

*The Perfect Sacrifice*  
Hebrews 7:1-3; 11-28  
March 13, 2016

**“The bedrock of our Christian faith is the unmerited, fathomless marvel of the love of God exhibited on the Cross of Calvary, a love we never can and never shall merit.”**

Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

**Call to Worship:** Psalm 110

**Scripture:**

*For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,<sup>2</sup> and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.<sup>3</sup> He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever. . .*

<sup>11</sup> *Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?* <sup>12</sup> *For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.* <sup>13</sup> *For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar.* <sup>14</sup> *For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.*

<sup>15</sup> *This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek,<sup>16</sup> who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.* <sup>17</sup> *For it is witnessed of him, You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”*

<sup>18</sup> *For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness<sup>19</sup> (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, **through which we draw near to God.***

<sup>20</sup> *And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath,<sup>21</sup> but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever.’”*

<sup>22</sup> *This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.*

<sup>23</sup> *The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,<sup>24</sup> but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.* <sup>25</sup> *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost **those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.***

<sup>26</sup> *For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.* <sup>27</sup> *He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.* <sup>28</sup> *For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.*

Hebrews 7:1-3; 11-28 (ESV)

We ended our Scripture passage last week with these words from the author to the *Letter of the Hebrews* (6:19-20): <sup>19</sup> *We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,* <sup>20</sup> *where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*

Throughout the biblical story, especially in the Old Testament there is what is known as “types.” Types are things or people which point to something better to come. In fact if you look up the word “type” in the English dictionary, that which is found in the Bible is given as one of its definitions. Merriam Webster’s Dictionary says a type is: “A person or thing (as in the Old Testament) believed to foreshadow another (as in the New Testament).” There is the “type” which is an imperfect image of something better to come and then there is the “ante-type,” which is the perfect thing.

For example: In the O.T. there was the bronze serpent that God commanded Moses to set on a standard, that God’s people at that time, the Israelites, could look to, to be healed and live forever. It was meant to be a type of Christ being lifted up on the cross. Another example: In the O.T. the sacrificial lamb was a type of “the lamb of God,” Jesus, who would be sacrificed for the sins of the world. It also was meant to serve as a description of one of Jesus’ primary characteristics, meek or innocent.

The types were not just things, or animals, they were also people. Going all the way back to Adam & Eve in the Garden, Noah, and then Abraham. The two greatest people that we read about in the Bible who were meant to be “types” of a better one, a more perfect one to come, were Moses and David. Throughout Christian history it has been widely believed that Jesus in his coming to earth, then his death on the cross and his resurrection, fulfilled three primary or critical roles: 1) Prophet; 2) King; and 3) Priest.

While there were others who were the types of the perfect one to come, Moses is said to be the primary prophet type and David is said to be the primary King type. Yet, as good as they were they were imperfect human beings like the rest of us – pointing to something better, pointing to something perfect. In our Scripture passage this morning, and in the earlier passages of this *Letter to the Hebrews*, we find the one who many believe to have been the primary Priest type, Melchizedek, – pointing to the perfect High Priest to come, Jesus. Yet, the Bible does not give us much historical information about Melchizedek. He is really only talked about three times in the entire Bible: in Genesis 14 it is written that he is the High Priest during the time of Abraham. *And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. And he blessed Abraham and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”* (Genesis 14:18-20).

The next time we read about Melchizedek in the Bible is in Psalm 110, our call to worship this morning, when King David is prophesying about the Messiah to come: *The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”* <sup>2</sup> *The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!* <sup>3</sup> *Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours.* <sup>4</sup> *The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”* Psalm 110:1-4 (ESV)

And the third time we read about Melchizedek is in this *Letter to the Hebrews*. So little is known about him, yet he is used to represent the entire priesthood of the Old Testament. So what do we know about him that points to the perfect priest to come? Well, first is the meaning of his name: the name Melchizedek means righteousness. He is referred to as the King of Salem. Salem comes from the same Hebrew word as “Shalom,” – which means peace. So, just in his name we learn that he is the king of righteousness and the king of peace. The other thing that is very interesting about Melchizedek, that which points to the perfect one to come, is that we don’t know where he came from. It’s like God just dropped him here on earth. In fact throughout history some have referred to him as being beyond human, perhaps like an angel. The Bible says that he came without genealogy.

