

Hebrews 7:1-3 “Going Deeper into Christ”\*\*

Main Idea: The book of Hebrews enables us to go deeper in our knowledge of Christ. As we begin our study of the seventh chapter of Hebrews, we'll ponder three lessons.

I. Hebrews teaches us about the supremacy of Christ (1:1-5:10).

- A. He is greater than the angels (chs 1-2).
- B. He is greater than Moses (ch 3).
- C. He is greater than any human priest (chs 4-5).

II. Hebrews teaches us that we have a lot more to learn about Christ, but may not be ready (5:11-6:20).

- A. The readers were guilty of lazy hearing (5:11).
- B. The readers were stuck on the ABCs of God's Word (5:12-14).
- C. The readers needed to get involved in the process of spiritual maturity (6:1).

III. Hebrews teaches us that we can learn about Christ from Melchizedek (7:1-3).

- A. Melchizedek was a great king and priest (1a).
- B. Melchizedek gave a blessing to Abraham (1b).
  - 1. His actions revealed his authority.
  - 2. His actions revealed his recognition of God's redemptive plan.
- C. Melchizedek received a tenth from Abraham (2).
  - 1. Words can be cheap.
  - 2. Giving is a way to show respect and appreciation.
- D. Melchizedek makes us think about the Son of God (3).
  - 1. You can't explain him fully.
  - 2. You can approach God through Him.
  - 3. You must accept him by faith.

Take Inventory: How well do you know Christ?

- 1. Do you know Him as your Savior?
- 2. Do you know Him as the supreme one in your life?
- 3. Are you taking steps to know Him better?

I was a twenty-one year old senior in college when it grabbed my attention. Oh, I had seen it before, I suppose, but this time it really stood out. I had been given the privilege to preach my first series of messages, a month long series from the book of Jonah, and to do so in my home church. I'd been introduced to Christ in that church as an eleven year old boy, disciplined there by those who taught me the Word from this same pulpit, behind Sunday School lecterns, in youth group meetings, and by the examples of their lives. It was quite intimidating to walk the steps to the platform, proceed to the sacred desk, and prepare to speak to the on looking congregation.

And then I saw it. There was a statement engraved in the wood of the large pulpit, visible not to the congregation but only to the preacher. It was placed there to remind every person who would ever attempt to address the assembly of his God-given task. The plaque, borrowing a verse from John's gospel, simply stated, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

There is nothing that people need more than a clear view of Jesus, and that's not an exaggeration. Jesus Himself said that knowing Him is eternal life (John 17:3). It's a privilege to know Him—that's why God sent Him into the world. It's a privilege to grow in our knowledge of Him—that's why God gave us His Word, for the Scriptures testify *of Him*, as Jesus said (John 5:39).

Let me ask you a question. How well do you know Him? Yes, we use His name regularly. We cite it in our prayers. We sing it in our songs. We give lip-service to it in our creeds. But how well do we really know Jesus?

I want to go *deeper*, don't you? There's a shallowness that prevails in American Christianity these days. We have access to more Christian books and literature than ever before, more Christian teaching via podcasts, radio and television, more Christian music, more Christian "talk" with blogging and chatrooms, more, more, more. And none of this is a problem per se, but it tends to mask over what is a very fundamental problem. I can't think of a better word to sum up the situation than *shallowness*. Many folks sitting in churches this morning will sing to a Jesus they barely know.

That's why I'm thrilled about the journey we are resuming today, for today, after a summer break, we are returning to our study of the book of Hebrews. If there's anything that Hebrews enables, even forces us to do, it's to *go deeper into Christ*. Who is Jesus Christ, and why did He give His life on a cross for us, and why should we live our lives for Him no matter what the cost? Hebrews tells us why, and there's nothing surfacy in the answer it gives!

The stakes are high, beloved. The book of Hebrews was written to encourage some predominantly Jewish followers of Jesus who were pondering throwing in the towel. They were being persecuted by family members and others, and they were starting to waver. Is it worth it to follow Jesus?

