

I. Introduction

I am grateful and honored to be preaching this morning as HCC's newest minister. Thank you for inviting and calling me to serve as your shepherd, a privilege I seek to carry out with the highest degree of care, faithfulness and humility. We continue our series on Hebrews, which sets forth the truth that "Jesus is better" and calls believers not to fall away but maintain their steady confidence in Christ.

It's a call to maintain hope amidst adversity. We throw the word "hope" around a lot. "I hope you get better soon!" "I hope you'll get that job offer." "I hope to see you around next time." But, that use of this word is more like "wish" or "desire." There is no guarantee that what you hope for will actually happen, though you wish it will.¹ The world rejects God and places its hope in technology, science, human progress and rationality. Not that any of those things are bad, but they almost always overpromise and underdeliver.

But, biblical hope delivers on what is promised! It is an assured confidence of receiving that which God has promised us. It is not wishful thinking but the rock-solid certainty that what God says about our present and future will occur. That is why with respect to our late brother Walter or any believer who has fallen asleep, we can say with 100% assurance that he is in heaven, rejoicing in the presence of his Maker.

But biblical hope is not just a confident expectation of a future result. It is also the very object of it. In fact, it finds its clearest expression in a person, our Lord Jesus Christ. And there's perhaps **no more vivid manifestation of Christ being our hope than as being our great high priest**. Because in really simple terms, the Bible can be summed up as the holiness of God, sin of man and the need for a mediator between God and man. This mediator is a priest.

Our greatest hope then is tied tightly to Jesus being our great high priest. Our faith can buckle under the stress of our ever-changing and divisive world, relentlessly bombarded by endless content and ideas (sometimes true but also sometimes fake or AI-generated). Our love can grow cynical or lukewarm because of the brokenness and disappointments we've experienced. How can we fortify faith and love so that they flourish and are fruitful? What can stir up wholehearted devotion and zeal for Christ? Hebrews 7 says it's **a complete confidence in Jesus being the better Melchizedek, our great high priest**.

Through today's text, the Holy Spirit encourages us in times of trouble to turn our eyes, not to ourselves, but to Christ. This morning, I'll show from the text that Jesus is our better hope in three ways. First, the great Melchizedek and his priesthood foreshadowed him. Second, he is from the superior priesthood of Melchizedek. Lastly, he was appointed by the Father to be *our* eternal high priest who unfailingly intercedes for us.

¹ Paul does use "hope" in this sense (cf Romans 15:24 and 1 Timothy 3:14).

II. **Main Point 1 (7:1-10): Jesus is our better hope because the great Melchizedek and his priesthood foreshadowed him**

The author begins his argument that Jesus is our better hope by presenting the greatness of Melchizedek. He starts off in verse 1: “For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him.” Now, whenever you see the word “for” at the beginning of a sentence, you should ask yourself, “What is the ‘for’ there for?” Because the thought in that sentence is based on something that came beforehand. Here, the “for” refers to 6:19-20, which sets forth Jesus as our hope, “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul,” because he is a “high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

Melchizedek is an enigmatic person and only mentioned in 4 verses outside of Hebrews. Yet, he is one of the most powerful types of Christ in all of Scripture (more on types in a bit). Four thousand years ago, he appears to Abraham, but just for the briefest of moments. A thousand years later, David invokes him in one verse in Psalm 110, an important messianic psalm that is the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New. A thousand years after that, the author of Hebrews here uses him to undergird his argument that Jesus Messiah is our better hope. To me, this remarkable development of Melchizedek is an example of how the Bible is God-breathed and a unified expression of his mind.

As I mentioned, Melchizedek is important as a type of priest-king, which finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. What is a “type”? *It is a biblical illustration consisting of a correspondence between real, historical events, persons or things to something greater that will take place later.* For example, the historical Exodus under Moses is a type of salvation, a demonstration of a higher, spiritual exodus under the greater redeemer and mediator, who is Christ. Melchizedek’s priesthood is a type or picture of Christ’s in four ways: as a royal priesthood, a universal priesthood, a righteousness and peace priesthood, and an eternal priesthood.