Why is that important? Because it goes against the norm. In the O.T. the priests had to be from the lineage of Levi, from the lineage of Aaron, the brother of Moses. Not all Levites were priests, but all priests had to be Levites. The fact that Melchizedek was not a Levite, points to something significant about the perfect priest to come. Jesus, too, did not come from the priestly lineage that was expected. He came from the line of Judah.

Hebrews, chapter 7, is thought to be the focal point of the *Letter to the Hebrews*. It concerns the most important part of Judaism. While many believe that “the Law” was and is the most important element of Judaism, that is not the case. Obedience to the law was, and is still today, extremely important to the Jewish people, but the Jewish people knew early on that there obedience could never be perfect. The offering of sacrifices became even more important than the law because they were the only things that could take away their sins. And so we have the entire O.T. sacrificial system which is laid out best in the Book of Leviticus, Leviticus, for “Levites.” The Priests, the Levites, had to offer the sacrifices to God, on behalf of God’s people, over and over and over again for the forgiveness of their sins.

All the priestly sacrifices as prescribed in the Old Testament, including the one which the High Priest offered on the Day of Atonement, were not permanent. They had to be repeated over and over. They provided no permanent forgiveness of sins, no permanent righteousness, and no permanent peace.

Jesus came to fulfill what nothing else could offer people. What exactly is that? Well, what actually is the purpose of religion, or the primary purpose of our lives? Augustine, who lived from 354 – 434 A.D., thought by many to be one of the greatest theologians of all time, said something to the effect, “our souls will not find rest until they find rest in you, O God.” Whether we know it or not, the ultimate purpose of religion, the ultimate reason which we exist, is to enter into the presence of God. God created us to be in relationship with Him. The writer of this *Letter to the Hebrews* describes that ultimate goal in verses 19 & 25 this morning as “through which we draw near to God.” To him, the ultimate goal of religion is access to God’s presence, that which allows us to come to God as God’s friends, with nothing between us and Him. That is what Adam and Eve had early on in the Garden, full access to God. But then they sinned, that which separates us from God, and even though God went looking for them, they were eventually banned from the Garden. There was a wall or a barrier separating them from God.

The Old Testament is all about God creating a way back for His people. There were two primary ways people could get back into God's good grace: One, by obedience to the law – and at that time it was all the law, with was some 633 laws, rules and ordinances. All one needed to do is to obey the law perfectly and one could have friendship and fellowship with God. Well, it didn't take long for the Israelites to realize that was not going to work. So God, in God's ultimate wisdom, in establishing the law, that which he knew his people could not perfectly obey, he established another way. Well, they're actually two sides of the same coin.

After all, Adam and Eve couldn't perfectly obey with just one command. How were God's people going to obey 633 of them? So God established another way His people could have access to Him, or at least maintain relationship, and that was the establishment of the entire sacrificial system. God's people would have to offer sacrifices, through priests, to atone for their sin. But just as many of the other things and people which we read about in the Old Testament, that two was a "type," it was pointing to something better, it was pointing towards a more perfect way.

In v. 18 it says that *the former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness*. Many versions read that the former law is set aside. Well, the entire former way was set aside, the law in ordinances and sacrifices and the entire sacrificial system. The English phrase "set aside," is really too weak of a word used there. The Greek word used there means wiped out, completely abolished. But we need to be careful here because in the Bible when it says that the law was abolished it never means the entire law. When the Bible refers to the law – it could mean God's basic law, that which includes the Ten Commandments and how He wants us to live as His people – that which has never been abolished. That represents the part of the law which Jesus said "I have come not to abolish." And then there is the ceremonial law of all the different ordinances and sacrifices, that which was abolished, thrown aside, completely wiped out, gone! The ceremonial law in all its ordinances and sacrifices and the need for sacrifices themselves was completely eliminated in the priesthood of Jesus.

The author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* goes on to describe the perfect superiority of the priesthood of Jesus:

1. It was sworn by an oath by God, one by which it says God will not change, both in our passage this morning and in the greater priesthood to come prophesied by David in Psalm 110. That was never the case with the old priesthood.
2. The new priesthood was permanent, something that the old priesthood could never be because the Levites serving as priests had the same little problem back then as we do today which prevents us from permanently doing what we are called to do – that little problem being death. Death here on earth comes to all of us and those who served as priests back then died and had to be replaced. There was no permanency in the O.T. priesthood. But the perfect High Priest, Jesus, is eternal, he lives forever!

