

Title: Saved to the Guttermost
Text: Hebrews 7.11-25
Theme: The Superiority of Christ's Priesthood
Series: Hebrews #18
Prop Stmt: The Levitical priesthood was helpful in that it pointed to Christ, but incomplete without Him. With the advent of Christ, the Levitical system is obsolete.

Have you ever purchased a computer or other sophisticated piece of technology and were totally intimidated by the operating manual that came with it? I have, actually, on occasion attempted to read through those things, just so, at the very least, I can at least pronounce the words correctly when in a conversation with some techie-nerds. You may not realize this, but there are actual real-life people who read and understand those manuals and enjoy it. Of course, they are the ones that the rest of us call when things go kablooney with our gadgets (as they inevitably will). When that happens, we don't make fun of them anymore – do we?

This text, at first reading, may seem a bit difficult, because it contains some technical language. When you read something like this, you may be tempted to let your eyes glass over a bit, and simply skim the words, instead of stopping and working through the argument, line by line. But, the reward is not simply being able to understand some sophisticated theological jargon. No, the reward, the joy, is in knowing why Christ is such an absolutely perfect King, Savior and Priest! My prayer is that the ears of your understanding will be opened to the meaning of this text so that the eyes of your heart will be enlarged to see and savor the magnificence of Christ.

Read Text:

Here is the big idea of this text: The Levitical priesthood (the structure of religious life for the OT Jews) was incomplete and therefore it was temporary and imperfect. It was never intended to be an end in itself but to point people to Christ. When Christ came, he fulfilled the Levitical priesthood and thereby rendered it obsolete. To go back and trust in the Levitical system (instead of trusting in Christ) would be tantamount to completely missing the whole point of the OT ceremonial law. Now, most of you at this point are tempted to shrug your shoulders and think, "ok, so what?" I was not raised as a Jew. I feel no connection with the Levitical system. I have no emotional bond with OT ceremonies. I am not tempted to right after church to run out and eat unleavened bread, or kill a lamb. Maybe not. But there are three very important truths that I want you to reflect on, even before we work through the text.

Intro #1 – Every detail in God's Plan fits together.

I grant you that you did not grow up in the Levitical system and that you are not (like the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews) being pressured or persecuted because you left Judaism and became a full-blooded follower of Christ and are feeling the weight of that are being tempted to return. However, what you can do, is see how everything that God revealed in Exodus and Leviticus had a level of preciseness and exactitude that seemed so

picky, but was all in preparation for Christ. The details mattered, because God demonstrated that he did everything then (and still now) down to the inth degree as part of his magnificent plan and this magnificent plan is fulfilled in Christ.

Sally Lloyd-Jones wrote a book for children called *The Jesus Storybook Bible* in which she explains in the introduction something about the Bible that many adults have not figured out. Listen:

“Now, some people think the Bible is a book of rules, telling you what you should do and shouldn’t do. The Bible certainly does have some rules in it. They show you how life works best. But the Bible isn’t mainly about you and what you should be doing. It’s about God and what he has done. Other people think the Bible is a book of heroes, showing you people you should copy. The Bible does have some heroes in it, but (as you’ll soon find out) most of the people in the Bible aren’t heroes at all. They make some big mistakes (sometimes on purpose). They get afraid and run away. At times they are downright mean. No, the Bible isn’t a book of rules or a book heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It’s an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It’s a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne – everything-to rescue the one he loves. It’s like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life! You see, the best thing about the Story is – it’s true. There are lost of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them (sic). It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. Every Story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in the puzzle – the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.”

So, even when studying about Levitical priests and this guy named Melchizedek, we find out that all along, these were part of God’s story that are giving us glimpses of the real hero of the entire universe, and the real Savior of our world, and our lives – Christ!

Intro #2 – We all struggle with tradition trumping truth.