Quite frankly, many today believe in a "Jesus" who is *not* worth following, and certainly not worthy dying for. They believe in a gutted Jesus. They can recite a few, maybe even a lot of facts about Jesus—"Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus died for my sins. Jesus is coming again." But there's a hollowness to those statements of faith, true as they are. We are not saved merely by believing in propositional statements. We're saved by believing in the *person* of whom those propositional statements are true.

*Sir, we would see Jesus.* I hope that's your desire today. It's mine, and the book of Hebrews can help us, for this book is well suited to take us deeper in our knowledge of Christ. As we begin our study of the seventh chapter of Hebrews, we're going to ponder three lessons. The first two take us back to what we've already seen, the third breaks new ground.

## I. Hebrews teaches us about the supremacy of Christ (1:1-5:10).

That's the theme of the entire letter, the sufficiency and supremacy of Christ. [\[1\]](#) Why should I follow Christ when the world around me puts pressure on me to tone it down? Because He is worth it! Indeed, there is none like Him.

The book begins by making this announcement in Hebrews 1:1-2, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”

We don’t know who penned this letter, but we know his intent. Based on five warning texts included throughout (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29), we know the writer is concerned that his readers are wavering. They came out of Judaism and were being pressured to return to their family traditions. But why go back? Christianity isn’t anti-Judaism, but the fulfillment of all that the Hebrew Scriptures foretold. Christ is supreme.

We’ve seen three comparisons thus far in our journey through Hebrews.

**A. Christ is greater than the angels (chs 1-2).** Most first century Jews considered angels to be exalted beings and revered them greatly. And they are powerful, but listen to what he said in 1:5, “For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’? Or again, ‘I will be his Father, and he will be my Son’?” And in Hebrews 1:13, “To which of the angels did God ever say, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’?”

God never said that to an angel. But He did to His Son! Yes, angels are magnificent creatures, but they don’t compare with the One who created them and everything else. Christ is greater than the angels.

**B. Christ is greater than Moses (ch 3).** This, too, was a huge issue for first century Jewish Christians. Through Moses God gave His people the Torah. “You’re being anti-Moses if you turn from Judaism to Jesus,” said the critics. Not so, says the writer of Hebrews.

Listen to Hebrews 3:1-6, “Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.”

Does Moses deserve honor? Certainly, but Jesus is worthy of *greater honor*. Moses was a servant in God’s house, but Jesus the Christ, God’s Son, is over God’s house.

**C. Christ is greater than any human priest (chs 4-5).** For fourteen centuries, since the day Moses came down from Mount Sinai, God’s people had approached God *through priests*. The Latin word for *priest* is *pontifex* which means “a bridge builder.” Barclay explains, “The priest was a man whose function was to build a bridge between men and God by means of the sacrificial system.” [\[2\]](#)

“That’s your problem,” said the Jewish critics to the early Christians. “You don’t have a priest, and consequently you don’t have a bridge to God like we do.” Not so, explains the writer of Hebrews...

2:17 “For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.”

4:14 “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.”

5:1 “Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”

5:4 “No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.”

So how then did Christ become a priest? We find the answer in the next two verses, 5:5-6, “So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, ‘You are my Son; today I have become

your Father [a quotation of Psalm 2:7].’ And he says in another place, ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek [a quotation of Psalm 110:4].’”

Don’t miss that last phrase, “In the order of Melchizedek.” We hear it again just four verses later at the end of verse 10, “And was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.” We do have a priest, says the writer, one like Melchizedek.

“Who’s Melchizedek?” you ask. The writer wants to tell us, but he can’t. In the very next verse, he makes an intriguing announcement. Notice 5:11, “We have much to say about this, but...” The writer wanted to say more about this subject of Christ’s priesthood, particularly pertaining to His priesthood being “in the order of Melchizedek.” But he couldn’t say it. Oh, he could say it, and he will as we’ll see in chapter seven, but he couldn’t say it yet because his readers couldn’t handle it. Which brings us to lesson two...

