

Perfect Saviour

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[0 : 00] Now I'd like to go back to Hebrews chapter 7. I meant to do something that I forgot to do, and it's too late now, but nonetheless I'm going to tell you anyway.

I meant to get you to read the passage with me as if you were a Jewish believer in the first century.

In other words, as if you were kind of the first recipient of this letter to the Hebrews. Because it was written to Jewish Christians, struggling Christians, Christians who were tempted, who maybe were let down with what they thought Jesus was, and were tempted to go back towards Judaism, towards the ritual of Judaism.

So I wanted you to read it as if you were kind of that. It's not an easy thing to do, okay? And it's too late, so it's a waste of time. But what I want you to do now is I want you to, because I wanted to then go on and say, but listen now to the sermon through God and through the Spirit of God as he works through his word.

Listen as a 21st century believer. Because the great thing about the Bible, because sometimes you might look at a passage like this and say, I really don't understand what's it got to do with me, or how can I make any sense of this?

[1 : 12] He's not on my spectrum, Melchizedek. I don't know what's all about. And we might think, well it's not that relevant, it's not that significant, it's not that important. But of course as we come to Scripture, we recognise that every part of Scripture, to a greater or lesser degree, is going to be speaking into our lives.

And so sometimes that requires a little bit of digging, it requires a little bit of work. Sometimes, or not sometimes, but all the time it requires that we are approaching God's word, recognising it as the living word of God and recognising that we need the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit of God to take that word and to apply it to our lives.

So what I'm going to try and do, and I'm not going to give you a history lesson, I'm not even going to give you an Old Testament biblical history lesson, but I'm going to try and apply this truth, as I see it, through the chapter to our own lives.

And dip into the historical setting, which is very important. There's an awful lot in this passage, there's too much for one sermon, but I hope it's a kind of taster towards what you can continue to learn and know as you study the chapter.

First thing I want to say, and these are relevant, significant points that I hope will apply to your life and to mine. There's nothing like the Bible, okay? There's nothing like the Bible, God's word.

[2 : 39] It's absolutely crucial, it's central to our understanding and to our revelation of God to us and to our ongoing Christian lives. And sometimes I think it's become stale for us.

I'm not going to do what I did with the children, now that you've put your hands up. But you know, if I was to say, right, hands up today for whom the Bible has become stale. If you're hugely honest, you would maybe be willing to flick a muscle towards that and put your hand up.

The word becomes stale, or alternatively, we think that we kind of know everything. Now I know we don't think, we know everything about the Bible, but we come to it in a sense and we think, well I know this, I've read this before, I understand it, he's just going to go over and repeat things that I know and I've heard before.

Maybe we feel like that sometimes with the Bible. And I think there's a degree in which the Hebrew people, the Christians, the Jewish Christians here, to whom the writer to the Hebrews was penning his letter, were a bit like that in the sense that they were God's covenant people, weren't they?

They had all the promises, they had all the privileges, they had the covenant, they were the children of Abraham. And they knew the Old Testament, they knew the Old Testament was pointing forward, they knew it spoke of the Messiah.

[4 : 05] They had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but somehow Jesus as he revealed himself and as he was working in their lives, maybe wasn't the kind of Messiah that they really wanted.

That's why they were tempted to give up, that's why they wanted to turn back to ritualism, because somehow they hadn't grasped the greatness of Jesus and the book is all about the greatness of Jesus.

They possibly should have known better. And maybe they were asking, is this Christ that we have given up everything to follow? Is he really the Messiah?

Or should we look for another? And should we go back and wait for another to come? Maybe they felt they knew the Bible and they hadn't more to learn.

Well here the Holy Spirit, or God, through the writer to the Hebrews, is opening up the Bible in a new way to them, to remind them, to make clear to them that Jesus is the greatest, that he is better than all their Old Testament fathers and heroes, and that they can still learn new things about Jesus that maybe they didn't know before, or hadn't thought of before in order to give them a deeper understanding.

[5 : 19] And the Holy Spirit, that's his work. See their Bible was just the Old Testament, wasn't the Old and New Testament that we have. And yet here, by his power and by his insight, he is opening up the Old Testament to them in a way they hadn't understood before.