Many of you grew up in the Roman Catholic faith. When we studied through Exodus and came to the 10 commandments, you were saddened and puzzled as you reflected on how many icons, images, statues and relics are worshipped in that system, when God goes to great pains to be so clear about not setting up images nor worshiping them. How was that ever allowed? The pat answer is that “back in the day” (referring to the middle ages), people were illiterate. Since they could not read and did not have a Bible, the images were the Bible for the poor. (Which is a bit of a stretch when you consider that the Mass was always given in Latin and no one spoke Latin) Flannel graph would have been cheaper had someone invented it back then. But over time, the images became part of the tradition of the church and then the teaching of the church. If you do something long enough, pretty soon it becomes difficult to understand the difference between the tradition and the truth they are supposed to reflect or teach. We are no different. Let’s do a quick quiz called – “Tradition or Truth” with the understanding that a tradition is a

practice that is used to help to communicate a truth, or enforce a good practice but is not mandated in the Scriptures, while a truth is something that is mandated in the Scriptures.

	Tradition	Truth
Vacation Bible School	X	
Communion		X
Wednesday Night Electives	X	
Teaching the Word		X
Baptism		X
Advent Sundays	X	
Trombone-led worship music	X	

There is nothing in Scripture that says that we have to have VBS, Wednesday night classes, or Trombone-led (or Organ or piano, or guitar or accapella) worship music. But, we certainly are tempted to fight about these things because “it is not how I was raised.” But now, you can start to understand a bit of what these people were experiencing. They grew up with the Levitical system and the OT sacrificial and ceremonial system was (unlike many of our traditions) explicitly taught in the Bible. But, it was not taught as the final, end-all and be-all. The Levitical system all pointed to Christ. But because the entire life of a Jew revolved around it, they found that in reality they were married to the traditions instead of the truth that the practices were intended to teach. That is why Christ said, that if you were really followers of Abraham and Moses, you would love me because they all pointed to me. So, not only does this give us some empathy with the people to whom this book was written, but this is an enormous warning. Do I really Christ, or do I simply enjoy the traditions associated with Him and the church? Do I really love the gospel or am I trusting in my adherence to certain practices that give me a false security because I think that I am a little more holy than others because of my preferences?

Intro #3 **Full-throttled Worship demands deep thoughts of God.**

Genuine Christianity demands deep thoughts. But deep thoughts of God produce great affections for God. Great affections for God produce full-throttled worship of God. Some people want emotion without theology (idolatry – the worship of feeling). Some people want theology without affection (idolatry – the worship of intellect). Technical truths are given to produce amazement, humility, adoration, joy, love, praise and exuberance! Keep these three ideas in mind as we look at this text.

1. **Christ is the only perfectly effective Priest** – 11-19

These verses are really not that complicated. The big idea is this: Even though God established the Levitical priesthood it was God Himself who predicted that there was going to be another priest who comes, but this one would come in the order of Melchizedek, not from the tribe of Levi. This prediction was made in Psalm 110, which is quoted over and over here in opening chapters of Hebrews. Why would God say that another order of priest was necessary, if the first order was doing fine? The reason is,

because the first order was NOT doing fine. The Levitical system was designed by God to be temporary.

Read v. 11 and note two things that are very important. 1) Perfection was not attainable through the Levitical priesthood and 2) it was on the basis of the Levitical priesthood that the law was received. So, if you get rid of the Levitical priesthood because a better Priest has come, you are getting rid of the entire ceremonial law that goes with it. (12) But that is okay – the Levitical system was not designed to guarantee its own perpetuation, it was to point to Christ. (13-14) How could a priest offer the sacrifice that was needed if he was from the wrong tribe? Didn't kings get into trouble if they tried to usurp the position of a priest? But this priest came from a different order, one that pre-dated Levi (verses 1-10) and was promised by God (17).

Let's say for example that you get a job working for the Leukemia foundation and you are particularly motivated to do this job because you lost a dear family member to this disease. As time goes on, you work your way up through the ranks of the foundation until one day, you are the head of this and you are making both a good salary and you are helping to fund some needed research. In fact, you do such a good job that a full and final cure for Leukemia is discovered, developed, and distributed all over the world. Then it hits you. Hey wait, I don't have a job anymore! No, but you helped discover a cure for Leukemia. At that moment you have to figure out, if you were more interested in the purpose of your job, or just in the perpetuity of your job.

The reason the Levitical system was put in place was to help people understand how serious their sin was and how impossible it was to fully pay for it. The system was good, necessary and helpful but it was also temporary and incomplete. Notice v. 15. Here the AH intensifies his language because instead of viewing the fact that Christ was not from the tribe of Levi as a liability he shows that Christ's authority came from a source other than his tribe. Christ's authority as priest was not because of his pedigree as being in the tribe of Levite. No! His authority as priest was "the power of an indestructible life" (16).