1. First, notice that he is called “king of Salem” but also “priest of the Most High God.” He is a priest-king, which points to the coming Messiah in whom the kingly and priestly lines are merged in one individual. So, Melchizedek’s priesthood is a royal one.
2. But it’s not just royal in character, it is universal in scope. He is a priest of the “Most High God,” which is a translation of the universal name of God, *El Elyon*. The Aaronic or Levitical priesthood was strictly Jewish, using God’s Jewish covenant name *Yahweh*. But, Melchizedek’s priesthood used God’s name that reaches everywhere and everything in heaven and on earth, both Jew and Gentile. His priesthood was not limited to a nation, but reflected the universal rule and character of God.
3. Melchizedek’s royal and universal priesthood also concerns righteousness and peace. His name (“melchi” and “zedek”), in verse 2, literally means “king of righteousness.” Since he reigned over Salem (which is Jerusalem), he was also “king of peace.” “Salem” is derived from the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means well-being in the fullest sense, especially wholeness of the relationship between a person and

God. Thus, Melchizedek symbolically represents the peace (shalom) that exists *after* sinful man is made righteous and thus reconciled to holy God.

And that is why he is king of righteousness first, then peace because righteousness comes before peace. In Romans we first learn how the righteousness of God has been maintained in the cross (chp 3) before we are told of peace with God (chp 5).²

4. Finally, the priesthood of Melchizedek is eternal. The author says in verse 3 that he “continues a priest forever.” Since Melchizedek comes and disappears from the pages of Scripture, his priesthood seems to have no end, which is unlike the timed priesthood of Levitical priests who could only serve from ages 25 to 50 (Numbers 8:24-25).

After introducing us to Melchizedek, the author then tells us in verse 4 to “see how great” this man was. He does this by recalling the events of Genesis 14:18-21, which is the biblical account of this ancient priest-king. That episode concerned a series of battles between two alliances of kings in which a smaller force of 4 kings defeats a team of 5 kings. Abraham’s nephew Lot is carried off as part of the spoils of war (14:12). Abraham comes to Lot’s rescue and recovers all the goods and people (14:13-16).

When he returns victorious, Melchizedek greets him. **His greatness is shown in how he accepts tithes from Abraham and blesses him.** Abraham was revered as the father of faith, *the* exemplary patriarch, a friend of God. Yet, in verse 4 he spontaneously gives Melchizedek “a tenth of the spoils,” which is a display of honor to Melchizedek. But not only that, this king of Salem blesses the patriarch, the one to whom God made the promises mentioned in Genesis 12:1-3 and Hebrews 6:14 to bless and multiply him. Think about it: Melchizedek blesses the one whom God promised to bless! This proves the surpassing greatness of Melchizedek, as the author says in verse 7: “It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.”

But if this Melchizedek, who surpasses the great Abraham, functions as a type of Christ, how much more does this elevate Christ! For in verse 3 it says he was made to resemble the Son of God, not the other way around. Melchizedek was a great man, but only because he was made to resemble and foreshadow someone far greater: Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Before we go on, let’s stop for a moment to consider the tremendous implications of these first ten verses. I want to center on this concept of greatness. Have you ever been inspired by a person whom you thought was great? I think of Dr. Warsaw, who was a great music teacher in high school and helped me overcome my fear of performing. I think of how great my mom has been in terms of raising someone difficult like me and often showing me kindness and grace when I deserved otherwise. I think of Shohei Ohtani who aside from

² So Melchizedek foreshadows Christ, the one in whom, Psalm 85:10 says, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. His priesthood also points to that of Christ’s, who fulfills the many Old Testament expectations that the Messiah would bring righteousness and peace (Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-9; 32:16-18; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 9:9-10).

perhaps being the greatest talent ever seen in baseball, when hit by a pitch from Padres closer Robert Suarez about a month ago, displayed great sportsmanship. Instead of charging the mound or yelling or showing any display of anger, he played the peacemaker and waved off his teammates who were ready to storm the field on his behalf.