In the same way that Jesus opened up the Old Testament to the disciples in the road to Emmaus, where he pointed, he made clear to them, he opened up Scripture so that what they couldn't see before, they now could see about Jesus and who he was, and how he was prophesied, and that everything pointed in the Old Testament towards him.

So here we have the Holy Spirit speaking to these people and saying to them, he thought about Melchizedek, he's another Old Testament character that points forward to Jesus, and reminds us that Jesus is purposed and planned in God's own sovereign will, and that he's a wonderful type or figure of the coming Jesus.

Genesis, I want you to look with me at it, the whole of the Old Testament teaching about Melchizedek, and that's very easy because it's only really two verses.

Genesis chapter 14 and verses 18 and 20. This is the only time that Melchizedek, apart from the Psalm which we sung, was written later by David and David understood the importance of Melchizedek, and apart from that, this is the only mention of him in Genesis chapter 14 and verse 18.

[7 : 04] Then Melchizedek, Abraham had been involved in defeating the king, different people, it was king of Sodom at that time, and then Melchizedek, king of Salem, possibly Jerusalem, brought out bread and wine.

Interesting, bread and wine. He was priest of God most high, and he blessed Abraham, saying, blessed be Abraham by God most high, creator of heaven and earth, and blessed be God most high, who delivered your enemies into your hand, then Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.

That's all we know about Melchizedek, that's all that's told to us about Melchizedek in the Old Testament. Tremendous, tremendous.

And yet, he's described here by the writer to the Hebrews as the one who was pointing forward to Jesus Christ, so that Christ's priesthood, that is the fact that he represents us before God, it didn't come from the Levitical order, which hadn't even started then.

Remember, Abraham wasn't even Abraham by this point, he was still Abraham, he wasn't the father of the nations, and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob hadn't been born, and the twelve tribes of Israel weren't there, and the Jewish nation hadn't begun.

[8 : 37] So we have this guy here, Melchizedek, who is probably not even a Jew, he doesn't even belong to the covenant people of God, and yet he's so significant that the whole kind of priestly role and the priestly right of Jesus to represent us comes from his line from Melchizedek.

And that reminds the people and reminds us of the plan of God and the uniqueness of Christ.

He's this king, he's like Christ, kind of Old Testament likeness to Christ, he's called, you know, we're told in these early verses, he's the king of righteousness.

That's what his name means, Melchizedek, king of righteousness. But he's also king of Salem, that is king of peace. And that's dovetailed in Isaiah chapter nine, where it speaks about the redeemer, the Savior being a king, one who was sovereign and a king of righteousness and a king of peace.

And the sweet little reference to him sharing bread and wine, surely pointing forward and giving some significance into the New Testament last supper and the body and the blood of Christ, which has such significance to New Testament believers and to those who trust in Jesus Christ.

[10 : 10] And so Hebrews here is making clear something very important. It's making clear that he is the primary teacher of Scripture and we need the Holy Spirit to understand Scripture.

And as we go to the Holy Spirit and as we go to God and ask Him to reveal Scripture to us, He will reveal more and more to us. Just as this people had this, I would imagine a new truth, or certainly one they hadn't considered before about Melchizedek.

It reminds us that Jesus is not just a local cultural saviour of a people, a Jewish people, but his lineage in both spiritual and natural ways includes Gentiles and includes God's planning long before even it was all narrowed into the covenant people of the Old Testament.

They were blind to that. What are we blind to as we open Scripture? Do we go to our Bible readings thinking, I've not got much new to learn, or I think I really know most of it and it's stale.

We don't go expecting to learn. We don't go expecting to be taught by God. We go expecting for the Holy Spirit to reveal not just truth about our own hearts and our own lives, but truth about the Word itself.

[11 : 46] It's magnificent. It's beautifully dovetailed. There's clear evidence of a divine hand and everything in the Bible, even in this.

God reminding the people, you are underestimating Jesus. I'm telling you, before your nation was even formed, Jesus was purposed and planned, and even before Melchizedek.

But Melchizedek is there to point forward. Who was he? Well, we don't know. The Holy Spirit loves to make clear the links and the truths that make Jesus more glorious, but he also, I think, loves a bit of mystery.