Christ is the only perfectly effective Priest. All of the other priests could only offer sacrifices that would temporarily cover the sinner, but only on the basis of what was going to happen in the future. No priest had any authority to say to others, or even to himself for that matter that "your sins are covered" "your guilt is removed" "God is satisfied – and you are forever at peace with him." But now! Christ, the infinite God, became man, and lived in my place so perfectly that he satisfied the righteous requirements before God of a holy life. And then he died in my place, so completely that God accepted his death in place of mine. And then to show the world that God was so permanently persuaded and eternally convinced and so infinitely satisfied that he raised Christ up from the dead. There is no Priest like Jesus and you need to trust him alone. "The power of an indestructible life" is reminding us of the critical importance of justification!

Margery Kempe lived in Norfolk, England in the 1400's. She was serious about her faith and it almost drove her crazy. The established church in those days taught that you could

merit salvation if you really did your best. But then comes the thorny problem of, “how do you know if you have done your best?” So, the practice of going to confession was established. This way the priest could ask you things such as: “Are your prayers, alms, and religious activities done more to hide your sins and impress others than to please God? Have you loved relatives, friends or other creatures more than God? Have you muttered against God because of bad weather, illness, poverty, the death of a child or a friend?” And what was designed to help people do their best turned out to reveal that no one has or could! Margery wrote that one day “she left one confession so terrified of the damnation that such a sinner as she surely deserved that she began to see devils surrounding her, pawing at her, making her bite and scratch herself.”¹ While that may sound delusional to some of you, others of you who know the power of a sensitive conscience and the affect of taking commands seriously enough to realize that no one is ever righteous enough to merit salvation. Rather than blow it off, what do you do?

Jill Price has a rare condition known as “superior autobiographical memory”. She is known as “woman who cannot forget.” You may have seen her on 20/20 or Oprah (hope not Oprah). But she can recall with vivid detail almost everything that has happened to her since age 14, and she is in her 40’s now. Sure, she can do great on history tests, but she can also remember every insult, every embarrassment, and every failure. If you could remember every failure, how could you function, especially when the truth finally settles in, there is nothing that I can do that will ever merit me salvation?

The longer that I study the Bible and think of these things as they relate to my own life and work them out with others in conversations and counseling, the more convinced I am that our great enemy is “works righteousness.” We desperately look for other things to trust in, instead of trusting fully in Christ. Some of the things we trust in are not immoral, but in fact are very moral, very helpful perhaps to others, but still the enemy of our souls if they occupy a higher place than Christ.

2. **Christ is the only perfectly established Priest** – 20-22

How did an OT priest become a priest? You were born into the tribe of Levi and at the age of 30 you became a priest. You took no vow, or made no oath (20). Now, there were some really good priests in the OT. There were also some really bad ones. But, because it was on the basis of your tribe, the people were limited in who they had to work with.

But Christ was made priest, not because of his tribe, but because of an oath. But it was not an oath that he made but an oath made by the Father. The Father, in planning out our rescue, ordained his own Son to be our Priest – forever! (Ps 110)

3. **Christ is the only permanently enduring Priest** – 23-24

The priesthood endured, but not the priests themselves. There was constant turnover. You were never guaranteed that the priest would be good, or that the one that was good would be there. They got old, sick and died like everyone else. So, how could you know if the

¹ Michael Reeves, The Unquenchable Flame, p. 21.

sacrifice was good enough, especially when the whole transaction depended upon the person making the offering (you) and the person doing the ceremony (the priest)? What are you supposed to trust in if you cannot completely trust in the priest? All of that unsettledness only reveals why Christ is our only and final hope. His ministry on our behalf is perfectly effective and perfectly established because he continues forever.

That brings us to verse 25, which along with the last three verses of this chapter provide a powerful and glorious conclusion. This is the reason why the AH has gone to such detail because he wants you to know that Christ is not only your only Savior, King and Priest, and a superior Savior, King and Priest, but he is a phenomenal Savior, King and Priest.

