

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Hebrews 5:1-10 *For 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. ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; ⁶ as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." ⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.*

We have a children's book at home, written by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw, entitled "Same, Same but Different." It was published in 2011, and it's a fictional story about two young pen pals. One child lives in America, one child lives in India, and they write back and forth about their everyday experiences, likes and dislikes, their homes, etc. And the grand conclusion is that although there are many things in their lives that are different, really the two children are very similar. "Same, Same but Different." Well, the writer to the Hebrews is really leading us to the same conclusion in the text before us today. There are three different parties which Jesus is being compared to in our text. There are similarities to them all, but there are also some *very important* differences. The theme we'll be considering today is:

Jesus Christ is "Same, Same but Different"

- I. As the Old Testament Priests
- II. As Melchizedek
- III. As you and me

Throughout the book of Hebrews, the priesthood of the Old Testament is referred to frequently as a point of comparison for Jesus. Referenced 25 times in these 13 chapters, the priesthood is brought up more frequently in Hebrews than any other New Testament book. We can understand why. When God instituted the Priesthood, which you can read about in Leviticus 16, it was all as a way to point forward to the coming Messiah. The priest was to be a constant reminder to the people of Israel that their sin that separated them from God. They were unable to just take their sins directly to God, instead the Priest stood as the go-between—bringing sins in repentance to God and returning with God's forgiveness. Well, that whole dynamic changed when Christ entered the picture. He bridged the gap between us and God by tearing down the wall of sin which separated us. Now, Paul writes, "**There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.**" (1 Timothy 2:5) There's no need for a priest anymore, we have access to God's throne of grace through our Savior.

And so, there's just not much mention of priests throughout the New Testament, outside of the accounts of Jesus' interactions with the priests. That is until we get to the book of Hebrews, where again, priests are one of the main focuses of the book. And this is because Hebrews is written, as you might have guessed, to a group of Hebrew believers. These are ethnic Jewish people who believe in Jesus as their Savior, but they're having a bit of a hang-up on all the Jewish ceremonial and religious practices that they grew up on, one of them being the reliance on the priests and their accompanying sacrifices. So, Hebrews frequently compares Jesus to the Priests, showing how He is the better version of what they offered. Or, in the words of our theme, **Jesus Christ is "Same, Same but Different."**

One of the ways in which Jesus is the same as those Old Testament Priests is that they both, as we read in the first verse of our text, are ***“appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God.”*** There’s a saying in sports that you might have heard before, which goes something like this: “Play for the name on the front of your jersey, not the name on the back.” If you’re familiar with sports jerseys, the name on the front is always the name of your team, whereas the name running along the back is your own name. So, the point is that you ought to play in such a way that you’re putting your teammates first. And we can see this very idea in a literal way with the Old Testament Priests. In Exodus, we’re told that when the High Priest went into the Holy Place to appear before the Lord, he would do so wearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on a breastplate. (Exodus 28:29) He was making sacrifices for the names on the front of his jersey, so to speak. But he also had to do so for the name on the back, because he was a sinner too that was also in need of God’s forgiveness. As our text says, ***“He is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.”***

This is where Jesus is much different. As verse 9 of our text says, ***“Being made perfect, He (meaning Jesus) became the source of eternal salvation.”*** Those Old Testament priests, do you know how often they made sacrifices for sins? Every single day. In fact in verse 3, when he’s talking about those Priests being ***“obligated to offer sacrifice,”*** the tense of the verb in Greek is the Present Tense, which if you were to picture what that means in a visual form, imagine a dot with a line proceeding out from it into eternity, never ending. Such was the nature of their sacrifices. Because they continued to sin every single day, they needed to keep sacrificing forever. And if they rounded up all the goats and bulls and turtledoves on the entire earth and sacrificed them all, they could never fully cover all the sins of the people. This was to act as a reminder from God that they needed something else. Something better.

