

Title: Who is this King of Glory?
Text: Hebrews 7.1-10
Theme: Christ – King of Righteousness, King of Peace
Series: Hebrews #17
Prop Stmtnt Going back on Christ is like stepping off the cliff

Read Text:

Do you know people who stubbornly resist any form of medical attention, simply because they don't want to know what may be known? Life for them is a whole lot easier if they don't have to deal with the reality of their condition. So, they choose to live an unexamined life, until of course an emergency occurs that absolutely cannot be ignored. If you are one of those people, I would have no integrity if I said anything to you. I fully understand and empathize.

What I can speak to, is that there are many more people, who stubbornly resist any form of soul examination because they do not want to know the reality of their own condition before God. They choose to live an unexamined life. It appears to me that most of you are NOT in that category. Here you are, on a hot summer Sunday, knowing that we are studying through a rather meaty section of the weighty book of Hebrews. Hebrews does soul surgery, and here you are, not only willing to endure this, but you bring along your own scalpel. So, I commend you and encourage you just for being here. Particularly, if you previewed this text and you noticed that within the space of ten verses, "tithing" appears six times. You probably said to yourself, there is no way Bob is going to let that opportunity slip by. Knowing that, I certainly do not want to disappoint you. But, that is not the main point of this text, so it can not be the main point of the sermon. What is the main point of this text is that there is great reward for those willing to look at their need and then willing to accept our soul's provision in Christ.

The message has four parts: Review, History, Structure, and Points.

Here is the Review

We are about halfway through the book of Hebrews, which means that by this time, many of us have lost sight of where we are and where we are going. So, let's get our bearings again, and if you are new or fairly new, this will be helpful for you as well. The book of Hebrews was (as you can tell from the title) written to people who were ethnically Jewish, who probably lived in Rome. Some background here may be helpful. Tiberius was emperor during much of the life of Christ and was succeeded by Caligula who was murdered by the Praetorian Guard. He was succeeded by Claudius, who was murdered by his wife and succeeded by the infamous Nero who committed suicide. (As an aside, the next one was also murdered, followed by another suicide, and followed by another one who was murdered, all within a year and a half). So, life in Rome was more than a bit unstable. The political tensions were only part of the backdrop. When Claudius was emperor, he decreed that all Jews leave Rome (AD 49). Two of those were Aquila and Priscilla who went to Corinth where they met Paul and become followers of Christ (Acts

18). But, back in Rome, there was already a church that was probably started by some Jews who had been in Jerusalem on Pentecost, became converted to Christ and went back to their home in Rome and started meeting together. By this time, this early congregation probably had a few Gentiles, though it was mostly Jewish. But, because of Claudius' decree, all the Jews had to leave which meant that this church just lost most of its founding leadership. The Jews were permitted to return a couple of years later, which proved to be difficult on this young church in Rome. Now, does anyone know why Claudius kicked them out in the first place? Historical documents reveal that the reason was because the Jews were fighting about a guy named Christos. So, when the Jews, particularly the Jewish believers, went back to Rome, they tried to assimilate back into church life. Major tension arose, because some were acting as if their Jewish sensitivities or their Gentile freedoms were more important than the gospel. So, in AD 57, the apostle Paul writes the glorious treatise on the gospel known as the book of Romans, in which he says, "Here is the gospel!" "Fight over this!" "Lay down your life for this! But, don't waste your time and energy on your own ethnic, cultural, or generational preferences. Your preferences will die with you! Your preferences are not eternal. The gospel is!

Now, thirteen (13) years later, the Hebrews in Rome are still feeling the pressure. They never really fit in Rome. Assimilation into the church was not smooth. Rome was in the middle of a civil war in which emperors kept being killed or kept killing themselves. They were weary. They were tired of the pressure from without, and they just wanted to "go back to the way that things used to be." In other words they were tempted to turn back to Judaism. After all, isn't Judaism a legitimate religion? Isn't Judaism based on the OT and wasn't it God who established Judaism? So, why can't we just go back? There is both nostalgia and perhaps less persecution that way.

Now, think with me, because I just raised a very important issue that for some seems a little fuzzy around the edges. Since God established Judaism in the OT, isn't Judaism a legitimate religion? The answer is: Judaism is incomplete without Christ. Judaism was established by God as the foundation for Christianity. Judaism is not legitimate without Christ. Therefore, a person who truly followed Judaism, as God intended it, would follow Christ.

Do you remember, John the Baptist? John said that his job was to prepare the way for Christ. So, a person who truly listened to John the Baptist, left John's ministry for Jesus, but in leaving John for Jesus, they fulfilled John's mission. The mission of Judaism is to point to Christ. Without Christ, Judaism is one more religion attempting a "works-based righteousness", none of which work. Therefore, if you returned back to Judaism, that is, if you rejected Christ, you were turning your back on truth for the sake of tradition, which is exactly the circumstantial reason why Christ was executed.

