

Sermon 36, A New Hope, Hebrews 7:13-19

Proposition: The priestly work of Christ ended the Levitical order and Mosaic law, bringing in a new priesthood and a better hope.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we saw last week the intimate connection between the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic law. We know, of course, that Moses was a Levite. And the Levitical system that was set up under his mediatorship depended entirely on the law that was given to him on Sinai. In the text before us this morning, the Hebrew writer describes the evidence showing that Jesus is a Melchizedekian priest and thus that the coming of Jesus abolished the Levitical priesthood. The writer then applies this abolition of the Levitical priesthood to the Mosaic law. Because the priesthood is gone, the Mosaic law in its ceremonial and civil aspects has to go as well. Jesus ended the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic law, for He is a perfect priest and His priesthood gives us a better hope of free access to the Father. The priestly work of Christ ended the Levitical order and Mosaic law, bringing in a new priesthood and a better hope.

I. Christ Ended the Levitical Order & Replaced it with the Order of Melchizedek, vv. 13-17

The first point the writer makes in our text this morning is that Christ ended the Levitical order. He has already been expounding the statement in Psalm 110 that Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. He continues to draw out the implications of this statement.

A. Levi, Not Judah, Was the Priestly Tribe, vv. 13-14

He reminds us that the tribe of Levi was the priestly tribe, and that Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, was a Levite. Thus, no Judahite has ever served at the altar — that is, performed priestly work. The most important part of the priest's work is sacrifice, which is to be done at the altar.

1. Uzziah got leprosy when he offered incense, v. 13 with 2 Chron. 26:16-23

There is a biblical record of a Judahite serving at the altar. Good king Uzziah attempted to offer incense. His desire to serve God and worship as a priest overwhelmed him, and he entered the temple and put incense in a censer. He was quickly driven out, but not before God had stricken him with leprosy. He was a leper until the day of his death.

In other words, Uzziah is the exception that proves the rule. He is the only Judahite to attempt service at the altar, and he was stricken with a deadly disease by God, lost his kingdom, and was hustled out by the priests as soon as they saw what he was doing. Judahites were simply not allowed to assume the priestly functions. Thus the statement that men from the tribe of Judah never served at the altar in the Levitical system.

2. Our Lord Is a Judahite, v. 14a

But Jesus, of course, is a member of the tribe of Judah, a direct descendant of King David. Our Lord was raised from Judah. The verb has Messianic overtones from its uses in Genesis and Numbers to describe the Messiah rising. Jesus “rose” out of Judah — that is, He was descended from Judah and He also rose from the dead.

3. Moses Did Not Allow Judahites to be Levitical Priests, v. 14b

Of course, as we saw in the previous verse, no one from Judah ever served as a priest. In fact, Moses never mentions anything about a Judahite being a priest because it can't happen. It is totally contrary to the law of Moses, which highlights over and over that Levi and only Levi is allowed to serve in the priestly office.

4. Psalm 110's Fulfillment Shows that a Judahite Is a Melchizedekian Priest

Yet, as v. 12 implies, the fulfillment of Ps. 110 in Jesus shows that a man from the tribe of Judah served as a priest — not as a Levitical priest, but as a Melchizedekian priest. The coming of Christ is the fulfillment of Ps. 110's promise, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

5. The Levitical and Melchizedekian Priesthoods Are Mutually Exclusive

Allow me to remind you that the author's point is, further, that the Levitical and Melchizedekian priesthoods are mutually exclusive. You can be one or the other but not both. Precisely by being

a priest in Melchizedek's order, Jesus is not a priest in Levi's order. The monks in later centuries who tried to say that Jesus was actually a Levite had missed the point.

B. Jesus Is a Priest in the Order of Melchizedek, not Levi, vv. 15-17

The author goes on to prove this by showing that Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

1. His Coming Has Clearly Abolished the Mosaic-Levitical System

It is clear that Jesus is from the tribe of Judah; it is even more clear that the Levitical order and Mosaic law have withered away and vanished since His coming. The most fervent partisan of Hebrew roots cannot say who the Levites are, identify the line of Aaron, or find the Ark of the Covenant and resume sacrificial worship before it. God has obliterated the Levitical system from the earth, and thus He has also abolished the ceremonial and civil aspects of the Mosaic law that morally obliged His people to worship Him through the Levitical system. All of this took place within the lifetime of one generation after the death of Jesus. He came as Messiah, and then He sent the Romans to destroy the temple and the Jewish state. Ever since, keeping the ceremonial aspects of the law has been impossible for the best-intentioned Jew.

2. He Is Like Melchizedek, v. 15

He says that Jesus is like Melchizedek, and he explains that this likeness is in two things — an indestructible life, and a permanent priesthood.

3. His Priesthood Flows from His Divine Life, v. 16

Jesus is not like Melchizedek through physical descent, but because of His indestructible divine life. That life was demonstrated in the resurrection, but it was present from the beginning, for it is the divine life of the Son of God — a life that cannot be damaged, lost, or permanently set aside. God is undying, and His Son's priesthood is founded on that deathlessness.

