

"Who would name thier baby 'Melchizedek'?"

4/21/96

Hebrews 7:1-8:1

(Jesus, the High Priest, who meets our deepest needs)

Have you ever done something for which you were truly guilty?

Not only did you feel guilty but in fact you were?

Have you ever felt the guilt that King David felt when he wrote, "I know my transgression and my sin is always before me - night and day, God your hand was heavy upon me..."?

Last Sunday morning, I made reference to Susan Smith of South Carolina who drowned her two young sons by strapping them into car-seats and then driving her car into a lake.

Assume for a minute that Susan Smith has not totally lost touch with reality - how does she deal with the guilt?

What does a father do when in a burst of anger he slaps out as his young daughter and she falls against the corner of a table permanently disabling her?

How does he handle the guilt?

How does someone live each day with the knowledge that they broke a marriage vow? That they abandoned their spouse and children they swore they'd never leave?

What does someone do when they have violated the trust of their parents, their God and their future spouse by engaging in premarital sex?

What does a person do when they have failed to be the father or mother they knew they should have been and now their children are living as selfishly and as destructively as they did?

In the situations I've just described I am talking about REAL guilt.

I'm not discussing "false guilt" - feelings of responsibility some people have when in fact they had no responsibility.

No, I'm talking about when you do bear responsibility - maybe full responsibility - you did or did not do something that resulted in great harm (physical or emotional) to another person. You are Guilty! HOW DO YOU LIVE WITH THAT?

On Easter Sunday morning I spoke of two issues every person expects their religion to address:

Almost all, if not all, religions attempt to respond to these two issues:
the problem of a broken relationship with God

if there is a God and I have sinned against him, how do I deal with that AND SECONDLY

the problem of death - what happens to me or to my loved ones when we die.

Today, I am pointing out there is another issue that every person expects their religion to address:

That is the issue of guilt.

Most, if not all, religions try to deal with guilt by having people somehow atone for their sins - do something to make up for what they did wrong.

Some religions have penance or some form of it - whereby the guilty person "makes up for" their sin in some way.

Many religions will have other forms of "paying" for the sin - thus again, absolving the offender of guilt.

But do those actions actually make the offender "not guilty" or even "less guilty"?

Can people actually believe that their sin, their harmful actions against God or others are dealt with by these superficial means?

Or do they go only living with a measure of guilt and just hoping that God and others will somehow not hold them as accountable as they feel?

The Jewish religion, at least the Jewish religion of New Testament times -

around the time of Jesus and the Apostles, was a religion, like other religions, that attempted to deal with the issue of guilt.

In that Jewish religion, guilt was dealt with in a sacrificial system headed by the priests.

The priests regularly sacrificed animals to atone for the sin of the people.

And specifically, each year, the high priest, would sacrifice a bull to pay for the sins of the people.

The author of the Book of Hebrews has repeatedly made reference to Jesus as a "high priest".

Look at Hebrews 4:14. Here Jesus is called a "high priest"

A month ago, from this Hebrews 4 & 5 passage, I preached a sermon on "Protestants in need of a Priest".

As we saw then, every human being desperately needs a priest to stand between them, as sinful people and a holy, just God.

We are incapable of removing the sin that separates us from God and so we need a savior priest who will remove that sin and give us peace with God - so that God will look on us with favor rather than anger.

Even while the author was talking about Jesus as a high priest he introduced us to someone named "Melchizedek" - look at 5:6 READ

Look at 5:10 Still speaking of Jesus, the author referred to him as "designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek".

Who is this "Melchizedek" and what is his significance?

Before we get our answer, the author digresses with a warning which begins in 5:11 and carries through chapter 6.

That warning I spoke to in a two-part sermon entitled "Babies, Counterfeits and Doubters"

But look at 6:20.

Here the author returns to that man named "Melchizedek".

And again he likens that Melchizedek to Jesus.

And so in Chapter 7:1 we see the author finally develop his point about Melchizedek - "THIS Melchizedek, (the one I've already mentioned three times) was..." - and he goes on to describe him.

I started out this morning talking about what every person wants his or her religion to do for them:

We want our religion to deal with our guilt.

We know about guilt and we long to be free of it.

What have Jesus as a high priest and this man named "Melchizedek" to do with the issue of guilt?

In this book of Hebrews, God, through a human author, is writing to Jewish people about their particular religion - but it is applicable to people of any religion or people who claim to have no religion.

Look at 7:11. God says, "If perfection - that is, completeness, what you really need and want from your religion- could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood...why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek not in the order of Aaron?"

Even if you don't understand everything about this verse yet, you get the gist of it at first reading - God is saying, "There is something wrong with your religion - it won't do for you what you need."

Look at 7:18. Here God says, "the former regulation (that is the former sacrificial system) is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect)" - your religion isn't doing for you what you need.

You Jews may have the law and you may be doing all the right sacrifices but something has changed that makes all that obsolete - it isn't able to bring you to God and it isn't able to deal with your guilt.

