

Hebrews 7:11-28      “The Power of an Indestructible Life”  
Leviticus 21  
Psalm 110

March 14, 2021

Our OT lesson comes from Leviticus 21

(I know that I said Numb 25 in the bulletin, but Lev 21 is more helpful).

Read Lev. 21

Notice how the high priest is separated from his brethren.

If his father dies, he cannot help prepare his body for burial.

He must be unblemished – a perfect specimen of humanity.

If you think about it, there was no chance that a priest would be sinless,  
so the focus had to be outward.

But the outward traits listed in verses 16-23  
all have spiritual parallels.

A blind man cannot see – and if you are blind to the light of God,  
then you cannot lead.

“a mutilated face” – literally a “flat nose” –

the nose discerns the difference between sweet and foul –  
and so refers to a man who lacks discernment.

It’s actually really interesting to compare this list of physical qualifications in Lev 21  
with Paul’s list of spiritual qualifications for elder and deacon!

But the point of Lev 21 is that we need a high priest who is a perfect specimen of humanity.

And since the earthly high priests could not achieve this morally,  
they were at least supposed to approximate it physically!

This is why Psalm 110 is so important.

Because Psalm 110 teaches us that we need a priest who is better!

We need a priest who lives forever!

And for that – we need a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Sing Psalm 110

Read Hebrews 7

We have a problem.

We keep dying.

Ten more people just died since I said that.

120 people die every minute.

Death is relentless!

This is why we need a priest who lives forever –  
and also why we need a sacrifice that deals with sin and death once for all!

And as we saw last week,  
this is why we need a high priest after the order of Melchizedek!

In 7:1-10 we saw how Melchizedek is set forth as an example of a non-levitical priesthood that is greater than the Levitical priesthood.

Having established that Melchizedek's order is greater than Aaron's order,  
and having established that Melchizedek's order is—by definition—an order of one,  
Hebrews now will show how Jesus' priesthood is similar to the Levitical,  
but superior.

The comparison consists of two sections:

- 1) the imperfection of the Levitical priesthood (11-19)
- 2) the oath that inaugurates Christ's priesthood (20-28)

Note that verses 11-19 open and close with the reference to the lack of perfection in the levitical priesthood,  
and that verses 20-28 open and close with the reference to the oath establishing Jesus's priesthood.

Hebrews frequently uses this device (called an inclusio) to structure his narrative.  
(We saw it last week in verses 1-10 with respect to the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek)

## **1. The Imperfection of the Levitical Priesthood (7:11-19)** **A Change in Priesthood Means a Change in Law**

Last time we heard the story of Genesis 14,  
where Melchizedek brought bread and wine –  
and he blessed Abraham –  
and Abraham gave him a tithe of the spoils.

At this point in Hebrews, we are dealing with the implicit question,  
why is the eternal covenant with David (regarding the Son) continued,  
when the eternal covenant with Phineas (regarding the priesthood) is abandoned?  
Why does Psalm 110 say that the Levitical priesthood would be replaced?

And the answer is simply that if Psalm 110 speaks of a new priesthood,  
then that means that the Levitical priesthood was defective:

*<sup>11</sup> Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?*

In other words, the fact that David spoke of the need for a priest after the order of Melchizedek

demonstrates the imperfection of the Levitical priesthood.  
Hebrews hasn't told us what that imperfection is yet.  
Rather, he is showing that the Old Testament itself declared that Aaron's order would be replaced.  
And if Aaron's order must be replaced, then the law of the priesthood itself must be replaced.

*<sup>12</sup> For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.*

The OT law made it clear that the priesthood belonged solely to the family of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi.

If the OT law of the priesthood remains in effect,  
then there is no way that Jesus could serve as a priest.  
But our Lord, who arose from the tribe of Judah,  
plainly did do the work of a priest.

*<sup>13</sup> For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. <sup>14</sup> For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.*

*<sup>15</sup> This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, <sup>16</sup> who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. <sup>17</sup> For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."*

*<sup>18</sup> For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness <sup>19</sup> (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.*

How can this be?