The book of Hebrews was written to these weary, discouraged, doubting believers as an encouragement and a warning. The warning was, if you turn back, there is no hope for your soul, because Judaism, apart from Christ, cannot save you. The encouragement was, look at how everything that God did and revealed in the OT points to Christ! Christ is pre-eminently superior! He is worth all of your trust. He is worth a patient endurance. He

is worth a long obedience in the right direction. He is worth the affections of your life. He is worth all of this because Christ is superior to the angels – Hebrews 1.1-2.18 and Christ is superior to the OT law. In fact, everything in the OT is fulfilled in Christ. He was the pillar of fire, the manna in the desert, the Shekinah glory in the tabernacle and even the tabernacle itself. He is the fulfillment of the Sabbath rest and the Day of Atonement, the high priest and even Melchizedek pointed to him. This brings us to chapter 7. Chapter 7 is setting us up for the main argument of this book, which begins in chapter 8. This set up is done by the AH making 3 related points. 1) Melchizedek was a very important historical figure (1-10). 2) Levitical priests were important to the OT system, but even the Levitical priests were inferior to Melchizedek (11-19). 3) Christ is superior to them all (20-28), since he is the ultimate reason for them in the first place. So, why return to the shadow, when you can have the essence?

That was our Review. Now, we need some History.

The History

Verses 1-10 reference an event that is recorded in Genesis 14. Abraham was living in the land of Canaan west of the Dead Sea. His nephew Lot was living in Sodom, east of the Dead Sea. The region was to some degree under the control of a coalition of four (4) overlords from the Mesopotamia region, when the kings of five (5) Canaanite cities on the eastern side of the Dead Sea decided to band together and rebel. The Mesopotamian overlords did not take to this idea fondly, and came down to quell the rebellion, which they did by not only defeating the 5 kings in battle, but they went to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and they plundered them. They took all of their possessions and their people as prisoners, presumably to be slaves and headed back to their homes. This would tend to discourage any others from trying this again. One person escapes, perhaps near Hebron, and tells Abraham, whose nephew Lot (that he has treated like a son) is part of the POW's. Abraham takes all of the men in his employment, organizes them into a little army and goes into pursuit. At the city of Dan, he catches up to them, launches a surprise attack at night, and defeats the overlords. Abraham risked everything for Lot, and for people of Sodom and Gomorrah. The benefits for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are enormous. They not only receive back their people and possessions, but they receive their freedom from the heavy taxation that no doubt, they were under from the overlords. The assumption would be that Abraham would be compensated very handsomely for his efforts.

All of this sets up a very interesting situation. In a place, just to the east of Salem (later named Jerusalem), known as the king's valley, Abraham is approached by two kings. One is the king of Sodom, who ought to be grateful and the other is the king of Salem, known as Melchizedek, who is identified as not only a king, but also a priest of "God Most High – el Elyon. The contrast between the two kings and their treatment of Abraham and Abraham's response to them is very clear.

Melchizedek brings out bread and wine for Abraham and his men, the king of Sodom brings out nothing (perhaps because he has nothing). Then, Melchizedek gives a blessing

to Abraham and praises God, while the king of Sodom in humiliation and bitterness expresses no gratefulness whatsoever, and withholds a blessing from Abraham. He had an opportunity to express gratitude and he didn't. He simply said, "give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself" assuming that Abraham was materialistic like everyone else.

This alone screams to us. Sodom was an extremely wicked city which eventually was deemed beyond hope and was destroyed. Here, the picture is clear isn't it? Sin cannot bless you. Sin cannot give to you. Sin only takes from you, and the king of sin is not the king of joy or blessing, but of bitterness and pettiness and small-heartedness.

After Melchizedek gave Abraham the bread and wine and blessed him, Abraham in turn, gives to Melchizedek and tenth (a tithe) of all that he has, acknowledging that it is God who has blessed him and prospered him. Get this. He tithes to Melchizedek as a means of expressing worship to God because Melchizedek was a representative of God. But, to the king of Sodom, he gives back to him the people and the possessions that he liberated because he does not want in any way to be thought of as being made wealthy by sin. That's it. There is nothing more mentioned about Melchizedek. We do not know his family line. We do not know how he came to be a follower of God. We do not know what happened to him. Like a good Michigan summer thunderstorm, he shows up, makes an impact and disappears. It all seems rather random, until we get to the book of Hebrews and we find out, that this historical event was orchestrated by God in order to point to Christ. Melchizedek was in many ways, a preview of Christ.

That is our History, now, the Structure.

The Structure

One of the reasons why I preach expositionally is because it helps teach you how to read the Bible. For example, this text has another one of those chiasms in it.

The Meeting – v.1a

The Blessing – v.1b

The Tithe – v.2

Big Idea – v.3

The Tithe – vs. 4-5

The Blessing – v.6

The Meeting – v.10

The chiasm tells us that verse 3 is the big idea.

That is the Structure, now the points.