Enter Jesus. In Hebrews 7, the ***“Same but Different”*** Great High Priest is brought to the forefront. There, we read, ***“[Jesus] 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.”*** (Hebrews 7:27) Have you ever wondered why in the Catholic church the guy who stands in the front is called a Priest, and in the Lutheran church he’s called a Pastor? It’s not just because we wanted to be different. The truth is, there are no priests anymore, not properly. A priest is a go-between, who mediates between God and the people. The theology of the Catholic Church revolves around this on-going need for sacrifice, on-going need of mediation, on-going need for payment for sins. There’s never a final satisfactory answer for sin, instead it’s thought to be on-going process leaving a big question mark at the end of your life. “Have I really been forgiven? Do I have any residual guilt clinging to me?” And certainly, we struggle with those questions too. We often consider our relationship with God to be as fickle and fragile as our relationships with one another. We treat God’s love with the flower petal, “He loves me, He loves me not, He loves me...” But what happens if at the end of our life the final petal is, “He loves me not”? But while we leave with questions, God responds with a resounding answer. The Bible proclaims that, once-and-for-all time, Jesus produced the sacrifice for all sin, including yours. He stood between you and God, and *you* now stand uncondemned. No question at all.

So, **Jesus Christ is “Same, Same but Different”** as the Old Testament Priests. Another way He’s different is found in relation to the next person mentioned, Melchizedek. He’s brought up twice in this section, but perhaps you’re unfamiliar with that name. He’s a rather mysterious figure who suddenly just appears on the scene in Genesis chapter 14, and then disappears, only to be mentioned again once in Psalm 110, and then 8 times in the book of Hebrews. As brief and insignificant as his original appearance seems to be, he is a strangely significant person in the Bible.

If you turned back to Genesis 14 and read the account there, you’d find this Melchizedek appearing unprompted at one of the lowest points of Abraham’s life. And of course, you all know who Abraham is. He had been called by God and blessed by God. God told him to leave his home country and go to the

land which God would give him. God told him that his offspring would be like the stars of the heaven, like the sands of the seashore—unable to be numbered. God told Abraham He would bless him and make his name great, and he would have a future descendent through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed—that descendant being Jesus. So, Abraham left as he was told to do.

So, that's obviously all good news for Abraham, but after several years, Abraham doesn't have much to show for it all; in fact, his situation in life seems to have gotten much worse. He wanders from country to country as a man without a home; he endures a harsh famine in the area, and he's forced to seek refuge in Egypt for a time. The Pharaoh of Egypt at the time kicks him out, still a man without a country. He does have a lot of wealth, a large family that follows him, many servants and livestock in tow. He also has a nephew named Lot with him whose family and flocks are also growing quite large, there are disputes among the two factions due to a lack of available land and they end up having to split apart, Lot going to the lush land called Sodom and Gomorrah.

And then there was a great battle, five different kings led their armies up against Sodom and Gomorrah and ransacked the cities. They took many hostages, including Lot and his family. So then, Abraham, is drug into battle. He takes 318 men and goes to fight those five kings and their armies, just so he can free his nephew and family from their hands. He's endured so much by this point after being given so many great promises from God, and still he has not even received so much as a son to continue his family line, much less any land to call his own.

But then, as the dust begins to settle, this Melchizedek appears. Abraham hadn't previously met him, but he is identified as the "King of Salem," (which would later be known as Jeru-salem), and he's also called "the Priest of God Most High." (cf. Genesis 14:17-20) What does he do for Abraham? He comes to him at this seemingly low moment in his life, he nourishes him with bread and wine, and he blesses him. The Lord sends Melchizedek to Abraham to strengthen his resolve so that he can keep waiting patiently on the Lord's promises. And then Melchizedek just disappears, that's the last historical account we hear of him. Jesus is just like Melchizedek. He's a priest, the mediator between man and God; He appears for us right when we need Him, even being there for us in our lowest moments.