## II. Hebrews teaches us that we have a lot more to learn about Christ, but may not be ready (5:11-6:20).

To put it bluntly, some of us aren’t ready to go deeper. The thought bores us. We hear that there’s something to be learned from Melchizedek about Christ and we’re already tuning out, wondering what’s for lunch. We’re not ready to learn more.

What’s the problem? In order to help his readers, the writer confronts three issues head-on. First he says that...

**A. The readers were guilty of lazy hearing (5:11).** “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.”

The problem wasn’t that his subject matter was too difficult, although the subject of Christ’s priesthood certainly is mind-stretching. No, the problem is that *you are slow to learn*. Slow—the Greek word *nothros* means “careless, slothful, sluggish.” We see the same word in 6:12, there translated “lazy.”

And what was lazy? The NIV uses the words, “to learn,” but it’s actually the noun *akoe* which means “hearing.” The readers were guilty of “lazy hearing.”

What kind of a hearer are you? What would your spouse say about the way you listen to him or her? More significantly, how do you listen to God’s Word when it’s taught? Do you come to church ready to learn and grow? If we want to go deeper we cannot afford to be lazy hearers.

**B. The readers were stuck on the ABCs of God’s Word (5:12-14).** Hebrews 5:12-14 “In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

He refers to the *elementary truths of God’s word*. The *milk*, he calls it. Milk is a good thing, but you can’t live on it, not for long. You need solid food if you want to grow and be strong. And who can handle solid food? It’s for the *mature*, he says. Which brings us to the third issue with which the writer confronted his readers...

**C. The readers needed to get involved in the process of spiritual maturity (6:1).** “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.” Think about that counsel carefully. He just told his readers they needed milk, that they needed someone to teach them the elementary truths all over again. What would you expect his next words to be? I would expect him to say, “Well, since you can’t handle solid food yet, I’ll give you some more milk.” But he doesn’t. Instead, he challenges them to “leave the elementary teachings about Christ and *go on to maturity*.” The implication is, you can do this. You don’t have to stay status quo, but you must get involved in the process of spiritual maturity.

And to help them he's going to take them right to the subject that, just moments ago, he said they couldn't handle. The subject? At the end of chapter six he mentions yet a third time that Christ is a "high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." And that brings us to new ground and our third lesson.

### III. Hebrews teaches us that we can learn about Christ from Melchizedek (7:1-3).

The writer takes the whole chapter to discuss implications from the life of Melchizedek. My aim now is merely to introduce the subject by looking at the first three verses. Again, our goal isn't merely to learn about mysterious Melchizedek, but to get to know Christ better through him. That's the reason he's mentioned here in the first place. So by the end of this message, and the end of the study of this chapter, I can assure you that we won't know all there is to know about Melchizedek, but we ought to know Christ better. The study of Melchizedek can help us go deeper into Christ.

We're given four insights into Melchizedek in verses 1-3.

**A. Melchizedek was a great king and priest (1a).** "This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High." That's a significant combination, *king* and *priest*. He was both. He was the king of Salem, a shortened name for Jerusalem (see Psalm 76:2). And he was priest of God Most High.

The reference to "God Most High" doesn't mean there are many gods and that Melchizedek was priest of the highest of them. The term simply means that God is the sovereign one over all His creation. It's worth noting that elsewhere the title is applied to Christ, as "the Son of the Most High God" (by the demons in Mark 5:7, and by Gabriel in Luke 1:32). King Melchizedek, then, served as a priest of the Most High God, the only true and living God, the Sovereign One.

**B. Melchizedek gave a blessing to Abraham (1b).** "He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him."

Melchizedek is mentioned in only three books of the Bible, here in Hebrews and previously in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110. In our text the writer refers to the events of Genesis 14 and mentions interaction that occurred with Abraham. He "blessed" Abraham when he returned from the defeat of the kings.

If we go back to Genesis 14 we can fill in some of the details, which no doubt the Jewish readers already knew. The meeting occurred in the valley of Shaven, known as the King's Valley (17). Abraham was there because he had just rescued his nephew Lot from being a hostage to a coalition of aggressive kings (11-12). He took his 318 trained men, attacked the enemy forces, set Lot free, and took home the spoils.

