HE ALWAYS LIVES TO INTERCEDE FOR US

Hebrews 7:1–28

Key Verse: 7:25

“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”

Today’s question is: “Who are you relying on?” Children rely on their parents, a married person relies on his/her spouse, parents rely on their adult children, church members rely on their pastor. We might be doing it more than we know. The author of Hebrews has been showing us how Jesus is superior to angels (1:4–2:18), to Moses (3:1–6), to the Sabbath rest (3:7–4:11), and to the high priest (4:14–5:10; 6:20). Now in chapter 7 he shows how Jesus’ priestly order itself is superior to the old Levitical priesthood. Obviously it was hard to get Jewish Christians to let go of their traditions and focus on Jesus. Even Jesus once mentioned how people don’t like to let go of the old and embrace the new (Lk5:39). Of course new isn’t always better. But in the case of Jesus, he’s far superior to what God had given his people previously. Today’s passage has some of the author’s favorite words, such as “greater,” “better” and “perfect.” Why is Jesus so much better? Especially, why is he such a better priest? And why do we need him? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

In the last verses of the previous passage the author wrote, “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek” (6:19,20). Here the author is describing the Most Holy Place in the temple. It was hidden behind a curtain. Only the high priest could go in there to offer sacrifices for sin, and only once a year. It was only a copy of the true temple of God in heaven. The author is going to say more about Jesus entering this Most Holy Place (e.g. 9:3,7,8,12, 25; 10:19,20). But for now, he mainly wants us to know that Jesus is our high priest “forever.” In chapter 7 the word “forever” is repeated five times.

But who is “Melchizedek”? The author already mentioned him in 5:6. In that verse he quotes from Psalm 110, a famous messianic psalm pointing to Jesus. The most famous verse from Psalm 110 is verse 1: “The LORD says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” Jesus quoted this verse to his enemies trying to knock him down (Mt22:42–46; Mk12:35–37). Peter also used it to proclaim Jesus to those who’d crucified him (Ac2:34–36). Psalm 110:1 is referenced indirectly in other places in the New Testament (Eph1:20,21; 1Co15:25; 1Pe3:22). But the author of Hebrews focuses on Psalm 110:4: “The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.’” The author mentions Melchizedek again in 6:20. But in chapter 7 he goes into much more detail about him.

Read 1–2a. “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, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.” This is a reference to Genesis 14. Abraham got involved in that war to rescue his nephew Lot, who’d left him to live in Sodom and Gomorrah. Those cities had been captured during the war, and amazingly, Abraham, to rescue Lot, defeated those most powerful kings with only 318 trained men. At the end the king of Sodom wanted to make a deal with Abraham. But just before he could do so, this mysterious priest named Melchizedek appeared and blessed Abraham, reminding him that God was the one who’d given him victory. God was protecting Abraham from becoming proud. To show his gratitude to God, Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the material plunder he’d taken. His encounter with Melchizedek helped Abraham not to compromise with this king and his various worldly temptations. Abraham needed this spiritual help of a priest at this crucial time. Sometimes so do we.

Why is the author of Hebrews going into detail about this mysterious priest Melchizedek? Read 2b–3. “First, the name Melchizedek means ‘king of righteousness’; then also, ‘king of Salem’ means ‘king of peace.’ Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.” The main point here is that Melchizedek, who was both priest and king, resembles Jesus. Jesus is our true King of righteousness and King of peace. Jesus makes us right with God, and Jesus gives us peace with God. Just as Melchizedek seemed to be a mysterious, eternal figure, Jesus is our true priest forever.

In verses 4–12 the author emphasizes Melchizedek’s greatness. Why was Melchizedek so great? For two reasons: because Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder, and, because Melchizedek blessed Abraham. Both these things show that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham. These verses also show that the order of Melchizedek’s priesthood is greater than the Levitical priesthood. Why? Abraham was the great grandfather of Levi, from whom the Levitical priesthood came. But again, Abraham, the ultimate ancestor of that priesthood, was blessed by Melchizedek and gave him a tenth of everything, showing that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, and thus, greater than his great-grandson Levi. So Melchizedek’s priestly order is greater than the Levitical one.

The author goes on. Look at verses 13,14. He mentions Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, not Levi. Judah’s tribe, though not allowed to serve as priests at the altar, was known to be greater than Levi’s. Why? Because Judah was the tribe through which the Messiah was promised to come (Ge49:10).

