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Sermon Notes

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Abraham Honors Melchizedek So We Can Worship Christ

Hebrews 7:4-10

I. Meditating on Melchizedek, Worshiping Christ

A. The Context

1. Hebrew Christians who were being tempted to forsake Christ and return to Old Covenant Judaism
2. At the center of Old Covenant Judaism: the Levitical Priesthood, with its animal sacrifices
3. One of the main points of the Book of Hebrews: to display the greatness of Christ compared to all other Old Covenant figures
4. Especially the greatness of Christ compared to Aaron as a High Priest
5. The purpose of Hebrews 7: to show that the Old Covenant has been superseded in Christ... it is OBSOLETE and the time has come to leave it behind forever
6. This concept is very difficult to accept... that everything is changing in their religion
7. So the author has been giving us the example of Melchizedek, a mysterious figure from the Old Testament... an ancient history
 - a. Melchizedek, mentioned in Genesis 14 after Abraham had defeated the kings and was returning from battle
 - b. Melchizedek mentioned again in Psalm 110:4

Psalm 110:4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

8. Basically Hebrews 7 is a careful exegesis of that one statement
 - a. Hebrews 7:1-3 The person and name of "Melchizedek" is discussed so he can be compared to Jesus

- b. Hebrews 7:4-10 the word “priest” is unfolded for us, especially in the greatness of his person compared with Levi
- c. Hebrews 7:11-12 the priestly order of Melchizedek is compared with that of the Levitical priesthood as a whole
- d. Hebrews 7:13-14 the author devotes two verses to the personal pronoun “you”... “You are a priest...”
- e. Hebrews 7:15-25 the author unfolds the significance of the word “forever”

"You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

B. Last Week: the mystery of Melchizedek’s person in 7:1-3

Hebrews 7:1-3 This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, ² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." ³ Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.

- 1. Melchizedek was conformed to the pattern of Christ in some amazing ways, and set forth centuries before Aaron was established as a High Priest by the Laws of Moses... Melchizedek was in the pattern of Christ:
 - a. First: as priest of God Most High
 - b. Second: as a Priest-King
 - c. Third: as “King of Righteousness”
 - d. Fourth: as “King of Peace”
 - e. Fifth: as the one who blessed Abraham
 - f. Sixth: as the one who received gifts and offerings from God’s people, represented by Abraham
 - g. Seventh: as a priest who did not owe his position to his genealogy
 - h. Eighth: as a priest whose ministry is not restricted to fifty years of age, but who continues as priest to the end of his days

C. Now: The Author Wants Us to Consider His Greatness

^{NASB} Hebrews 7:4 Now observe how great this man was

- 1. The Greek word means to “see”... to gaze carefully at something

2. Since we cannot physically see Melchizedek, the author clearly means for the readers to meditate deeply on Melchizedek
3. Again and again, the Author is calling on us to think deeply about our faith
 - a. The Christian message is BOTH milk and meat
 - b. But Melchizedek as a precursor of Christ is clearly MEAT
 - c. The author wants us to be constantly thinking, thinking, thinking about the deep things of the faith
 - d. Three times in Hebrews this kind of command is given

Hebrews 2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

4. The call here is to focus all of our attention on Melchizedek, specifically on his GREATNESS
 - a. Why? Is Melchizedek our Lord and Savior? No... but he is a picture of Christ from which we can learn many things
 - b. Especially, we can see the greatness of Jesus' priestly ministry on our behalf
 - c. Ultimately the author wants all his readers to focus on these spiritual ideas, on the promises of God, on the prophecies and types and shadows of Christ so that our faith and hope will be VERY STRONG, and we will continue to run this race of faith with endurance
5. So... this sermon will be a deep meditation on Melchizedek because God thinks it will benefit your faith!!

II. A Hierarchy of Greatness: Christ, Melchizedek, Abraham, Levi

A. Central Concept: The Greatness of Christ Displayed by Hierarchy

1. The issue of greatness is established right away
2. The issue of Melchizedek being GREATER THAN Abraham is in the middle of the passage

3. The ultimate destination: think how much greater it is to have Jesus, the Son of God as your high priest than some descendent of Levi!!!

Hebrews 7:24-26 because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. ²⁶ Such a high priest meets our need-- one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

B. Melchizedek Represents Christ

1. As we already saw, the Author is drawing a direct connection between Jesus and Melchizedek
2. Melchizedek is a type of Christ... an acted out prophecy 2000 before Jesus was born

C. Melchizedek Greater Than Abraham

Hebrews 7:7 And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater.