Upon arrival, a mysterious, previously unmentioned figure called "Melchizedek king of Salem" brought Abram bread and wine (18) and blessed him. The Genesis account records his words in Genesis 14:19-20, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."

His actions reveal two things to us...

1. *His actions revealed his authority.* The person who gives a blessing is greater than the person who receives it, a point the writer of Hebrews will make in verse 7. The actions of Melchizedek speak of his inherent authority as a king-priest.

2. *His actions revealed his recognition of God's redemptive plan.* The story of the Bible is the story of redemption. In the beginning man the creature rebelled against his Creator. But God chose to buy back (redeem) man from his bondage to sin. He did it by choosing one man, Abram, and entering into a covenantal relationship with that man, so that through him He might bring hope to the world. He gave Abraham a son, and through that son, two grandsons, and through Jacob He formed a nation, called Israel, so that through that nation He might ultimately send

Messiah Jesus into the world to redeem a people from their sins and for Himself.

“I will bless those who bless you,” God told Abram back in Genesis 12:2. And that’s what Melchizedek did. He *blessed* Abraham, thus affirming his recognition of the redemptive plan of the Most High God.

**C. Melchizedek received a tenth from Abraham (2).** “And Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.” The fact is...

1. *Words can be cheap.* “Thanks a lot!” How many times do we hear and say those words in a day’s time? Are the words meant? Sometimes more than others. The fact is, words can be cheap. However...

2. *Giving is a way to show respect and appreciation.* Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe, ten percent of the spoils he gained in the battle. That seems to indicate that tithing preceded the Law. And it surely demonstrated that Abraham respected and appreciated King Melchizedek.

How do you show King Jesus that you respect and appreciate Him? It’s through giving, right? You give Him the praise of your song. You give Him the tithe of your income. You give Him the obedience of your life. He gave to you, so in response you give to Him.

The writer gives us the meaning of Melchizedek’s name at the end of verse 2, “First, his name means ‘king of righteousness’; then also, ‘king of Salem’ means ‘king of peace.’” The order is significant. Righteousness must precede peace. That’s what Isaiah 32:17 reveals, “The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.” Romans 5:1 shows the same connection, “Therefore, since we have been justified [i.e. ‘declared righteous’] through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**D. Melchizedek makes us think about the Son of God (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.”

Is the writer saying that Melchizedek didn’t have a father or mother, and that he was never born and never died? If he didn’t have a father or mother, that would mean he wasn’t human, wouldn’t it?

I should point out that the Greek word translated “without father” (*apator*) was actually used on first century birth certificates if the father was unknown and therefore the child illegitimate. Amazing yet true, the writer of Hebrews used that word here.

Scholars have gone back and forth on the identity of this mysterious figure. Who was Melchizedek?

One theory introduced by the rabbis at the end of the first century (and later picked up by Luther) says that Melchizedek and Noah’s oldest son Shem were one and the same. Others have suggested that he wasn’t a man at all. Some of the Gnostics, for instance, identified Melchizedek as the Holy Spirit, linking Psalm 110:4 (which refers to “a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek”) with Romans 8:26ff which indicates that the Holy Spirit is the one who intercedes in behalf of saints. Others have suggested that Melchizedek was a Christophany, an appearance of Christ in human form prior to His incarnation. But as Gromacki explains, “It would be difficult to argue that He was a priest after the order of Himself.”<sup>[3]</sup> Centuries ago Epiphanius put his finger on the weak spot in this hypothesis, “If Melchizedek resembles the Son of God, he cannot at the same time be the same as the Son of God; for how can a servant be the same as his master?”<sup>[4]</sup>

What are we to make of Melchizedek? Keep in mind that Hebrews is addressed to a Jewish audience, and they knew their Hebrew Scriptures.