Perhaps some of my examples resonate with you and I'm sure you could think of countless other individuals whom you would consider as great whether because of accomplishment, character, conduct, identity or love. These great individuals inspire and assure us. They show us a type of person worth emulating. They set a threshold that we can aspire to. They show us a better way. If this is the case with great human beings, how much more so with Jesus, the greatest human being who has ever lived, the God-man who loves us with an undying love!

Let me make a bold claim: *None of you can consistently and calmly cope with adversity or endure affliction unless the greatness of Christ fills your heart.* Do not harbor a small view of Christ. A small of Jesus leads to small worship and small comfort. But we worship a great Savior, which leads to all-encompassing comfort. Do you begin to see even in these opening verses of Hebrews 7 how great our Lord Jesus truly is? How much should this inspire, assure and anchor you in hope! For, this immeasurably great Jesus is for and with you always.

Great human beings can be role models, but they are not saviors. They can be mighty examples, but they cannot change hearts for eternity. Only Jesus, with his royal, universal and eternal priesthood, is our perfect Savior and the perfecter of our souls, who transforms and perfects our hearts forever. Only Jesus, the greater and better Melchizedek, can ground you in unassailable truth, sustain you with invincible love, and give you mercy and grace in your time of need (4:16). That, beloved, is true hope. It is a lasting hope. It is a better hope.

III. Main Point 2 (7:11-19): Jesus is our better hope because he is from the superior priesthood of Melchizedek

The author isn't finished with his comparison between Melchizedek and Jesus Christ. He continues with an even more powerful line of reasoning in verses 11 to 19. There he argues Jesus Christ is our better hope because he is in the order of the superior priesthood of Melchizedek.

His first step is to demonstrate how priests in the order of Aaron were inferior or insufficient. We already saw a little bit of this when I mentioned how the Levitical priesthood was limited to the nation of Israel, but Melchizedek's was universal. In verse 11, he poses a striking question: If the Levitical priesthood was sufficient, why then would there have been a need for another priest of a different order to arise later? The author's standard of sufficiency here is perfection, which seems impossibly high and unreasonable. But, what does he mean by perfection here? In Hebrews, perfection refers to "unimpeded access to

God and unbroken communion with him.”³ One would attain perfection when his sins are atoned for and is thus saved and able to be in the presence of God.

In verse 11, the author states how the people received the Levitical priesthood “under the law.” But note in verse 19, he also says “the law made nothing perfect.” Under the Mosaic law and Levitical priesthood, slain animals could not cleanse worshipers’ consciences nor transform their hearts. The law is weak and useless (v18) because it cannot bring us to God; it can only prepare us for the need of a Savior. The law cannot cleanse us from sin; it can only bring it out. If anything, the law which only allowed the high priest to enter the Most Holy Place once a year by himself, merely proved that access to God was severely restricted.

Contrast this to Jesus, who in 6:19-20, already went into the Most Holy Place, where God dwelt, behind the curtain and became the “new and living way” to God (10:25). So, the author’s logic here is very strong and persuasive: perfection – being totally saved and transformed such that you have access to God – is not attainable through the law, and by extension the Levitical priesthood, so we need a different kind of priest than one in the order of Aaron.

Further, Jesus is the promised Messiah who was to be a son of David from the tribe of Judah. Moses said nothing regarding priests with respect to Judah (v14). But Jesus is not a priest under the law of Moses. No, he is the other priest who “arises in the likeness of Melchizedek” (v15), who came before the law.

