive tooth paste. ACT fl2 rinse Brushing @ gumline Floss

That's the law. It points out the ways in which you have failed and continues to condemn, offering no hope, other than commands.

But, the hope that Christ brings is much different than this. That sin, which the law exposes, has been dealt with at the cross of Christ. No longer do we need to perform the works of the law to gain God's approval. Through faith in Jesus, we are fully reconciled to God. With full reconciliation comes a new law. Love God!

Regarding the law that we follow, it's the law of love. It's the "perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). All that we do comes from an expression of our love for God. We attend church because we love the Lord Jesus. We read His word because we love the Lord Jesus. We pray because we love the Lord Jesus. We give because we love the Lord Jesus. We love others because we love the Lord Jesus. We confess our sins because we love the Lord Jesus. We share the gospel with others because we want them to share in the love we have found.

That's the new law we follow. It's because we have A Perfect Priesthood (verses 11-12). Not only had Jesus brought in a perfect priesthood. The priesthood of Jesus is better because it is ...

2. A Royal Priesthood (verses 13-14)

Hebrews 7:13-14

For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.

Regarding priests, your lineage was everything. If you were to be a priest, you had to be able to prove that your mother was a Levite and that your father was a Levite. If not, you couldn't be a priest.

Perhaps you remember in the days of the return from exile. The Jews had been away from the land for 70 years. Upon their return, they built the temple and re-instituted the sacrifices. In order to do that, you needed to have some priests. So, the men from the sons of Levi gathered to be priests. But, there were several men, whose genealogies were uncertain. So, they searched the ancestral registration, to try to figure out whether they were fully Levites or not. But, when they couldn't find their records, "they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood" (Ezra 2:62) because, they couldn't trace their lineage to the tribe of Levi. This was a big-deal for the Jewish people.

And so, when the early Christians claim that Jesus was a priest, they had some explaining to do. Because, clearly, Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (verse 14). But, there was never a priest from Judah who served in the temple. The tribe of Judah was tribe of kings. David was from the tribe of Judah. And all the kings were from the tribe of Judah.

Whenever we see a king attempting to offer sacrifice, it ends in disaster. And on the one occasion, when Saul attempted to offer the sacrifice, Samuel came to him and said, "What have you done?" (1 Sam. 13:11). "You have acted foolishly" (1 Sam. 13:13). As a result, Saul lost his kingdom.

When Uzziah became proud, he "entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense" (2 Chron. 26:16). Azariah, the priest, along with eighty other priests opposed him saying, "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. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God." (2 Chron. 26:18). But, Uzziah was enraged at them. Who were they to stop the king from burning incense on the altar of incense???? And as he was there in front of the priests, "leprosy broke out on his forehead" (2 Chron. 26:19). "King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death. And he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD." (2 Chron. 26:21).

"And so, how do you justify that a priest could possibly arise from the tribe of Judah, the royal tribe?" I do believe that this question was being asked of these Jewish Christians. Those who were attempting to pull these Christians back into Judaism certainly felt that these believers were transgressing the law. "You can't have a king-priest. It doesn't work!" And these believers were being instructed to take them back into the Old Testament to see that God had prepared the way for another priest to come.

You go back to Psalm 110. In that Psalm, we have a priest arising, who isn't from the tribe of Levi. And it can be easily be argued that he must be from the tribe of Judah. Oh, to be sure, Judah isn't ever mentioned in the Psalm. But, it was written by David, who was from the tribe of Judah. It referred to his son, the Messiah, who would rule as a king. Psalm 110:2, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies." Psalm 110:5, "He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath."

So, what about the kings who tried to offer sacrifices and were rejected? Will this king be rejected in like manner? No, because this king isn't offering Levitical sacrifices. His sacrifice is of a different order (Heb 8:4). So, it's totally appropriate for Jesus to be the priest. And, as Jesus is from the line of Judah, it makes the priesthood of Jesus A Royal Priesthood (verses 13-14). Perhaps you have heard it said that Jesus is "Prophet, priest, and king!" Here is where we see it most clearly.

My third point: the priesthood of Jesus is a better priesthood, because it is ... 3. A Worthy Priesthood (verses 15-17)

By this, I simply mean that Jesus is a priest, who is worthy of His priesthood. His life is what qualifies Him.