And in Hebrews chapter 7, we can read about another comparison between Jesus and Melchizedek. There, we read, **"this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God. . . 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."** (Hebrews 7:1-3) Melchizedek is unique, because so many of the protagonists throughout Scripture have one thing in common. So many can be found included in a genealogy somewhere in Scripture. We can read who their fathers were, who their sons were, we know when they were born and when they died. We have none of those details recorded about Melchizedek; he simply floats into the story and then disappears, as though he had no beginning and no end. This is what the writer to the Hebrews is pointing out in his comparison between Jesus and Melchizedek in verse 6, ***"You [Jesus] are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."***

Unlike all those Old Testament priests who became priests because their fathers were priests, who had sons that then became priests, all of them who were born and also later died—Jesus is the Great High Priest with no beginning and no end. What does that mean for you? It means He continues to intercede for you. It means His work on your behalf never ended. As Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, ***"Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."*** (Romans 8:34) Even right now, Jesus continues to come to us at our lowest points, vindicating us, pleading our case in heaven.

And that's one of the reasons why when we compare Jesus to Melchizedek, Jesus is **"Same, Same but Different."** For He doesn't leave our story. He doesn't just disappear from the page never to be heard

from again. Jesus continues to feed us with bread and wine, also His body and His blood. He continues to nourish us and strengthen us and forgive us. He continues to find us when we are in the depths of despair due to sin, and He lifts our case before the Father in heaven. We can continue to turn to Jesus and never be turned away. For as we read later in the book of Hebrews, ***“Jesus is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”***

Truly, Jesus is **“Same, Same but Different”**—as the Old Testament Priests, as Melchizedek, and also as you and me. Imagine for a second that you had a business, and you entered into a legal battle with another company. Say they stole some intellectual property from you. You don’t want to go to court over it, so you hire a mediator who can help your companies work it out. Now, a mediator needs to be impartial so that they can objectively help you reach a solution. Now imagine that you found out that your mediator was on the other company’s payroll. You wouldn’t feel very confident that that mediator was really going to understand *your* situation or even really care about your situation. You want a mediator who can understand you and empathize with you. Well, we have a mediator between us and God, Jesus Christ, God Himself. Can *God* truly empathize with us and understand us?

He can and He does. Verse 7 says, ***“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.”*** (Hebrews 5:7) That almost certainly is a direct reference to Jesus’ hours of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion. We know that He prayed there, ***“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”*** (Luke 22:42) And I think often, when we picture that scene, we imagine Him sort of just rehearsing these lines and looking up to heaven in this beatific way. And that wasn’t the scene at all. It was ***“with loud cries and tears,” “His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”*** (Luke 22:44) He was in real agony because He was the same as us, having become a real human with all of the struggles of a human. And He knew that He was about to suffer hell-on-earth, and unlike us He knew exactly what that would be like.

Let’s not lose sight of that picture of Jesus. God, yes, and also a man who suffered like us, who was tempted like us, who went hungry like us, who felt pain like us. As we can read in Hebrews chapter 4, ***“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*** (15) **“Same, Same but Different.”** The One who stands before the Father on your behalf, who pleads your case, who is always near to help—He gets it. He understands. He’s been there before. And He’s prepared to answer. He’s prepared to lift you from the pit of despair, from this valley of the shadow of death, from the grief of guilt over your sin, with the simple assurance that He’s already taken care of it. All of your darkest sins, all of your greatest needs have found their answer in Jesus Christ, your source of eternal salvation.

So, in summary, we’re back where we started. **Jesus is “Same, Same but Different.”** In that children’s book, the point is that even though there are differences, no one way of life is better than the other. The moral is, if you cut through all the differences you find really the two children are the same. That’s not the lesson that we find in Jesus. Yes, there are a lot of similarities between us and Him, but it’s the differences that make all the difference. The differences are what set Him apart as better and as our Savior. He is our Great High Priest who lives and reigns and pleads on our behalf forever. He’s able to do so, and He does do so all for you. Thanks be to God. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh
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