Because God had said that the son of David would become "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

The Levitical priesthood was based upon  
"a legal requirement concerning bodily descent"  
(Literally, "the law of commandment of fleshly descent")

What is the problem with this law?

It lacks power.

The Levitical priesthood is weak and useless (v18).

That is strong language!

The priestly garments were designed to show the glory and beauty of the Aaronic priesthood.

The Levites were given an exalted place in the life of Israel.

Of them it is said that the LORD himself was their inheritance.

But Hebrews says that the commandment regarding the Levitical priesthood

is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness.

In the office here at the church we have some old copies of the building plans for this building.

There was a time when those plans were useful.

They served as the law by which this building would be made.

We loved those plans and the building committee labored over them with care.

Now they sit abandoned and gathering dust,

honored only for what they reveal about the process

by which this building came to be.

Now that the building has come,

the plans are weak and useless.

That is what the Levitical priesthood is like.

It showed the pattern of what our great High Priest would do,

but once he himself came, the pattern is set aside.

There was nothing intrinsically wrong with the old priesthood,

it was just that it was designed as a pattern or shadow.

You might think that because Christ is of the order of Melchizedek

he has an entirely different *sort* of priesthood.

But that is not the case.

The rest of Hebrews 8-10 is going to show how Jesus does everything that Aaron did—  
the difference is that Jesus does it once for all!

The order of Melchizedek does not refer to what the priest does,

but to who the priest *is*.

As we've already seen,

Jesus is "like Aaron" in that he is able to sympathize with our weakness.

But he is better than Aaron, because Jesus is without sin,

and therefore Jesus can do what Aaron could not do:

he can bring us near to God.

Aaron could draw near to the throne of grace on our behalf,

but he could not bring *us* there.

But now we have this "better hope" through which we draw near to God.

### **A Better Hope – Through Which We Draw Near to God**

Because Jesus has entered the holy place, not through the blood of bulls and goats,

on the basis of a legal code that required fleshly descent from a priest,

but through the power of an indestructible life.

Who has an indestructible life?

Only God himself.

It is only when one who is the very radiance of God's glory,  
and the very stamp of his substance,  
    God of God, light of light, very God of very God,  
    begotten, not made,  
    being of one substance with the Father,  
    by whom all things were made,  
it is only when He learns obedience through what he suffered,  
    and only when HE offers himself as the sacrifice for our sins,  
that, through him, we may finally now draw near to God.

He is the better hope – through which we draw near.  
Think about what Hebrews is saying about hope over the last two chapters:

“We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness  
to have the full assurance of hope until the end” (6:11)

“so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie,  
we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement  
to hold fast to the *hope* set before us” (6:18)

“We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul,  
a *hope* that enters into the inner place behind the curtain...” (6:19)

“(for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand,  
a better *hope* is introduced, through which we draw near to God” (7:19)

The hope of the OT was always “wait till next year!”  
Because the high priest had to do it all over again next year!

But we have a better hope.  
We have a high priest who has entered the heavenlies  
through the power of an indestructible life.

But there is also a second way in which Christ's priesthood is shown to be superior to Aaron  
His priesthood is rooted in God's oath.

## **2. The Oath of Jesus's Priesthood (7:20-28)**

**The Guarantor – the Surety – Who Saves to the Uttermost Those Who Draw Near**

<sup>20</sup> *And it was not without an oath.*

We've been seeing over the last couple weeks the importance of the oath.

A promise is good, but an oath is better.  
When you promise to do something, the penalty for non-performance  
is merely that you lose your credibility.

But when you swear an oath you open yourself up to more serious consequences.  
To lie under oath in a courtroom is to commit perjury.

When you swear an oath, you call down curses upon yourself  
if you do not do what you say.

Even so, God swore an oath that the son of David would be a priest forever—  
at whatever cost to himself.

This oath, in Psalm 110:4, is at the very heart of Hebrews argument about Jesus's priesthood.