Hebrews 7:15-17

And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of Him, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

See, in the Levitical system, it wasn't so much their character that qualified them to be priests. Rather, it was a series of fleshly requirements. First of all, their ancestry qualified them to be priests. Then, some other requirements were needed. But, they all related to their physical bodies. Among other things, a priest couldn't be blind or lame or have a disfigured face or a deformed limb (Lev. 21:18). He couldn't be a hunchback or a dwarf or have a defect in his eye (Lev. 21:19). Furthermore, when being a priest, they couldn't defile themselves by touching a dead person (Lev. 21:2) or by shaving off the edges of their beards or making any cuts in their flesh (Lev. 21:5).

You can read more about the qualifications for priests in Leviticus 21. But, they all have to do with their physical lineage as well as their physical appearances. Little is mentioned in the law regarding their character. There were many priests throughout the history of Israel who were not righteous men. And it started within the first generation of priests, right from the start. It's just like sin; that started with our first parents, Adam and Eve.

Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu "offered strange fire before the LORD. ... And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed

them, and they died before the LORD" (Lev. 10:1-2). A few generations later, Eli's sons were "worthless men" (1 Sam. 2:12). Rather than sacrifice the animals that were brought to them, they would eat the animals that were brought to them, bullying the worshipers who came with their offerings (1 Sam. 2:13-17). Furthermore, they committed sexual sin with those women who served in the tent of meeting (2 Sam. 2:22-25), not much unlike the Roman Catholic scandal in the priesthood of our days.

Towards the end of the Old Testament canon, Malachi wrote a scathing rebuke against the priests of the day, ...

Malachi 2:1-9

"And now this commandment is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the LORD of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart. Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it. Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi," says the LORD of hosts. "My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him as an object of reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name. True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts. "So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction."

In the days of Jesus, it was no better. The priests were closely involved with the whole process of extorting the people with their high priced sacrifices that they sold in the temple, making "the Father's house a place of business" (John 2:16). I'm sure that they were merely following the lead of the priests in the days of Jesus. And the high priests that we know of by name, Annias and Caiaphas, were far from righteous men. They were politically motivated men, who sought to do everything possible to find Jesus guilty and put Him to death.

But, Jesus is totally different than this. He has become a priest on the basis of his "indestructible life" (Heb. 7:16). That phrase there at the end of verse 16 speaks of the character of Jesus. He has an "indestructible life." Primarily, this term has to do with the fact that the life of Jesus was in no way able to be destroyed. Oh, the Pharisees and Sadducees attempted to destroy His life. After healing the man with the withered hand, "The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (Mark 3:6). They looked for any weakness in Him. They looked hard. They accused Him of being demon possessed (Matt. 12:24). They accused Him of breaking the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-14). They accused Him of having been born of fornication (John 8:41). They accused Him of being "a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19). To all of these things, Jesus said, "wisdom is vindicated by her deeds" (Matt. 11:19). They tried to trap Jesus in what He said or did (Matt. 22:15). Rare was the time when a Pharisee came to Jesus with a genuine question (Nicodemus or the Rich Young Ruler). Most often, they came with attempts to destroy Him, questioning His every move.

Finally, they found a way to kill Jesus. But it wasn't in what He had said or done. It was by stealth and deceit. Perhaps you remember when Jesus was arrested; they came by night with a large crowd, wielding swords and clubs (Matt. 26:47). Jesus said, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me" (Matt. 26:55-56). When they brought Jesus to trial, it was late at night, when those with reason were tucked away in bed. At that trial, they "kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. ... [But] they did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward" (Matt. 26:59-60).

When Jesus died upon the cross, it may have looked that His life was destroyed, but even then, His life was not destroyed. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Though the Jews thought that He was talking about the building before them, Jesus "was speaking of the temple of His body" (John 2:21). Indeed, three days later, Jesus raised from the dead (which we will celebrate next week during resurrection Sunday).

All of this testifies to the indestructible life of Jesus, all of which makes his priesthood A Worthy Priesthood (verses 15-17) They couldn't destroy Jesus because of the quality of His life. He was sinless. He was above reproach. He was impeccable. He was flawless. He was faultless, unlike so many of the priests before. The book of Hebrews affirms this on several occasions (2:18; 4:15). Look down at how chapter 7 finishes up.

Hebrews 7:26-28

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

You need a priest to bring you to God. Who is your priest? Are you going to find a man, another sinner, to try to bring you to God? Or, are you going to go with the sinless God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, the worthy priest? Are you going to trust Him to bring you to God?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 28, 2010 by Steve Brandon. For more information see www.rvbc.cc.