And that I also believe is an important part of our coming to Scripture. We come looking for God to make it clear, but we also recognize that within Scripture there is a great deal of mystery.

That's all there is about Melchizedek. That too, verses the bit in Psalms and this chapter here, which is pointing his life and the meaning of his life towards this Messiah who was to come.

[12 : 56] We don't know anything about his lineage. We don't know where he came from. We don't know where he went. We don't know where he died. We don't know where he was born. We don't know his mum and dad were. We don't know anything about his rule.

We don't know anything about him. Some people say, well, maybe he was an Old Testament incarnation of Jesus. Well, we don't know. It isn't told. We're told here that he's without father and mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days, at the end of life, like the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

What does that mean? Does that literally mean he had no mother and father? Or does it mean there's no record of that? There's nothing in the Bible that tells us where he comes from. We don't really know. It's a mystery to us.

But he's there. And he's there for a purpose. And he's there, planted there to remind us of the unity of Scripture.

Remind us of the pattern and the plan of God. And remind us of the significance of Jesus Christ, which I'm going just to say about, more about in several different ways.

[14 : 06] The Holy Spirit also likes a bit of mystery. And I do think there's always a danger for us to think we have the A to Z of God planned and clear.

And we know, you know, we've got our systematic theology. We have our confessions. We have our truths. And then we've got it sussed. And anyone who's outside of that then are suspect.

But there's much we don't know. There is much mystery that is not recorded for us, as in the life of this man here.

Mystery is sometimes significant and important. We don't like the thought of mystery, because it means we're not in control. We like to be in control.

We like to know everything that is about God. We like to think we've got God sussed out. Our heritage, our background, our knowledge. We know we've got God sussed out.

[15 : 04] Whereas there's always this reality that faith is about holding on to a God who has been revealed clearly and who tells us all we need to know for our salvation and for our day-to-day living.

But who doesn't tell us everything about himself and who wants us to recognize that there will be times we've fallen our knees in worship to him because of what we don't know.

The Jewish believers in the Hebrews who was written to didn't understand why they were suffering the way they were suffering. It didn't make sense to them. They thought they were God's people.

They thought they believed in the Messiah. They thought it would bring in a reign of peace. But there was struggle and persecution and opposition and illness and doubt and fear and difficulty.

They didn't understand. So they thought Jesus isn't what he's all cracked up to be. So they were wanting another way. They thought they knew better. And that's often how we come, I think, sometimes to God and to His word.

[16 : 06] Mystery is important. It reminds us of our need for humility, for trust and for faith. There is no divine Wikipedia that we can just turn to and get the immediate spiritual answer to our needs.

There is wrestling. There's fighting. There's depth. There's battle. There's struggle that we need to break our own selfish dependence and come to Him and trust in Him.

Not every mystery is revealed. Maybe not even into eternity. I don't know. But we are asked to trust. Because we are not God.

And that's the great battle, isn't it? We might not verbalize it as such, but the big problem from the very beginning is that we want to be God.

We want to be in control. We want to make the decisions. We want to be sovereign. And He says there's mystery. And the people needed to know there was mystery.

[17 : 17] And Melchizedek is a great example of mystery and of knowledge. So, nothing like the Bible. And then following on from that, the second thing is Christ should always be our hero.

Christ should always be our hero. Because that's what the writer and God is doing in Hebrews for the people who were tempted to make Jesus Christ not important, less important.

He is debunking their heroes. And we've looked at that. He started with Moses. And then he went on to talk about the angels. And now he's talking about Abraham. Abraham, Father Abraham.

Don't speak about Father Abraham. He is the father of the covenant. He is our great Old Testament hero. And here, what is the writer here saying?

What is God saying here? He's saying, listen, there's a guy that there's only two verses of written in the Bible. And Abraham recognized that Melchizedek was greater than him.

[18 : 18] Abraham gave him a tenth of his plunder, which was a recognition that Abraham was more significant in his worthy of this gift. That he was significant and important.

We have that written here. And you know, just think how great he was. Verse 4, even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of his plunder. Pre-figuring the law that was to come and the provision that was to be made for the Levitical priesthood.

Before it even happened. Abraham unwittingly, though Levi was still, as it were, in his body because it was a descendant of Abraham, he was recognizing this biblical instruction and was fulfilling it towards Melchizedek.