His becoming such a priest was not due to the weak and useless law focused on “bodily descent” (v16), that is physical lineage. To be a Levite priest, all that counted was pinpointing your genealogy back to Aaron. That was it. But Jesus’ qualification to be high priest was by the power of his “indestructible life,” demonstrated by his resurrection. Because of his resurrection, he is a “priest forever,” quoting Psalm 110:4. He “continues forever” (v24) and “always lives” (v25) to serve as a priest. He offered himself up “once for all” (v27) because by his resurrection he proved himself eternal and so belonged to the eternal priesthood of Melchizedek. Because of all this, Jesus introduces a “better hope” (v19) and there is no turning back to the law.

At least we know in theory there should be no turning back to the law. In principle, we know the law makes nothing perfect. Sure, we no longer sacrifice bulls and goats or follow cleansing rituals, but might we still subtly be acting as we’re under the Old Covenant? We try to justify our holiness or earn God’s love by measuring how often we go to church, how much we read our Bibles, how long we’ve served or how many people we’ve impacted for Christ. But, beloved, as I’ve said before from this pulpit, this **performance-based, results-oriented faith is toxic and denies that Jesus is embodied perfection and our all in all.**

The weight of performing is much too heavy for anyone to carry. Youth are often comparing and despairing on social media, and we might be doing the same thing with our “performance” at church. Comparing ourselves to that person or that family, or our small

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 80. See also Hebrews 5:9, 14: 6:1; 7:11, 19, 28; 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14: 11:40; 12:2, 23.

group with that small group, or our Bible knowledge versus another's knowledge...and where does all this comparing leave us? Arrogant, disappointed, insecure, angry and heartbroken. If we're not comparing, then perhaps we're despairing. We might be too sorrowful to even lift our faces to another believer, let alone the Lord of life, because we fear if we're fully known, we will not be fully loved.

Church family, flee from the toxic thinking of a performance-based faith and find refuge in Christ through whom we draw near to God (v19). To borrow the author's assurance in 6:9, though I may speak to you in this strong way, "yet in your case, beloved, [I] feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation." I, as your newest minister, feel this way because salvation belongs to the Lord, you belong to the Lord, and the Lord Jesus is better; he is your better hope, and no one can snatch you from his hands (John 10:28).

Deny results-oriented faith; instead, draw near to your Heavenly Father through child-like faith. Reject a metrics-centered ethic; instead, rest in the loving embrace of Christ your great high priest. Cease all striving to gain divine favor; instead, be led by the Spirit who empowers you to follow Jesus.

IV. Main Point 3 (7:20-28): Jesus is our better hope because he has been appointed by God to be our eternal high priest who continually intercedes for us

So far the author has made a compelling case that Jesus is our better hope because the great Melchizedek foreshadowed him, and he is a priest in the superior order of Melchizedek. In this final section, verses 20 to 28, the author seals his case by showing that this better hope is anchored by an oath.

The author highlights in verses 20-21 how unlike the Levitical order, which was dependent on the law, the Melchizedekan order is based on the swearing of God by himself to appoint Jesus as a priest forever: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'" This unchanging oath is the basis for why Jesus is a "guarantor of a better covenant" in verse 22. Next week Pastor Henry will go into more detail about the "better covenant," but I want to linger a little over the word "guarantor."

One of the last items I had to negotiate as a lawyer long ago (well, just last week) was regarding a parent guaranty. In the corporate world, if an entity commits to pay for something but the seller has concerns over its ability to actually pay, it may ask the buyer's parent company to provide a guaranty. This guaranty obligates the parent, which typically has deeper pockets, to cover any debts that its subsidiary (child company) fails to pay. To bring it closer to home, those of us who are parents know that we're on the hook if one of our kids breaks something in the store. [*Story of me breaking glass window with basketball when younger and parents paying to repair it*]

We also see this concept beautifully illustrated when Paul tells Philemon that if Onesimus wrongs him at all or owes him anything, "charge that to my account" (Phm 1:18). **The Spirit says Jesus is our ultimate parent guaranty.** Whenever you sin, you owe God an infinite debt because your affront is against an infinitely holy God; in corporate lingo, there is no cap on your damages because there is no limitation of liability for your breach of God's

law. But if Christ is your guarantor, your damages, your debt, your liability are all charged to Christ's account and paid for *fully* by his blood.