The Points

1. **Christ is superior because he is without beginning and end.** (v.3)

This is the big idea of this text. While Melchizedek was not a Levitical priest, he was a priest of the Most High God. When the text says that “he is without father or mother or genealogy” it means that he was a priest, directly appointed by God, but not on the basis of his ancestry or succession. He is a preview of the perfect priest who was to come, in that his beginning is not recorded, and neither is his death. This is particularly noteworthy in a book that is filled with the phrase, “and he died.” This does not mean that Melchizedek was divine, or a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ it is just referring to the fact that his birth and death are not recorded, so according to the official records, he is still functioning. In reality, it is Christ who is forever.

When you read the end of verse 3, we are given an example of how we should understand the OT. Notice that the AH reads Genesis through the lens of Christ. Christ is not like Melchizedek, it is Melchizedek who is like Christ. Melchizedek has no recorded beginning or end, but it is Christ alone who is truly without beginning or end. The point is: Can you find a priest who beats that? Of course not! So, who is this King of Glory? He has no beginning and he has no end, which means he is indestructible.

2. **Abraham pointed to Christ’s superiority by tithing to Melchizedek.** (v. 2, 4-5)

Abraham not only gave Melchizedek a tenth, he gave him (lit.) “the top of the heap.” That is because you put the precious stuff on the top so that it is not crushed. The good plunder was at the top. Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of what he had, and the tenth that he gave was the good stuff. Verse 4 mentions that Abraham was the patriarch. But, here you have the patriarch, the head guy giving a tithe to someone else. What is the point?

You tithe to that which you deem important and worthy. I do not know how else to state this. The reason why many of you do not tithe to the church is because while you have a measure of respect for the gospel, you really do not consider Christ and the gospel THAT important. You find excuses as to why your resources need to go to lesser things. You see, where you put your treasure is simply an indicator of where your heart is. When Abraham gave a tenth of what he had to Melchizedek he was saying, that he considered Melchizedek to be superior to himself. He was placing himself in a subordinate position to him as reflected in him paying him homage through the tithe. Beloved, that is why we call it an “offering”. We are offering up to God, as an act of worship (attributing worth to him) what we naturally want to trust in. The question is; does the value of your offering match the meaning of what you profess? Some of you have some repenting and changing that you need to do. It is part of us all “pulling the ropes.”

The nation of Israel paid tithes to the Levites in obedience to God and in support of the “gospel” ministry of the tabernacle/temple. The first part of verse 6 indicates that Abraham did not give a tithe to Melchizedek because he had to. There was no law yet that demanded that and besides Melchizedek was not a Levite. Abraham’s offering was an act of faith that demonstrated that he considered Melchizedek to be superior to him. It wasn’t something that he had to do, it was a spiritual reaction.

3. **Abraham pointed to Christ’s superiority because he was blessed by Melchizedek.** (1b, 6-7)

The principle is pointed out in v. 7. The superior person always blesses the inferior. The one in need comes to the one with the supply in order to be blessed. Abraham accepted the blessing because he recognized that he was in the presence of one who was greater than himself.

4. **Abraham pointed to the of Christ’s superiority because he was inferior to Melchizedek.** (1a, 9-10)

While verse

three points out the big idea, verses nine and ten reflect the apex of his argument. When Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek, Abraham did that as the patriarch of the nation of Israel, which means that Levi was still in his line to come. In that sense, through Abraham, Levi and the priests gave a tithe to Melchizedek. So, if you are considering going back to Judaism, you will be relying upon those who are inferior, when what is offered to you is the real deal. The fact that Melchizedek is a preview of Christ is brought out by his name and his title. His name means, “king of righteousness” and his title means, “king of peace.” For Christ to be a priest in the order of Melchizedek means that there in some ways he is similar and in other ways different.

Christ is a king who not only has a righteous kingdom, but he is the king of righteousness because he is absolutely righteous.

Christ is a king who not only has a kingdom marked by peace, but he is king of peace, because he is the only means and foundation by which peace can be established between God and man and man and man.

When you step back and look at this, it is all rather amazing. Some of you have been or are involved in planning an event, like a wedding. The wedding itself may appear to go rather smoothly, but behind the scene, there is a great deal of nervousness and panic. Weddings last less than an hour. How would you like to plan a play, or a concert? There are pages of notes and cues. Does it not astound you, that God has orchestrated history in such a way that nothing is superfluous? The seemingly random appearance of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 is a loose thread that is left hanging until Hebrews 7. Oh, now we know! But that is the way it is with everything. God has designed his entire plan to point to the greatness of his Son.

This week, I ran into a young man that I know who was standing outside a restaurant and smoking. I have known him casually for a while and I did not know that he smoked, so I said, "hey, that will kill you, you wanna die? He said that he had been smoking since he was 10 and that he was now 28. So I said, "Well, you better hurry up and quit!" He then said, "I can't." When he wakes up, he has to smoke, during the day he has to smoke, at night he has to smoke. I pointed to his cigarette and said, "That is your master and you do what it tells you to do." Then I said, "There are better masters."

Beloved, this book is about the superiority of Christ. You are owned by someone or something, only Christ is worth it.