Recognizing the greatness of Melchizedek. And Melchizedek is only a figure who points towards the much greater Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the great one. So we have here, in the context of this people, in their time, with their problem, we have the writer, we have God through the writer, making clear the significance and the importance and the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus, particularly when it's tough.

[19 : 40] Particularly, again, when it's difficult. This is who Christ is. Christ is a redeemer. In verse 26, we are told that this is the High Priest.

Now, he's a priest. He represents us before God. He's a great bridge builder to us and God. He's the High Priest who meets our need. And he's the High Priest in verse 25, going back one who alone is able to save completely those who come to God through him.

He's the only way that we can draw near to God. That's how significant and important he is that he meets our need. And it's through him that we can draw near to God.

That's very important because Melchizedek can't do that. Abraham can't do that. Moses can't do that. Church can't do that. Ritchell can never do that.

Only Jesus Christ can do that. And the core message in many ways is recognizing that we move away from being our own problem solver, problem solvers to Jesus Christ being the one to whom we go to.

[21 : 02] When we are tempted to give up in the battles we face, who is it that you are using instead of Christ? Who is replacing him in your life? Who is it that you are looking for, for identity and acceptance and redemption and forgiveness and guidance?

And who will change your heart? This is the one. And in many ways, Hebrews is an encouragement to look beyond the micro focus that we often have in our lives to the big picture.

We are so engrossed in today and in my trouble today and in my problem this day, that we lose sight sometimes of the bigger picture that Jesus wants us to recognize where we are in Jesus.

If we are believers, we are at peace with God. We are redeemed. We are children of the Most High God. We have a great future in heaven. We have life to the full.

And I know that sometimes that is very difficult to understand, but the Bible is to raise us higher than the micro management that often we engage in in our lives and to see Him as worthy.

[22 : 15] The smaller Jesus is in your life, the less likely you are to worship Him and to rely on Him. If He is merely a theoretical saviour, then He has been shrunk down very small.

And Hebrews is all about making Jesus who He is in a particular context. So that is the second thing. The third thing, briefly, is that we take from this passage about Melchisedec, is that we can't...

I know you have heard this before. I am aware of that. But it is the truth in this passage and I cannot let it go. We can't work our way to heaven.

Verses 18 and 19 are speaking about the Old Testament, the law, saying how useless and how weak the law of God is in order to redeem us.

The former regulation of the law is set aside because it was weak and useless. I am glad the Bible says that. I am glad I can stand absolutely on that great truth that it is not me that says it, it is the Bible.

[23 : 32] For the law made nothing perfect and a better hope is introduced by which we draw near to God. And it was not without an oath. Others became priests without an oath, but He became a priest with an oath when God said to Him, Lord is sworn, not changes mind, you are a priest forever.

Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. So we have two, the Bible is split into two, Old Testament, New Testament, Old Covenant could be New Covenant, or Old Covenant, Renewed Covenant.

And what we are reminded of is that the people here were being tempted to go back to the old ways, to try and outwardly fulfill the law of God, the Ten Commandments, and to use the old rituals that went with that.

But the Old Testament covenant, the Old Testament law was only ever, as it were, a stopgap until Jesus came.

I was pointing forward to Jesus Christ. Now I am going to make a statement here, I have written it in the questions as well, and I won for discussion. Outward obedience has no eternal validity as a way of salvation.

[24 : 43] Outward obedience has no eternal validity as a way of salvation. We cannot please God and get to heaven by simply trying our best, or by fulfilling the law.

You all know that, it has been preached here ad nauseam for 150 years. But sometimes we live as if it is the case, we live outwardly, we just simply try unconsciously to do our best, and we think God will be happy about that.

We somehow agree that Jesus died for our sins, but then we live our lives legalistically, as if it is up to us to please God. God cannot be any more pleased with us in Jesus Christ because we are covered in His righteousness.

Rules and the regulations of God's word have no validity in making us right with God, or making us acceptable to God.

Jesus Christ has done all that for us. We are covered in His righteousness. We can't make God happy and save us that way.

[26 : 03] Otherwise the death of Christ is a waste of time. Are you kind of hoping that God will let you in because you've done your best, you've tried your hardest, you've gone to church, you've done all these things?