And more than just saving us from the *penalty* of sin (which is our justification), Jesus also secures our full salvation. He saves *to the uttermost* those who draw near to God through him. "To the uttermost" means from beginning to end, complete and absolute. Each hour of each day, Christ is praying in heaven for your sanctification, which is your continual salvation from the *power* of sin, until that day you enter heaven, when you are glorified and finally saved from the *presence* of sin. Christ, your eternal high priest, "always lives to make intercession for [you.]" (v25).

[Gospel call] And if any of you this morning have not drawn near to God through faith in Jesus, what is holding you back? I urge you to consider Jesus, the perfect high priest who lived a perfect life of righteousness but also offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to satisfy God's justice. For God's judgment will come for all who fail to have their sins paid for and forgiven by the blood of Christ.

Through his once-for-all sacrifice of himself on the cross and resurrection from the dead, you can *now* draw near to God. Not after you become a better person or do this or perform in that way...no, right now! You cannot earn salvation by your good works. You can be saved by faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you have doubts, hesitations or questions, please talk to someone about them today and take steps to pursue your Savior, who also pursues you, so that you can come to trust and know him like so many of us do here today.

At the end of this incredible chapter, the author exhorts us to cherish Jesus our great high priest, who is, as verse 26 describes, "holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens." In verse 28, Jesus, by his suffering and humble obedience unto death, "has been made perfect forever."

Imagine a close friend who thought he was worthless and a failure because he thought he couldn't do anything well, whether it was relationships, sports, learning, working, etc. He is depressed and angry and keeps having dark thoughts about his worthlessness. "What's the point of being on earth," he laments, "when I'm so unhappy and am not good at anything? I want to go heaven where it's beautiful and there's no more pain."

I'm sure upon hearing these words, your own heart would be pained for your friend and you'd want to care for him and try to offer him some measure of hope. You might say something like this: "Hey buddy, I love you, no matter what you can or can't do. Your identity is not in what you do, but in being a child of God, which means you belong to God who loves you. And, though heaven will certainly be beautiful and there will be no more tears there, do you know what's the best part? It's that we will finally see Jesus face to face and be with him forever without sin. And in his timing, you will go there; but until then, God is working out his good plans and purposes for you."

Beloved, these are words of true comfort because they reflect true hope. It is the hope anchored in the reality that perfection has been attained through the high priestly work of

Jesus, who is the better Melchizedek. This means unimpeded access to God both now spiritually as a child of God on earth, and in the future physically as a glorified saint in heaven. Jesus does not elicit mere wishful thinking; he secures a definite glorious result. He does not make promises that may or may not come to fruition, but is the very fulfillment of God's promises to his people. In short, he is our better hope in the flesh, made real and, as Hebrews 7 ends, "made perfect forever."

V. Conclusion

In closing, a couple weeks ago, I attended a memorial service for the daughter of a former coworker who tragically died in the horrific Central Texas floods. She was one of the Camp Mystic girls and basically the same age as Titus, my oldest son. Her life was sadly cut short and her service was a beautiful celebration of life. The officiant spoke about honoring this girl's life by carrying forward her generous spirit, amazing smile, and selfless love for others. She also said how when Jesus saw her in heaven he must have said, "You are perfect."

Now I think when it is our time to go to heaven, our Lord will welcome us with his nail-pierced hands and say, "Welcome home, my child." But when we see Jesus, I think more than what he says to us, our breath will be taken away as we are captivated by Christ, and we will catch ourselves saying, as I imagine this girl and our dear brother Walter, said: "Lord, *you* are perfect! *You* are my Savior and great high priest. Thank *you* for always having been my better hope."