*For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, <sup>21</sup> but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:*

*“The Lord has sworn  
and will not change his mind,  
‘You are a priest forever.’”*

<sup>22</sup> *This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.*

Because it is *this oath* that makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

What does this mean?

A guarantor (the old word was “surety”)  
is one who promises to pay another person's debts.  
This is stronger word than “mediator.”

A mediator is one who stands in between two parties and reconciles them.

Jesus is certainly the mediator of the covenant.

But he is more than a mediator.

He is a guarantor—he is the surety of a better covenant.

A mediator may just step in and help reconcile two parties, and then bow out.

A guarantor has staked his person and his character on fulfilling his word.

A mediator says,

“I will find some way of helping Joe work out his difficulties with his landlord”

A guarantor, or surety, says,

“If Joe is unable to pay his rent, I will certainly pay it for him.”

What does this mean for God?

His oath to David, swearing the eternal priesthood,  
makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

God's oath “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘you are a priest forever’”  
means that it must happen – at any cost to God himself.

What if David fails?  
What if David's heirs fail?

Then God himself must do it.

In other words, God obligated himself to deliver his people,  
because as the history of the house of David demonstrates,  
the only way that God's oath could be fulfilled was if God himself  
was born in the flesh.

The implications of this oath are spelled out more fully in verses 23-28—  
and in this we see the full power of Christ's indestructible life!

*<sup>23</sup> The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, <sup>24</sup> but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.*

First, the oath states that he will be a priest forever.

The Levitical priesthood was a perpetual priesthood,  
but they were many in number.

And the death of the Levitical priest demonstrated the ultimate futility of their order.

God gave to Phineas the covenant of a perpetual priesthood—  
a line of priests passed down from father to son,  
but God swore to Jesus that he would hold his priesthood permanently,  
because he has the power of an indestructible life.

*<sup>25</sup> Consequently (verse 25), he is able to save to the uttermost<sup>[b]</sup> those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*

As we've seen, Hebrews tends to think of salvation as both "already" and "not yet."

We are saved, but we still await our salvation.

Our salvation in Hebrews is identical to our inheritance in Christ—  
an inheritance in which we have already begun to participate,  
but for which we still long.

And Jesus saves "to the uttermost."

That is, both fully and finally.

This is not a partial salvation,  
nor is it a temporary salvation.

He saves to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him,  
since he always lives to make intercession for him.

This contrasts nicely with what he said in 6:4-6.

Those who draw near vs. those who fall away.

Those who fall away, and crucify the Son of God again to their own harm,  
are not saved to the uttermost.

But those who draw near through him are those whose only hope  
is that whether in life or in death,  
they belong to our faithful savior, Jesus Christ.  
Jesus is the sure and steadfast anchor of our souls.  
He does not save us part way, and then wait for us to come the rest of the way.  
He saves to the uttermost—both fully and finally—  
those who draw near to God through him.

### **The Unique High Priest: Holy, Innocent, Unstained, Separated, Exalted**

Why is Jesus such an effective high priest?

Remember that the high priest in the OT was separated out from among his brothers.  
He could never leave the temple area.  
He could never mourn the loss of his relatives.  
He had to remain ceremonially clean practically for his whole life.  
Jesus is such a great high priest, because he was even more separate than Aaron!

*<sup>26</sup> For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.*

Remember that in chapter 5, verse 2, we heard that the Levitical high priest  
“can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward,  
since he himself is beset with weakness.  
Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifices for his own sins...”

But Jesus is not like this!

Jesus is separated from sinners (the term “separated” is the one used to speak of divorce).

At first, that might lead you to wonder – how is this helpful?  
If Jesus is so “separated from sinners” –  
doesn’t that mean that he is far away from us?

But what did Jesus come to do?

He came to die for sinners.  
In order for him to die for sinners,  
he had to remain separate from sinners.

But think about what that meant for Jesus.