Is that the basis of your hope? It's futile, it's folly, because Jesus says, I've done it all for you. Your hope is by putting your trust in me.

That is taught in this chapter that Jesus is the only way for us to come to God. Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him.

It's His work. He's the one. That's why we need to rely on Him. What does the law do? Am I saying the law is a waste of time? Am I saying it doesn't matter how you live? Am I saying as Christians, we have no place?

Make an eye to God forbid, may it never be the case. That is not the truth. The law exposes us. The law doesn't draw us near.

[27 : 05] The law doesn't bring us closer to God. It exposes how far away we are. It exposes our hearts. It exposes our need, our guilt, our lust, our lostness, our spiritual deadness, our resentment to God, our need for rescue.

But when we've been touched by grace, the law becomes what we love, because we love the God of the law. And the law is love the Lord your God and love your neighbour as yourself.

And that becomes the focus and the basis of our life in Christ. Please never think that we are pleasing God by our obedience, as if somehow we can earn our way.

God has done everything to let us enter heaven through Jesus, and then somehow we have to walk that road in our own. No. Every day we need Jesus. Every day we need His grace.

It's only in His power that we can fulfill the law and be obedient. And it's only God that gives us the motive to love the law and to say, we can't love the law ourselves. The law becomes a heavy, horrible burden unless we are touched and continue to be touched by grace.

[28 : 17] The last thing, and I repeat myself here from my second point, which is Christ should always be our hero. The last thing is that God through Hebrews is telling us that Jesus Christ is much, much better.

I started that with the children. He's much better. That's what Hebrews is all about. The word better is used all through the book. Jesus is better. He's better than the old way.

He's better than the Old Testament. He's better than Moses. He's better than Abraham. He's better than Melchizedek. He is the only way. Now I want kind of practically to finish by asking the question in relation to that point, what is it that we're tempted to embrace in our day-to-day functional living?

What are we tempted to embrace is a better way than Christ. Because that's really where the rubber hits the road. You know, in your living, when you're dealing with your self-loathing or your fears or your marriage issues, your relationship issues, your loneliness, your confusion, your idolatry.

In responding to that, what better way are you choosing to live if Christ is not in it? Because Christ is here described as the one who is the power of an indestructible life.

[29 : 48] Verse 16, you know, He has become a priest. In other words, He's become the great bridge builder between us and God. Not on the basis of His ancestry, not like the Levitical priesthood in the Old Testament, but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life and because God made an oath that He is a priest forever.

That is, He's always going to intercede for us. He's always going to be a redeemer. And that makes Him much better. He's declared by God and the psalm and through these verses, as they explained, to be the perfect bridge builder between you and God, our Creator, our Judge.

He's the perfect bridge builder. He is the opposite of what the law is, which is weak and useless. He is strong and useful.

And He is the God, as we're told here in these last verses, the God of hope. Nothing's been prepared in verse 19, and a better hope is introduced by which we draw near to God.

It's not the kind of vague hope of saying, well, I hope that I'll get to heaven because I've tried my best. I was a minister in the church. I read the Bible and I hope that God will accept me.

[31 : 15] It's not that kind of wishful thinking hope, but it's the solid hope that's based on what He has previously done and you certain and sure hope based on His finished work.

So He has this great indestructible life and God has guaranteed to us that He is the great bridge builder. He's guaranteed, God's guaranteed it.

Are we going to question that? God has guaranteed it. God doesn't change His mind, we're told here, very significant and important. And he's verse 24 reminds us He's a permanent priesthood.

It's not part time. It's not now and again. It's permanent. It will always be there. Therefore, He can save completely because today, this morning, we all got up and we were all half asleep.

Jesus was interceding for us. That's His work. He's still doing that. He's doing it when we haven't got any interest or concern in Him. He's interceding for us and our hope is that He has started the work and He will finish it because no one can pluck us out of His hand.

[32 : 26] That's all kind of harping back to the previous chapter and what we looked at last week. He's that great high priest. Verse 26, these wonderful descriptions of who He is.

We don't have time to look at it. Blameless, pure, set apart, not tainted, not one of us, not just from the Levitical priesthood, but a unique priest who's made on oath by God His Father to be the bridge builder.