Conclusion – 25

This morning I will stop with v. 25 because I want to sit here for a bit and soak this up. This verse has three parts to it:

- 1) The Promise – “he is able to save to the uttermost”
- 2) The Condition – “those who draw near to God through him”
- 3) The Reason – “since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

The promise. Mel Trotter was a derelict and hopeless drunk. One night when his child was sick, he went out to get her some medicine but used the money on alcohol instead. His child died. At her funeral, he was so desperate for a drink, he took the shoes off her body and sold them for some booze. When Mel heard and believed the gospel he became a new man, inside and out. He used to refer to this verse and say that “he is able to save to the guttermost.” Your sin may be deep, but his grace is deeper still. But this promise has a condition to it. In order to be forgiven and declared righteous, you have to come to God through Christ alone (condition). That means that you cannot attempt to come to God through your own merits. You cannot look to your own efforts, your own righteousness, your own religious practices having any value at all, because they don't. Only Christ is your Savior and Priest. But, when you come to God through Christ, when you trust in Christ alone, then you are his forever. He is able to save to the uttermost because he always lives to make intercession for you. Perhaps a final example will help.

Josh Harris is a young pastor in Gaithersburg, MD of the church started by CJ Mahaney. About ten years ago, he was volunteering at a major evangelistic event in Puerto Rico and was on a major spiritual high. “But one night (he writes) ... I ... turned on the television. I mindlessly channel-surfed. Then I clicked past a channel that was all static – the images blurred and hard to identify. I clicked back to it. When I did, the static cleared for several seconds, and the images appeared. It was a pornographic cable channel. I didn't turn it off. I could have. ... Instead, I gave full vent to my lustful desires. I spent the next hour clicking back and forth to the channel for five-second glimpses. ... When I finally turned off the television and went to my room, the conviction that I'd been holding at bay came

rushing into my heart. I'd traveled all this way to ... watch porn. I was there to do God's work. I wanted to learn so God could use me. What a joke. I was nothing but a disgusting hypocrite. As I lay there staring at the ceiling, I couldn't even bring myself to pray. I finally slipped into a fitful sleep. That's when I had the dream....I dreamed I was in a room filled with index card-size files. They were like the ones libraries used in the past. When I opened a file, I discovered that the cards described thoughts and actions from my life. The room was a crude catalog system of everything, good and bad, I'd ever done. As I browsed the cards under the headings 'Friends I've Betrayed,' 'Lies I've Told,' and 'Lustful Thoughts,' I was overwhelmed with guilt. Long-forgotten moments of wrongdoing were described in chilling detail. Each card was in my handwriting and signed with my signature. ...I trust to destroy a card, desperate to erase the memory of what I'd done. But the past couldn't be changed. I could only weep in the face of my failure and shame. Then Jesus entered the room. He took the cards and, one by one, began signing his name on them. His name covered mine and was written with his blood. When I woke from the dream I had never been so aware of my guilt before God and, at the same time, the reality of my forgiveness by God. ...my failure and sin were so much worse than one lustful hour of watching pornography. But incredibly, God's grace and love toward me in Jesus were also much more powerful than I had ever realized. On the cross Jesus took my place. He took every one of my sins upon himself.

Josh obviously wrote this story down and it began to be circulated on the internet. Jenny heard this story, but only part of it. Jenny was a Muslim and was attending a week long camp for Muslim girls where she was asked to read this story. But the Muslim version of the dream had been edited. Jesus never appeared. The story ended with these words: "And then the tears came. I began to weep. Sobs so deep that the hurt started in my stomach and shook through me. (sic) I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of shame, from the overwhelming shame of it all. The rows of file shelves swirled in my tear-filled eyes. No one must ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key." The girls who listened to the story were affected, but Jenny was devastated. Like Margarey Kempe, Jenny was a religiously devout. Along with her family she memorized the Koran, prayed five times a day, and had even visited Mecca. ...but she was constantly aware of her shortcomings. Jenny had begun to have vivid nightmares of hell. When she read the story of the dream she was wiped out. She thought, I can't try any harder and I know I am not good enough.²

I thought of that as I studied this text. The Jews who were tempted to go back to Judaism were going back to a system that could not save, no matter how hard they tried. The Muslims who are so devout that they will dress so inconveniently and live so bound are no different. But, this text is not just for Jews and Muslims. It is for any person who is wondering if they can ever be good enough. The answer is no. But there is someone who has been good for you and he saves to the guttermost.

² I have adopted this from Josh's book "Dug Down Deep, chapter 6.