Now obviously, his point is saying all this is not to "rag" on the Jewish system but to demonstrate that a new and infinitely better way has come - a

way that WILLI bring you to God, a way that WILL permanently deal with real guilt.

What God through this author is going to do in chapter 7 is demonstrate that JESUS is infinitely better than any religion to bring us to God and
In Jesus we find the way to deal with our real guilt.

To make his point, the author will first show how JESUS IS A VERY DIFFERENT HIGH PRIEST than all the high priests of the Jewish religion.

And to do that he will begin by showing how different and superior this Melchizedek was to the Jewish Priests.

Why does he talk about Melchizedek if Jesus is the most important issue here?

Look back at 6:20 and 5:6. What do you read?

"Jesus is a priest or high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek"

Where does that statement come from? Psalm 110.

The Psalmist, probably King David, wrote about a coming King - even though he might not have known it, he was writing prophetically.

He was writing about a king who would come.

And this king who would come, would be unique.

David and his sons and grandsons who were kings were not priests. Kings and Priests had distinctly different roles and the two were not to mix.

The Priests, in fact were from a different family line - from the family of Levi - while the kings were from Judah.

But the Psalmist said a king was coming who would also be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek - not Levi.

Zechariah, the Prophet, also predicted a Priest-King who would come.

And so by Jesus day, the Jews were waiting for a Messiah who would fulfill those two offices - King and Priest.

And what the author is doing is showing how Jesus is that Priest-King - the ONE who would deal with our needs in a way that no religion ever could.

Now to show that Jesus is the Priest-King fulfilling the O.T. prophecies and to show that this Priest-King is infinitely superior to the O.T. Priests and their religion, the author starts out with a reminder about Melchizedek.

In Verses 1-10 we are shown how Melchizedek is greater than Abraham and greater than the Levitical priests who came out of Abraham's family and greater than the religious system of the Levites.

To the Jews Abraham was the greatest.

And from Abraham came Isaac

and from Isaac came Jacob (later renamed Israel)

and from Jacob-Israel came 12 sons who became the beginnings of the 12 tribes or families or clans of Jacob-Israel.

Some of the names of those sons were Benjamin, Issachar, Dan, Judah, Joseph, and Levi.

The great, great, great, (I don't know how many "great"s) grandsons of Levi were Moses and Aaron of whom we read in Exodus when the Israelites (descendants of the 12 sons of Jacob-Israel) were in slavery in Egypt.

Through Moses, God gave instruction that Aaron, Moses' brother and also a descendant of Levi - that Aaron and his sons after him were to be the priests of the nation of Israel.

Hence it is Levi's descendants, and also Aaron's descendants who became the priests and so we refer to the "Levites" as the priests.

And we refer to the "Levitical" priests or even the Levitical system when talking about the sacrifices of the O.T.

"Levitical" - Levites - descendants of Levi.

To the Jews, Abraham was the greatest and his descendant Levi and his descendants the Levitical Priests were the only way to God - through the sacrificial system of the Temple.

But what is God's point in verses 1-10?

Melchizedek is greater than Abraham and greater than the Levitical priests.

How is that possible?

V 4 When Abraham came back from battle he gave a tenth to Melchizedek the King-Priest of the city of Salem.

Not only did Abraham give a tithe to Melchizedek but Melchizedek also in Vv 6-7 "blessed" Abraham.

And v 7 makes clear what everyone already knew- the greater blesses the lesser.

Not only that, but, V8, the Levites who collect tithes from the people die. But Melchizedek, of whom the Scripture is silent about his birth and death, is a type, a pre-figuring, of a priest who never dies.

Please don't misunderstand, The text doesn't say that Melchizedek didn't have a mother and didn't die but that the Genesis account of him is silent on the issue - thus making it easy to use him as a illustration of someone who is truly without beginning or end - namely the Messiah - Jesus.

And lastly in V9-10 because in one sense Levi and his children were still in Abraham when Abraham met and honored Melchizedek, it can be said that even the Levitical Priests honored Melchizedek.

In the sense that Abraham represented the entire family that would be born to him and his descendants.

And so the author has established his first point:

Melchizedek is greater even than Abraham and certainly greater than the Levitical Priests.

II. Now he comes to his second point in Vv 11-19:

We desperately needed a different kind of Priest and a different kind of

religion and Jesus is that Priest bringing not a religion but Himself.

We are back to verse 11 which we looked at earlier.

The argument is this: Why would King David and Zechariah the prophet describe a King to come who would be a Priest-King like Melchizedek if the Levitical Priests, the ones through Levi and Aaron, were all we needed?

The answer? They wouldn't have!

But they did and V12 says, where there is a change of priesthood there is a change of law - a change in the way people are brought to God.

In verses 13-14 we see that Jesus is that Priest and he descended, in one sense, not from Levi (like the Jewish Priests) but from Judah , another son of Jacob-Israel.