Read verses 15–17. Here the author quotes a second time Psalm 110:4. Why? This time he wants to emphasize the power of Jesus’ “indestructible life.” Like Melchizedek, Jesus is a priest not because of a regulation about his ancestry but because God himself made him a priest “forever.” Jesus’ life became “indestructible” through his resurrection.

Look at verses 18,19. Here, “the former regulation” that was “set aside” is referring to the rule that only Levites could serve as priests. When God swore his oath to make the Messiah a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, he was setting aside that regulation. It also says the law could not make anything perfect and was “weak and useless.” The author is going to say more about that in later chapters too. But here he just says that in Jesus our great high priest we have a “better hope…by which we draw near to God.” Jesus our great high priest in the order of Melchizedek enables us to draw near to God.

Read verses 20–22. Here the author also emphasizes how God swore an oath about Melchizedek’s priesthood in Psalm 110:4. No oath was sworn about the Levitical priesthood. The point is that this oath from God makes Jesus’ priesthood “the guarantor of a better covenant.” The author will explain more about this “better covenant” later (8:6–12; 9:15–23). Read verses 23,24. Jesus, unlike all the other Levitical high priests before him, has a permanent priesthood because he “lives forever”—ultimately, he never dies—another reference to his resurrection.

The point is not just that Jesus’ priesthood is permanent. Read verse 25. The word “Therefore” tells us that this is the author’s conclusion of his argument. Jesus is so much better because “he is able to save completely those who come to God through him.” What does this mean? The old priests could only deflect God’s wrath away from his people’s sins temporarily, through their ritual duties. But Jesus alone is able to save us from our sins completely. Why? Because only Jesus made atonement for our sins when he died on the cross and shed his own blood for us (2:17b). Again, the author’s going to say much more about this later (9:12,14,15,24–26). But his main point here seems to be that through Jesus our great high priest we can come to God. Actually, we dare not approach the holy God due to our sins. But by faith in Jesus Hebrews proclaims the wonderful good news that we can come near to God (7:19,25; 10:1b,22; 11:6; 12:22,23). Are we hiding from God? Avoiding God? Or really coming to God by faith through Jesus?

Read verse 25 again. We find an even more amazing statement about Jesus here. Not only did he provide atonement for our sins so that we can come to God, but also, he always lives to intercede for us. Jesus our great high priest is in God’s presence right now, always praying for us. If we really think about it, this is mind-blowing. Jesus is always praying for me? We really appreciate it when people pray for us. When I first started studying the Bible, I was caught in the sins of pride, lust and immorality. I had no power to leave my sinful life. At that time my Bible teacher Mary Park was praying so earnestly for me, sometimes all night long. Because of her prayers God helped me. Of course she couldn’t keep up such an intense prayer struggle focused on me, 24/7, forever. But Jesus my Lord died and rose again for me and is always interceding for me. He knows all about me, even more than my wife, and he knows all my real problems, weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Romans 8:33,34 says, “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” Jesus justifies us. Jesus takes away all the condemnation we deserve. Jesus is at God’s right hand still interceding for us, yesterday, today and forever (13:8).

As we’ve seen, Jesus our great high priest was made like us, fully human in every way, subject to every temptation, so he’s able to empathize with all our weaknesses and be merciful and faithful to us (2:17,18; 4:15,16). Sometimes people’s prayers for us only reveal how little they understand us. But Jesus’ empathetic prayers move our hearts. His unfailing, intercessory prayers for us are what make him able to save us completely. We shouldn’t abuse his grace, but we should take great comfort in the fact that he’s always praying for me. It should give us great encouragement, no matter what we’ve done, what we’re struggling with, to come to God, just as we are, asking his mercy and help. 4:16 says, “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Read verse 26. All the other high priests were sinners, but Jesus is sinless. He’s fully human, but he’s holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. This Jesus truly meets our need. Read verses 27,28. Jesus sacrificed for sins once for all when he sacrificed himself. The author is going to mention this several times more (9:12,26; 10:2,10). Verses 27,28 give us more reasons to believe in Jesus, trust him and come to God through him.

Today we thought about the greatness of Jesus our great high priest—especially how he saves us completely and enables us to come to God through his unfailing intercessory prayers. May God help us really draw near to him through Jesus. May God give us confidence through Jesus our great high priest. May God also bless us to grow in his image as those who can really pray for others through our Lord Jesus until they can find God’s salvation in him.