

THE MELCHIZEDEK  
CONNECTION

PRESENTED

by

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on

*The  
Back to God  
Hour*

THE REFORMED CHURCHES  
OF  
Australia and New Zealand

## THE MELCHIZEDEK CONNECTION

For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, Prater of the heavens.

Hrhrws 7: 26

I'd like to ask you to take a few minutes to recall the derogatory comments you have heard in the last years. I'll say that even though you may not be a regular church member, you have let religious men. If nothing else, you have probably seen them on the street or at an airport with their religious rituals. you know, or you have read about them in the papers.

To tell the truth religious men are a very strange lot in a way---they vary differently from many other people. But then, so are doctors, engineers. And lawyers tend to develop their own idiosyncracies. today, guess house, too, have their own peculiarities. So, we should not be surprised that religious men have them.

But what I would like you to do is to try to think of the types of religious men you have encountered. When you let your mind run over the categories, you have met, I'll say they would fall into certain categories.

There's the "youthful" type. Perhaps you have met a black suited priest with a beard, a twinkle in his eye, and a mass of religious medals on a chain around his neck. you may know a cool Baptist or Presbyterian clergyman, with a purple motorcycle and a compact car with rally wheels.

On the other hand, there is the "opposite" type of clergyman. He is ascetic in appearance, a quiet, unimposing individual who is a good listener; many of them have high intellects and are members of his congregation. He always listens to people with that little nugget of information he

can introduce into a conversation and he has just enough humorous quips to make his presence welcome.

Then, too, there is the "big operator" type who ran he found among the clergy these days. They are hard nosed and rather flamboyant, and they are always able to come up with an appropriate spiritual remark when necessary. They know how to manage people. In fact, they tend to be manipulators. Most of them like to build, and they develop a flair for publicity. Though few in number, we hear a lot about this type of preacher.

Another type is the great, all-around clergyman who is doing a tremendous job, everyone agrees he is a spiritual man. yes, but he plays basketball with the children, too. And he's fairly easy to listen to when he preaches. Morally, he is pure as the driven snow. He is the last person in the world on whom you would suspect wrongdoing. And that's why it is always so shattering when something happens and he stumbles occasionally and even falls sometimes. But until that happens everybody considers him tops as a preacher . . . or priest as the case may be.

The point I'd like to make with all this is a simple one: religious men have their own peculiarities that get in the way of the gospel and of true religion. The stereotypes have just described illustrate this. Older people often cannot stand the "youthful" type; just talked about. Young people cannot stand the ascetic, tea-drinking type. We talked about it. Clergymen after all are people and as such they tend to fall into categories. And as such they get in the way of the gospel and of true religion almost as often as they further it.

Now this has been going on for years and

years and years. The members of the religious establishment have often corrupted religion terribly. When one reads the Old Testament part of the Bible, for example, there are some frightening examples of clerical mischief that made the people then already very cynical about their religious leaders.

If you read 1 Samuel 2 in the Bible you will find a report there of the way some of the priests of Israel acted long ago. The people would come with offerings of meat that were designated for the altar. And the priests would take the prime cuts for themselves before the offering ever got to God. They skimmed the take and gave God inferior goods. The same priests committed fornication with the women who worked in the temple. They were evil, dirty, unscrupulous people, and you can be sure that when the common Israelite in those days thought about his religion, he would sometimes shake his head and say that the religious establishment was nothing but a lot of hypocrites.

I wouldn't be surprised if you were very cynical about religious leaders, and right now I want to agree that you have much reason to be. There is another side to the picture, too, I know, and we can talk about that some other time. There is a great deal to be said in the defense of clergymen. But the fact is that if you want to find things wrong with the clergy, you don't have to look very far. You might begin by going to the nearest one and talking with him about it, and you would probably find out that he would be the first to agree with you that clergymen have their own problems. He could probably add a few dark chapters to the history of the clergy that you don't even know about.

But do you know what would be tragic? It

is this: if you would allow a generally low evaluation of the clergy to keep you away from the Lord Jesus Christ. Some people do this. They argue that they haven't met any religious leader who has really awakened their unqualified admiration. They have found something wrong with every one of them. And after all, Jesus was just another religious leader. He was related to the religion of the Jews in some way or another. We know what priests and priests' sons and rabbis are. So what else is new? Why should we become interested in Jesus?