He mingled with tax collectors, prostitutes—even touching lepers!  
According to the law of Moses, Jesus was contaminated by uncleanness!  
He even touched dead people—something forbidden to the High Priest!

Because in the OT, the unclean contaminated the clean.

The impure contaminated the pure.  
The unholy contaminated the holy.

But in Jesus the world is turned upside down.

Jesus touches lepers, which should have rendered him unclean. (Mt 8)  
But instead, the lepers are instantly cleansed—  
and you'll notice that no one suggests that Jesus thereby became unclean.

It was too obvious that there was a “cleanness” about Jesus—  
a holiness that purified everything he touched.  
If the High Priest had touched a coffin or a grave, that would render him unfit for office!  
(Lev 21:10-15)  
But Luke 7:14 makes a point of saying that Jesus touched the bier of a dead man.  
There you have it!  
Jesus is unfit to be high priest, right!?  
But Jesus's touch brings life to the dead.

What does it mean that Jesus, as high priest, is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners,  
exalted above the heavens?  
You might think at first blush, that these words are designed to put Jesus at a distance from us.  
But that is not the point.  
It is only because we have such a high priest that we *can* draw to God.

This is what separates Jesus from the Levitical priesthood.  
The Law appoints weak men as high priests—  
sinners who need to offer sacrifices for themselves—  
but the word of the oath appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Again, he was morally perfect all along.  
He never sinned.  
But Jesus only became a *perfect high priest* when he offered up himself,  
bringing his own blood as the perfect sacrifice to remove our sins.

Verses 27-28 summarize beautifully the whole point of chapter 7.

*<sup>27</sup> He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. <sup>28</sup> For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.*

The Son is the High Priest.  
The law appointed weak men as high priests,  
but God's oath in Psalm 110:4 appoints a Son—  
the Son of David, who is revealed in his glory as the Son of God.

### 3. Drawing Near

In conclusion, I'd like for us to think about what it means then for us to *draw near*.

But in verse 19 we heard that

“a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near” (v19)

Then in verse 25:

“He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him.” (v25)

How do you draw near to God through Christ?

This is priestly language.

The priests draw near to God in the temple.

In Heb 10:22 we'll hear the concluding exhortation to draw near to God in confidence,  
because of our priestly consecration in baptism.

We have confidence to draw near to God,  
because we have been united to Christ.

In his sacrifice, he died in our place.

The death we deserved has been placed upon him.

And so we now draw near to God through his blood.

As PRIESTS.

Our great high priest is separated from sinners.

But in him, you draw near.

What does that mean?

If you are in Christ, then you are not a sinner!

Sure – we still sin.

*We* have not yet been made perfect!

But if your sins are forgiven, then you are not a sinner!

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,  
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If you come to Jesus in faith – he saves you to the uttermost.

He saves you fully and finally.

That means that your identity is no longer the old sinner that you used to be!

You now may draw near to God through him!

Many of you already know this.

Why am I saying it again?

Because you need to hear it again.

Some of you may have never really heard this before.

You need to hear it now.

Jesus – the eternal Son of God – came in our flesh  
in order that he might destroy the power of sin and death –  
in order that he might save to the uttermost – fully and finally –  
those who draw near to God through him –  
in other words,  
in order that you might no longer be a sinner!

Do you think that you are a failure?

Do your own thoughts scare you?

Do you feel as though you are so f\*ed up that if people really knew you,  
they would despise you?

This is why we need a high priest who is separated from sinners!  
Because we are all screwed up!  
We needed a pure and holy sacrifice!  
We needed someone who could take away our sin and our shame!

When Jesus touched the leper – he cleansed the unclean.

When the prostitute kissed his feet – his purity made her pure!

The holiness of Jesus entered our unholy, impure, unclean world –

The power of his indestructible life overcame death!

He always lives to make intercession for us!!

No matter how far you have fallen!

No matter how deep you have dug the pit!

He always lives to make intercession for you!

So come to Jesus.

He is able to save fully and finally all those who draw near to God through him.