And verses 15-16, Jesus is like Melchizedek in that he serves as a Priest not because he is a descendant of Levi but because he lives forever - V17 "A priest forever in the order of Melchizedek".

Do you remember from V11 how he said the Levitical religious system was obviously flawed, otherwise we wouldn't have needed a new Priest?

Well in Verse 18 we are told WHY a new system is needed:

"The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless -for the law made nothing perfect."

In Romans 7 & 8 and Galatians 3 Paul says, in essence the same thing: The Law was not designed to bring people to God, it simply showed us how sinful we really are - it was a tutor, a schoolmaster showing us our need. It was powerless to make any change in a person.

The law could show you how guilty you were, but do nothing to actually

cancel or relieve the guilt.

BUT in Jesus, V19, a better hope is introduced by which we actually draw near to God.

III. Now at verse 20 the author begins his third and culminating point - We have a new and infinitely superior High Priest - in Jesus.

And in these verses we will see IN WHAT WAYS Jesus is superior to any religious system and WHAT THAT MEANS TO US.

A. First of all in verses 20-22 we are told that Jesus is superior to any religious system because he is the High Priest by God's appointment AND OATH!

To accommodate our tendency to lying and our suspicion of anyone else's promises - God says I not only tell you I appointed my Son to be your priest forever but I SWEAR TO YOU, I take an oath - Jesus is high Priest forever.

God never said the other priests would be forever BUT he did say, quoting from Psalm 110 again, that Jesus would be - and he swears to it.

And because Jesus is God's guaranteed High Priest forever, according to V22 he is the guarantee of a better covenant.

What this High Priest does lasts forever.

Trust in the religious systems of the world, even the sacrificial system of the Levites and they will fail you eventually.

But Jesus' priestly actions on your behalf will never fail - he is the guarantee.

B. Adding to that same concept, in verses 23-25 we find that Jesus is
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And since he lives forever and serves as our permanent high priest, He is able to completely save us who come to God through Him.

Those who trust in Jesus are at this very moment being saved by Jesus. Salvation is not just a point in time conversion but it is also a day by day "being saved" by Jesus himself.

The other priests are merely human beings, subject to the same limitations as the rest of us, but Jesus, human though he is, is also God who lives forever.

and V25 goes on to say that he always lives to intercede for us.

The picture is definitely of the Lord Jesus who as our Priest presents our case before the Father.

He is this day interceding on our behalf.

And it is important not to think of Jesus standing before the throne like some impoverished supplicant with his hands outstretched asking the Father for something for which he has no right to ask.

NO. Jesus sits enthroned as the Priest-King and his every request is consistent with the Father's desires and so the Father hears and responds.

Because of who he is, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him.

He will keep us, protect us, and bring us to the Father.

C. But not only is he infinitely superior to other religions by virtue of God's oath declaring him a priest forever, AND

by his permanence - whereby he doesn't die, BUT

he is also infinitely superior to all religions because of his CHARACTER his virtue.

Verses 26-27 spell out just some of the attributes of Jesus:

He is holy - he perfectly fulfilled the will of God, never missing the mark - always displaying the moral character of God.

He is blameless - in all his actions toward others he was perfectly innocent of any malice or wrong doing.

He is pure - he knew no sin having never sinned.

He was separate from sinners in that while he was fully human he was in a class by himself - he never sinned.

And what in Verse 27 does God say that means for us?

"Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices, day after day, for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself."

Chapters 9 and 10 are going to spell this out in more detail but for now the point is that when Jesus, the holy, blameless, pure, like us but unlike us, Son of God, the High Priest not only offered the sacrifice himself but he became the sacrifice himself - he took our sin and our guilt on himself - he met the demands of justice against our sin.

The other religious systems make us feel guilty for our sin because we are, but Jesus takes the guilt away.

The other religious systems pretend we can do something about our guilt - but we can't.

What can make up for a life taken?

What can make up for slander?

What can make up for a child abused?

What can make up for a God ignored?

What can make up for a vow not kept?

If we tried to pay for our sin we would spend eternity trying.

But not even eternal punishment could atone for our sin against God and others.

BUT when Jesus, the sinless Son of God died, not for his own sin, but ours - he satisfied justice.

He removed the guilt by being guilty in our place.

And since he has removed the real guilt I can be relieved of the feeling of guilt - I am forgiven by a Holy God.

Other religious systems lead people to try to pay for their sin by offerings.

Others would have you do penance - to somehow make up for what you've done.

Others would say you will have to spend months or years in a purgatory to suffer enough for your sins.

But God says bring your guilt to Jesus and receive his full forgiveness - not just a psychological forgiveness but a real forgiveness - your guilt is removed.

Your sin was paid for by Jesus - it is as if you never sinned.

By faith in Jesus, God declares you "not guilty".

Isn't that the kind of High Priest you want?

Look at 8:1 "The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven."

Is he your high priest?

Hymn 406 "My Hope is in the Lord"

Prayer Hall