4. His Priesthood Is Forever, v. 17

Indeed, His priesthood is forever, just as His life is. His priesthood was not brought to an end by death, just as Genesis does not record Melchizedek's priesthood being brought to an end by death. He died, but He was soon alive again.

II. Christ Set Aside the Mosaic Law and Brought in a Better Hope, vv. 18-19

The news gets even better, though. Not only is Jesus a Melchizedekian priest; He set aside the Mosaic law, and brought in a better hope.

A. The Mosaic Law Was Incapable of Bringing Us to Heaven

As we saw last time, the Mosaic law was not capable of bringing us to Heaven. Perfection was not to be gained through that law.

1. It Was Comparatively Weak

For one thing, it was comparatively weak. Remember, the writer is speaking comparatively, even though he does not mention that at this point in his discourse.

Why do I say that he is speaking comparatively? Well, remember the whole point of Hebrews is to encourage the Hebrews not to go back to the old ways. That is, from beginning to end it is comparing the old ways and the new, the old covenant and the new covenant. Thus, when it speaks about them it's speaking comparatively, telling you how one is compared to the other.

The old covenant was, compared to the new, weak. Paul tells us in Romans that the Mosaic law was weakened by the wickedness of the flesh. People do bad things, and the Mosaic law has no provision for really bad things. We mentioned this last week but it's important to recognize it again. The Mosaic law contained provisions only for garden-variety sins. It was too weak to deal with the really big stuff. When David killed Uriah and committed adultery with his wife, he admitted that God did not want sacrifice. There was no sacrifice for such a sin.

But the death of Christ is strong enough to handle those sins. His death is the perfect sacrifice, satisfying God's wrath for all time. It is not weak, and the system of worship whereby we access and appropriate Christ's mediation is not weak. It is mighty to save.

2. It Was Comparatively Useless

So we understand that the Mosaic law was comparatively weak. But to call it "useless" seems pretty harsh. How could something set up by God and practiced for over 1500 years be completely useless? Ok, so the text doesn't say "completely useless." It just says "useless." Again, I would take this statement to the context to find the author's meaning. He told us in v. 12 that the Levitical priesthood could not give perfection. It was useless for that purpose. As we saw last week, perfection is defined as the fulfillment of all the promises, which is heaven. The Mosaic law was not useful for bringing about the fulfillment of all the promises. As I said last week, building the tabernacle and operating it perfectly, sacrificing umpteen bulls and rams, was not sufficient to bring anyone to heaven. It could not cleanse their sins or bring them into a right relationship with God. It was a way in which God communicated the grace of Christ to His people. But it was not a worthy sacrifice accepted before God that could actually cleanse sin.

So the law was not useless for every possible use; it was useless for dealing with sin permanently, in a way that would allow people to go to heaven.

3. It Did Not Perfect the Individual

Thus, it did not perfect the individual. The Levitical-Mosaic system was not the vehicle through which God fulfilled all of His promises. He did so through His Son — indeed, I would say, could only do so through His Son.

4. It Did Not Perfect the Church

The Levitical system did not perfect the church, in terms of bringing about the fulfillment of all the promises and bringing God's people to Heaven.

B. God Brought in His Firstborn, 1:6

Instead of the Mosaic-Levitical system, God brought in the firstborn — a callback to 1:6, where the writer said the Father brought His Firstborn into the world commanding all God's angels to worship Him.

C. The Firstborn Is a Better Hope than the Mosaic Law

And let's face it folks: The Firstborn is a better hope than the Mosaic law. The Firstborn is actually able to pay the price for our sins. The Firstborn is our great high priest. He's passed through the heavens. He's at the right hand of the Father. He is not weak, and He is definitely not useless. He is the best hope we could ever have. Remember, hope looks to the thing promised. And thus, to call Jesus a better hope is to say that we look to have Him as ours — as our

bridegroom, world without end. That's a way better hope than hoping that the local priest will be able to kill your unblemished lamb and bring you back into fellowship with God after your accidental sin. It's a way better hope than hoping that the blood of bulls and goats will take away sin.

D. Through Christ the Firstborn, We Can Approach God

You see, our hope is this: We hope to approach God. The worshippers were excluded from the tabernacle, excluded from the Holy Place and Holy of Holies in the temple. Only the priests could penetrate the door and go into the Holy Place to switch out the shewbread. Only the high priest could enter the actual presence of God, and He could do it only once each year. But now, we can enter the actual presence of God every time we gather with His people. We both have access, Jew and Gentile together, into the presence of God.

How does Jesus do it? Because in Himself, He unites God and man, in His own person. And thus, because He is man in the presence of God, we too can be men in the presence of God. The better hope has come — a better hope than anything Moses and Aaron had to offer.

So what should you do? Hope! Give all diligence to have the same full assurance of hope until the end. Hope in the firstborn. The Father brought Him in, and through Him, we can approach God. We will do so in perfection in Heaven, as we come into the Father's presence and never leave it again.

Hope for that day, through Jesus, our better hope. Coming to church doesn't save you. Offering sacrifices and giving generously doesn't save you. The priestly work of Christ saves you. He is our hope; in the great High Priest, the Firstborn, we trust. Amen.