Our passage of Scripture this morning is one of those passages where we find the entire biblical story, the entire Gospel story!. It's similar to John 3:16, but of course much longer. The author starts out with the basic idea that the whole purpose of religion, the whole purpose of God

creating us, is to be in relationship with Him. He says the essence of religion is to take a man or a woman, without fear and without barriers, into the presence of God. What is the most quoted commandment in all of the Bible? “Fear not!” “Do not be afraid!”

God created a way that all mankind could be in relationship with Him, we could be His friends, we would never have to fear. All we had to do was to obey the law. It was as simple as that. If only we could faithfully and obediently observe the commandments of the law, we could have friendship with God and the door to God’s presence would be permanently open to us. Well, we know how that has worked out. Even today, with just the Ten Commandments and God’s basic law, we do not and cannot keep the law perfectly, so our friendship with God, our access to God’s presence has been interrupted, severed, a great chasm has occurred.

So God created another way and that was through the priesthood. The Latin word for priest is pontifex which means “bridge-builder.” The priest was a man whose function was to build a bridge between man and God. To provide us a way back. In the O.T. it could do it for a while, or on a temporary basis, but it always fell short, for two very important reasons: 1) the priests themselves were sinful human beings – they had to first offer sacrifices for themselves; and 2) they had to be repeated over and over again, and over and over again. It was an imperfect system pointing to something better.

### **Enter the perfect one!**

Enter the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace. *For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest - holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.* Not only was it fitting, it was necessary! God is holy and he requires a holy sacrifice, without blemish or defect. There is only one human being that could do that - Jesus of Nazareth, King of Righteousness, King of Peace. The order is both significant and necessary. In God’s ordering of things righteousness must always come before peace. Without righteousness there can be no such thing as peace. Without being right in the eyes of God, being right with Him, we can never have peace. While as Christians we are called to be “peacemakers,” that is not what we are talking about here. The peace we are talking about here is the peace that comes to an individual only when he or she knows they have been made right with God, when he or she can come into God’s presence freely, unafraid.

As Paul wrote in Romans 5:1, *Therefore being justified by faith, (justified, meaning being made right with God) we have peace with God.* Later on in Romans, 14:7, he writes, *The kingdom of God is . . . righteousness, peace and joy.* The order is always the same – first righteousness, and then peace.

It might be said that all of life is a search for peace – peace being in right relationship with God – the God who created us to be in relationship with Him. Unfortunately we almost always look for peace in all the wrong places:

1. We look for peace by escape – whether it be through drugs, alcohol, sex, work, movies, the internet, sports - all the earthly attractions that can easily become addictions.

2. We look for peace by avoidance – avoiding our sinful human condition, avoiding our fears, avoiding God.
3. We look for peace by the way of compromise. As long as we are willing to compromise there will always be tension and there is one really big problem with compromise – God does not compromise! If God were to compromise then he wouldn't have had to send His own Son to die on the cross.

There is only one way to everlasting peace within and that is the way of righteousness. Or another way of putting it is that there is no way to everlasting peace other than by the will of God, or the way of God. There is no true or perfect peace in any man or woman until he or she can say, "God, your will be done." Then and only then can peace come into one's soul. It even happened to Jesus. Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane with a soul under tension, with such tension that it says he even sweated blood. In the Garden He accepted God's will and He came out a man at peace. To take the way of righteousness, to accept God's will, God's purpose, God's plan is the only way to remove dispeace. It is the only way to lasting peace.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, except through me." Faith in Jesus is the only way to righteousness.

As with every other Christian denomination, when you stress certain things too much, you sometimes miss the true meaning of other things, and it is no different for us as Mennonites. We put so much emphasis on peace – peace being relationships between people and people groups – and rightfully so, but in doing so we often forget that true peace can only be had when our own relationship with God has been made right.

The other thing we emphasize too much, or at least we have in the past, is "the priesthood of all believers." Again, there is truth to that idea. It is biblical. We do not need to go through earthly priests anymore to have access to God. But we can emphasize that so much that we lose out on the one great truth: there is only one Great High Priest, and that is Jesus Christ who became the perfect sacrifice - *holy, innocent, unstained, separated from us sinners, and exalted above the heavens* – to provide the bridge between us and God, to make us right again, to be able to come into His presence and to give us everlasting peace. All for His glory and His honor!