When we read the first book of the Bible, Genesis, the book that contains the Melchizedek story, one of the things that stands out is the importance of genealogies. We’re given the generations of Adam in chapter five, of the sons of Noah in chapter ten, of Shem in chapter eleven, and of Terah, Abraham’s father, also in chapter eleven. When we read about men like Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Esau, and so on, we’re not left in the dark. We’re told both who their ancestors were and their descendants.

But not this man. Melchizedek is one of, if not the only person in Genesis that worshipped the true and living God whose genealogy is *not* given in the biblical record. It's not in the text.

“Well, how could he be a priest then?” the Jewish mind would ask. William Barclay points out, “A Jew could not be a priest unless he could trace an unbroken descent from Aaron; but if he could trace such a descent nothing could stop him from being a priest. If a priest married and his bride-to-be was the daughter of a priest, she must produce her pedigree for five generations back. It is the odd and almost incredible fact that the whole Jewish priesthood was founded on genealogy. Personal qualities did not enter into it at all.” [\[5\]](#)

Remember the charge being leveled at the Jewish followers of Jesus. “You don't have a legitimate priest.” And the writer of Hebrews says, “Yes, we do. We have a priest who is like Melchizedek.”

William Barclay explains, “The Aaronic priesthood depended on genealogical descent; the priesthood of Melchizedek depended on personal qualifications alone. Melchizedek's priesthood was based on what *he was*, not on what *he had inherited*.” [\[6\]](#)

And that's true of our priest, the great high priest, Jesus the Son of God. Notice the comparison at the end of verse 3. Speaking of Melchizedek the writer says, “Like the Son of God [he doesn't say Melchizedek *was* the Son of God, but is *like* Him] he remains a priest forever.”

I see three similarities between the king-priest Melchizedek and *THE* king-priest Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

1. *You can't explain him fully.* He doesn't fit into our little box. He's bigger than our boxes. Indeed, He created the minds we use to develop our boxes! I hope you can live with mystery because you and I will never be able to explain Christ fully.

How could God become a man? Explain that. How could God forsake His own Son as He hung on a cross? Explain that. How could God's perfect Son take upon Himself the sins of undeserving sinners so that by His death those sinners could be washed clean and indeed become children of God? Explain that. The fact is, I can't explain those realities, nor a host of others, not because they are not true, but because you can't explain our Priest-King fully. However...

2. *You can approach God through Him.* That's what a priest is for, a bridge builder. And unlike Levitical priests who served only twenty years, from age thirty to fifty (Num. 4:3, 22, 33), the Son of God remains a priest forever. That means you can call upon the Living God right now. You can know Him on personal terms, and one day enter His presence and live with Him forever.

The writer of Hebrews will have plenty more to say to us about Melchizedek, as we'll see next time. But to help us bring things together today, I'll call upon Warren Wiersbe for a helpful summary, “Melchizedek was a man (see Heb. 7:4), so he had to have a mother and a father. But there is no *record* of his genealogy in the Old Testament... Melchizedek was not an angel, or some superhuman creature; nor was he an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ. He was a real man, a real king, and a real priest in a real city. But *as far as the record is concerned*, he was not born, nor did he die. In this way, he is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.” [\[7\]](#)

One more similarity. As with Melchizedek, much more so with Christ...

3. *You must accept him by faith.* I can't explain Melchizedek, but I believe he existed, a real person who blessed Abraham and received a tithe from him. Of far greater significance, however, is what we do with Jesus Christ. You must accept Him by faith. There is no other way to the Father.

Take Inventory: How well do you know Christ?

Ponder three important questions...

1. *Do you know Him as your Savior?*
2. *Do you know Him as the supreme one in your life?*
3. *Are you taking steps to know Him better?*

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**\*\***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] The letter takes about fifty minutes to read through, so it may originally have been a message delivered to encourage believers in a first century church's worship service.

[2] William Barclay, p. 66.

[3] Robert Gromacki, p. 122.

[4] Quote taken from Philip Hughes, p. 243.

[5] William Barclay, p. 74.

[6] William Barclay, p. 69.

[7] Warren Wiersbe, p. 300.

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