Well, it would be a big mistake to allow our prejudices about the clergy in general to keep us from evaluating Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus is different. Again and again in the Gospels, Jesus Christ opposed the religious establishment of His day. He put a lot of distance between Himself and them. He opposed them and He condemned them. And I suppose that if the truth were known, Jesus would not support everything done by the clergy right now either. Somewhere, how we must find out who the real Jesus is.

One of the most intriguing descriptions of the unique character of Jesus as a religious leader is found in the New Testament book of Hebrews. It's the seventh chapter I'm talking about. It's about Jesus, to be sure, but it shows that Jesus was not like the other priests who the people of Israel knew so much about. He was different. Hebrews 7 is about the Melchizedek connection. That is, it is about the way Jesus Christ is related to a strange named Melchizedek. The connection between Jesus Christ and Melchizedek is worth exploring. In fact, once you understand it could just be that this Jesus, whom you have never been all that interested in, will become your Savior.



Let's take a look at the Melchizedek connection. The only people who have heard very much about Melchizedek, so far as I know, are those in the Masonic order, and the Mormons. Some others have heard about him, but that's about as far as it goes for them. And yet one must know the relationship between Jesus and Melchizedek if Jesus is going to help him at all.

In the closing verse of Hebrews 6, the Bible says that Jesus became a "high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." And when the Bible says that, it is virtually saying that no regular human clergyman can ever establish true religion. Only Jesus can.

The word order in the phrase *order of Melchizedek* is something like the word order we use when we speak of various religious orders, such as the Franciscans or the Dominicans within the Roman Catholic Church. Well, the Bible says Jesus was a priest of the *Melchizedekian* order. And that was a very startling statement when it was made. It was startling because the people who heard it first, knew of only one order of priests. Those were the Levitical priests of the Jews and they were of the Aaronic order. But Jesus had to be of this unique order because no human religious leader can ever do the job when it comes to establishing the true religion. This is why Jesus had to be a special kind of priest. He had to have the Melchizedek connection.

Now, a few minutes ago we talked about some of the common stereotypes of clergymen, and obviously there is something wrong with all of them. Clergymen are not perfect now and they never have been. But when you read the book of Hebrews you find an in-depth description of the inadequacies of the ordinary priests of the people of Israel in the Old Testament era.

When we evaluate the clergy we tend to look at them in terms of some of the superficial marks of their lives, and we type them in terms of what kind of sportscar they drive. But the Bible gets to the real issue and reminds us that actually no human priest can ever touch the root of men's problems because each one of them is caught in the problems himself. The book of Hebrews puts it this way: every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people." (1:1-3)

And this was very obvious to Jewish people who had been familiar with the way priests had had to offer sacrifices for centuries. All through the Old Testament we can find a record of sacrifices. But they began in earnest when the people of Israel left the land of Egypt in the Exodus. Then the Passover was instituted, with its killing of a lamb. Later in the desert a complicated economy of sacrifice was instituted and the priests of the house of Aaron, the Levitical priests were busy from then on, killing and slaughtering animals for the sins of the people.

It was a futile and dreary business; believe me. No wonder some of the priests became immoral, as we noted a few minutes ago. And this is why Christ had to be a different kind of a priest. He became, says the Bible, a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Who was this Melchizedek, anyway? Well, Abraham, the old Jewish patriarch, had met him centuries before Hebrews was written when Abraham, as a victorious general, was return-

ing from a great victory. This is the way  
brews 7 describes him:

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest  
of the most high God, met Abraham returning  
from the slaughter of the kings and blessed  
him; and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth  
part of everything. He is first, by translation  
his name, king of righteousness, and then he  
also king of Salem, that is, king of peace  
without father and mother or genealogy, and  
has neither beginning of days nor end of life,  
but resembling the Son of God he continues  
a priest for ever." (1-3)

Within the Jewish tradition, there had de  
veloped the feeling that when the Messiah  
would come, he would be related to this strange  
figure from Israel's past, Melchizedek. Psalm  
110 had put the matter this way: The Lord  
has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You  
are a priest for ever after the order of Mel  
chizedek'."