The perfect bridge builder. God's answer. Do we think we have a better answer than God? That is a hugely significant question in our lives because practically and functionally the way we live our lives where Jesus is so small we don't speak to Him, we don't pray to Him, we don't learn about Him.

We are saying, I've got a better way. I know better than God and I know better than Jesus. That's tremendously challenging. We all have big days in our lives.

We all have important days and these are great. You know, big, holy, well no, I don't mean holy, holy and being set apart different. We all have big days, important days in our lives and they're great.

[33 : 38] But for the Christian, and I don't mean this to sound in a negative way that the best days passed, but the biggest day of our life has been. That's when Jesus died on Calvary.

That for the Christian is the biggest day. It's not that he argues at the best days, the best days are still to come. But it's certainly this monumentally big day because Jesus on that day was crucified for your sins and for mine, for Christians.

That is important and that is significant and it's a big day. So I just conclude by encouraging you, I need to encourage myself to keep life in perspective.

Keep reminding ourselves who Jesus is, Christ. You know, you may come with bitterness and anger and frustration today about God and about Christ and what he's not doing in your life. That he's not working for us.

Remember that he is, that the truth is that there is mystery. That there's things we don't understand. That suffering is very much part of what we are and what God uses to sanctify us and bring us closer to himself.

[34 : 49] But it's not always, the answer's not always that the world around needs to be changed. Isn't that often the focus of our prayers? A real mess just now, I wish you'd change everything else around me and change everybody else around me.

It may be that he wants to change us so that we can be at peace without fixing the whole world. We want to fix everyone's world around us, don't we?

Your control freaks. And we want everything to be good and easy. And can I just say, if you're gambling today as an unbeliever and you're in the life of ease or of comfort or of maybe the pursuit of pleasure, that will work for a while.

It will work for a while to a greater or lesser degree. But the storms hit every one of us. It may be that life is a breeze for a long time, but for most of us sooner or later the storms hit and then the question is where's your foundation?

Where's your hope? The pleasure seeking, the life of comfort, the life of ease has all been something that's happened to you, will go. Where's your foundation?

[35 : 59] And will it be that you will recognise then that the life you've pursued leaves your heart empty and leaves you unforgiving and spiritually dead with the gravel of sin in your stomach.

It might have been sweet in your mouth. But what then, you know? When the storms hit what then? Where do you go? Jesus says, look, come to me all you that are weary and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

I will give you rest. Christ loves us. He's not the defeater of pleasure and of desire and even of comfort, even though we are battling and struggling in different ways, Christ loves you.

He loves you to take him into your heart and to let him transform you and save you and forgive you. That's the gospel message. That's what this city needs more than anything else.

That's what our friends need. That's what the people you're praying for need. That's what we need. We need to be kind of born in you every day to recognise in a fresh way, not that we are insecure or unsaved, but that we just need to understand it and focus on it again and again.

[37 : 20] That's why Hebrews will relentlessly push us back to Jesus and I'm not ashamed of that. And there's nothing, nowhere else we can go. Let's bow our heads briefly as we pray.

Lord God teaches us we pray to understand you more. Forgive us for when we make you so incredibly small that you're not even in our thinking.

Help us to be committed to you and to simply come to you and to know that the Holy Spirit gives wisdom to any who asks, that we can ask for grace and ask for faith and understanding, that it's not up to us on our own, that you don't leave us as orphans.

What a great message it is that our need is met through you and that you are the way, you're the great bridge builder, acknowledged and appointed by God, to be the only way back to heaven.

And may we be a church who love Jesus both theologically and functionally in our lives, that we serve Him and we worship Him and we adore Him and acknowledge Him.

[38 : 30] And bless us throughout this day we ask. And we thank you Lord that we have a guest, a friend with us tonight, shared truth with us, Rob Kraus. We pray for him and his wife who's here.

We thank you for the work that they are doing in Italy. They are planting churches there. And we pray that you would bless him among us, that we would learn from God through him as he humbly opens scripture to us.

We rejoice in these partnerships, these friendships that we have and they remind us of the universal nature of the God that we love and serve. We ask all these things then in Jesus' name, Amen.