1. Abraham gave him a tithe of everything
2. Melchizedek blessed Abraham
3. Therefore, Melchizedek was greater than Abraham

D. The Greatness of Abraham

1. Abraham is called here the “patriarch”
2. He was a person of immense dignity and honor in Jewish history... the father of their nation
 - a. He was a great man, to whom the promises of God had come
 - b. Abraham believed those promises, and became the father of a multitude
 - c. Abraham had walked with God and was called “God’s friend”
3. The Jews boasted openly of their connection with Abraham, that he was their father and they openly called themselves his children; and they thought of themselves as saved and in a right relationship with God because of their ancestor Abraham

Matthew 3:9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

John 8:31-34 *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³ They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" ³⁴ ¶ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.*

John 8:39 *"Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did.*

4. This Abraham was in fact a great man; but Melchizedek was greater
5. Why? Because he was priest of God Most High, and King of Salem;
6. Abraham himself felt he was greater, because he gave him a tenth of everything AND Melchizedek blessed him

E. Abraham Greater Than Levi

1. As the Author to Hebrews continues to make his point about the greatness of Melchizedek, he goes on to talk about the connection between Abraham and Levi
2. Levi was Abraham's descendent... Abraham was clearly greater than Abraham
3. Levi was in the body of his ancestor and Abraham acted on his behalf as a father represents all his children (more on that in a moment)
4. In the mind of the Author to the Hebrews, there is no doubt that Abraham was greater than Levi... and Levi is the father of the Aaron's priestly class

F. Therefore... Christ is greater than all the Levitical (Aaronic) priests

G. Therefore... why in the world would anyone want to forsake Christ and go back to the Old Covenant Levitical system

III. The Tithe and the Blessing

A. The Tithe

Hebrews 7:4-6 *Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! ⁵ Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people-- that is, their brothers-- even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. ⁶ This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham*

1. The evidence of the greatness of Melchizedek is the fact that Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder he had won from his military victory

2. The Greek work means literally “a tenth off the top of the heap”
 - a. Abraham gave him the best of the best
 - b. The highest he had to offer he gave to this priest of God Most High
3. Many who believe the tithe is a permanent requirement for all God’s people point to this as a key passage, since it predates the Law of Moses and seems to be a timeless principle
 - a. More on tithing at the end of the sermon
 - b. Whatever you think about tithing, however, it is clear that the Author to the Hebrews considers this giving of the tithe to be strong evidence of the greatness of Melchizedek and that he was greater than Abraham
4. Ponder the significance of this moment
 - a. Abraham, the father of the people of God, is at the pinnacle of his power and influence in Palestine
 - b. At this key moment, a mysterious figure, Melchizedek, appears out of nowhere and Abraham gives him a religious offering because he is priest of God Most High
 - c. Abraham clearly thinks that by giving this offering to this priest, he is really giving it to God
 - d. As honored and powerful and chosen and blessed by God with the promises as Abraham was, he considered Melchizedek to be greater
5. The Levitical priests are required by law to collect the tithe from their brother Israelites

Hebrews 7:5 Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people-- that is, their brothers-- even though their brothers are descended from Abraham.

This law is clearly recorded for us in the Law of Moses, in Numbers 18:

Numbers 18:21 To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting,

6. But this man was under no such law... the Law of Moses requiring the tithe would not be written for another 500 years! AND he was clearly NOT descended from Levi... but yet he collected the tithe anyway

Hebrews 7:6 This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham

7. This exchange represents the giving of gifts and offerings to God through a new priest, one not under the law of Moses, one who does not trace His descent through Levi
8. Melchizedek represents a new order of priest in Israel... and Jesus is that Great High Priest... greater than Abraham

B. The Blessing

1. Not only did Abraham give Melchizedek a tithe, but Melchizedek gave Abraham a blessing
2. AND not just any blessing!! We say "Bless you" when someone sneezes... or older women say "Bless your heart!" etc. These are weak expressions of wishes
3. But in the Old Testament, some blessings are powerfully significant... and especially patriarchal blessings and priestly blessings
 - a. Patriarchal blessings:

i) Isaac blessing Jacob

Genesis 27:28-29 May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness-- an abundance of grain and new wine. ²⁹ May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed."

ii) Jacob blessing each of his sons prophetically

Genesis 49:28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him.

iii) Jacob blessing his grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim prophetically as well... crossing his hands and putting his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Manasseh's head and speaking these significant words:

Genesis 48:20 "In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'" So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

iv) These were prophetic and powerful words... not mere throw-aways

- b. So also the blessing that God instructed the priests to give over the people, and the promise of divine blessing is immediately attached to this priestly blessing

Numbers 6:23-27 "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ²⁴ ""The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. "" ²⁷ "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

4. So the Author to the Hebrews makes much of the blessing that Melchizedek gave to Abraham:

Genesis 14:19-20 he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. ²⁰ And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."

5. The Author says this clearly proves that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham

Hebrews 7:7 And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater.

6. This is in fact the whole point of this section of Hebrews 7! All of it has been to prove how great Melchizedek was... greater than Abraham!