The significance of Melchizedek is that this  
ancient figure from the Jewish past is the person  
the Bible uses to describe the importance of the  
Lord Jesus Christ. With this figure, Jesus is set  
apart from any human priest or any other cler  
gyman for that matter. He is unique. And be  
cause He is, Jesus can really do something about  
our predicament.

If you have time, Hebrews 7 is worth a close  
reading. But for now, let's notice some of the  
things about Melchizedek that were so out  
standing and that were applied to Jesus. His  
name means "King of Righteousness." And  
that's what Jesus was, to contrast to ordi  
nary priests and other religious leaders, who are  
sinful, Jesus was not a sinner. He was the sin  
bearer, that is, He took the sins of men upon  
Himself. But He was not a sinner Himself.

Thus the word righteousness found in his name  
can be applied directly to Jesus.

But Melchizedek is significant for another  
reason, too. He was the king of Salem. Run that  
word over your lips for just a minute. Salem.  
Salem. Shalom. Shalom. You know what shalom  
means, don't you? It means peace. Salem is a  
form of the word peace. If you check back in  
Genesis 14: 18 you will find that Melchizedek  
was the king of a city by that name, Salem. It  
was the city of peace.

Hebrews 7 says that Jesus was a priest after  
the order of Melchizedek. And this means that  
He is the great person who establishes peace  
in this world. He does this first of all by recon  
ciling man with God. His sacrifice on Calvary's  
cross paid for sin and made it possible for us  
to pray to God and experience His care for time  
and eternity. No ordinary human clergyman can  
give people that kind of peace. Only Jesus can.

And then there is another characteristic of  
Melchizedek that Hebrews points out. "He is  
without father or mother or genealogy, and has  
neither beginning of days nor end of life .... "  
This is the way he came onto the stage of  
human history. The Bible never mentioned him  
before he suddenly appeared to Abraham. And  
the Bible does not mention him again. He is  
just a person who appears for a brief moment  
and then is gone. He has no beginning nor end  
of days. We don't know who his parents were,  
nor who his descendants were. And because of  
this there was an eternal quality about him.  
He was like the Son of God in that sense,  
the Bible says.

Jesus, who is the priest like Melchizedek, also  
had no beginning nor end of days. He is  
the eternal Son of the living God. He is God  
become man, God become the very flesh of



sacrifice in order that those who now trust in Him may be redeemed and their lives may be restored.

Hebrews 7: 26 takes all that we have been talking about and puts it together in this sentence: "For it was fitting that we should have, 1. such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens."

The Melchizedek construction-Jesus was a different kind of religious leader, and so you may never try to establish a simple connection between Jesus and any other ordinary priest or preacher. Look at Jesus in connection with Melchizedek and see that He is the perfect redeemer of mankind. He is righteous, He is the King of peace, and He is the eternal Son of God. The old Levitical, Aaronic priesthood the Jewish people had known throughout the years before Jesus' birth was unable to fulfill all righteousness and bring peace according to the "book of Hebrews. And no ordinary clergyman today may make how fine he may be, is unable to validate a reality in our lives. Only Jesus can do that. When you think about Him think about Him in terms of this strange figure from the distant past and remember "that" Bible in comparing Jesus to Melchizedek, is telling us that Jesus is really incomparable. He is the only priest who ever really made a difference. For He did not offer the blood of bulls and goats but He offered Himself on Calvary's cross. And now this eternal high priest still lives. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." { Hebrews 7: 25)

I know you have trouble admiring clergymen today. Of course you do. For none of them is

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righteous. Each one of them, just as anyone  
 11111st put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ  
 if he is to h1' sawd. But Jesus is righteousness.  
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 Yrn1 ought to stand listl'ning.

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 King of pPace. He sacrificed Himself on Cal  
 Yary's cross so that siimers just like us could be  
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 17:27)

You need apriC'st like' that. Not a priest like thepriest ɒn kno": nor:, priC'st likæt preach <:!, ɒn kno\\But You nC'ed a priest like' :Mel chiz!'dek: Onhthe Søn of theLiYino- God can sa,eyou. It takes əsacrin' that grɒt. And it has be-en offered.

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Pn•p;\rd fo1.broadcasthy Dr. Joel Nederhood.  
Radie Mini<tl'r. Christian Reformed Church.

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#### MANILA

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