7. Jesus Himself will later claim openly to be greater than Abraham

John 8:56-59 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷ "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" ⁵⁸ "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ⁵⁹ At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

8. The Author's point has been to show the superiority of Jesus' priestly ministry to that of the Levites
 - a. The Levites were required to collect the tithe, and they did so as men condemned to die... as dying men collecting from other dying men
 - b. But in this mystical figure of Melchizedek we have a man whose death is not in view... in the pages of the living word of God, Melchizedek never died... so he represents the deathless ministry of Jesus at the right hand of God

Hebrews 7:8 In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living.

- c. So the Author will later openly declare this as the essential superiority of Jesus' ministry for us... the high priests all died; but Jesus can never die again, but he lives forever to pray for us

Hebrews 7:23-25 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

IV. The “Presence “ of Levi, and the Principle of Representation

Hebrews 7:9-10 One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, ¹⁰ because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

A. Perhaps the Most Mystical AND the Most Significant Statement Here

1. Here the Author is claiming in some way that Levi was physically present in the body of his ancestor, Abraham
2. AND that through Abraham’s action, Levi was in fact paying the tithe to Melchizedek and acknowledging the superiority of Melchizedek to his own priestly ministry

B. The Key Connection Here: Federal Headship

1. This concept is foreign to us, especially in America
2. Intrinsic to the American dream is the idea that each person stands on his or her own merit, and is in no way bound to the fortunes and reputations of his/her father
3. This is what Thomas Jefferson had in mind when he wrote in the Declaration of Independence, “All men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...”
4. The British system from which they were rebelling was intrinsically an aristocracy in which your father’s station in life was the most determinative factor in the role you would play in society
5. American LOVE the idea of each person standing on his/her own merit and achievements
6. BUT here we have a profound and biblical principle: Abraham, the Father of the Jewish nation, was representing the whole Jewish nation and especially Levi in giving the tithe
 - a. Levi PAID THE TITHE through Abraham!
 - b. Levi in so doing was demonstrating the superiority of Melchizedek

7. This same principle—federal representation—lies at the heart of the two most significant moments in redemptive history

C. The First Adam: Represented All His Physical Children at the Tree

1. The Bible clearly reveals in Romans 5 that Adam represented the entire human race when he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden
2. In effect you were THERE in the Garden in the Body of your father Adam, and in him you ATE FROM THE FRUIT yourself
3. God sees you as guilty in Adam!!!

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned

4. And because of your sin in Adam, you were condemned to die along with every other member of the human race... all human beings stand under Adam's death penalty, because IN ADAM we all sinned
5. He was our federal head, our representative... just as Abraham was Levi's federal head and representative in front of Melchizedek

D. The Second Adam: Represented All His Spiritual Children at the Cross

1. In the same way Jesus Christ represented all His spiritual children at the cross
2. Jesus died in our place, and Jesus' righteousness was credited to us as His children
3. This parallel is laid out plainly in Romans 5 and in 1 Corinthians 15

Romans 5:18-19 Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

4. The powerful concept is summed up in Paul's awesome statement of unity with Jesus

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

5. Through spiritual UNION with Christ His death has become our death and His life has become our life
6. And this is especially delightful at Easter time as we consider how Jesus' resurrection guarantees our own... just as Levi was IN THE BODY OF HIS ANCESTOR and paid the tithe through him, so WE ARE SPIRITUALLY UNITED with Jesus and His resurrection is our own resurrection:

Ephesians 2:4-6 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus

V. Applications

A. Trust in Christ Alone... He is the Great High Priest We All Need

B. Make the Connection to Today

1. It is clear that we Gentiles who have come to trust in Christ have no similar temptation to go backwards to a clearly obsolete priestly system.
2. I have been a pastor for almost fourteen years and I have seen a lot of tragic spiritual backslidings and sinful wanderings... but I have never once heard of someone who turned his back on Jesus to go back to the Levitical priesthood
3. That time is clearly finished... and it has been since the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed
4. BUT that doesn't mean that Hebrews 7 has nothing to say to us
5. EVERY LAST ONE OF US is under constant pressure to drift away, turn away and fall away from Christ
 - a. For us, it is not so much into Judaism that we are tempted...
 - b. BUT the pull of sinful temptations and the constant assault on our souls by our own fleshly lusts and by Satan's attacks is overwhelming
 - c. We need a strong anchor that will keep our souls from drifting away from Jesus
 - d. Hebrews 6 tells us what that anchor for our souls is

Hebrews 6:18-20 we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

e. It is biblical HOPE alone that is the anchor for our souls... and that hope is completely tied to our faith in the promises of God

f. The stronger we know the High Priestly ministry of Jesus, the more confidence we will have in fighting sin and finishing our race

C. Worship

D.