

DAY 19 WEDNESDAY

HEBREWS 7:11-19 GRASPING REALITY

¹¹ *If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?* ¹² *For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.* ¹³ *He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar.* ¹⁴ *For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.* ¹⁵ *And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears,* ¹⁶ *one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.* ¹⁷ *For it is declared: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”*

¹⁸ *The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless* ¹⁹ *(for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.*

Twice in this letter Jesus has already been identified as *a high priest in the order of Melchizedek* (5:10; 6:20). The importance of this to the story of our salvation has been masked by the millennia of separation between us and the sacrificial system of pre-Christian Judaism. All this talk about priests and sacrifices, tithes and blessings, is more than a bit obscure and archaic to us. In passages like this one we need to pray that God will open our eyes to the truth of his Word so that we might apply it in our lives.

The order of Aaron and the order of Melchizedek are related to one another as a symbol is to the reality to which it refers. The power of a symbol is found in its dissimilarity from the reality it is supposed to represent (otherwise it would be that reality). The power of a symbol is that it points beyond itself to something greater as an aid for understanding the latter. When you move into a new town you depend on the signs to find a grocery store. But once you have found the store, you no longer need the signs. The lack of inherent power in the sign is obvious when the store is closed. In that case, if you go to the sign you will not be able to get your groceries.

We are always in danger of confusing the symbols for the reality. We are comfortable with the symbols because they are easily accessible and understandable, or at least familiar and comfortable. But when we do so we sell ourselves short and miss out on the truth and the freedom they offer. For the Temple Jews, Jesus offered deliverance from the burden of a life-long cycle of ineffective bloody sacrifices; from ultimately impotent symbols of salvation. With Jesus, atonement for sins was accomplished once and for all, and it was really accomplished.

What are the symbols in your life to which you adhere? Symbols are necessary for understanding reality, but do not let them get between you and reality. Remember that God is the Reality and Jesus is the Truth. As long as a symbol is useful in helping you “see” Jesus it is good. As soon as it becomes your focus, you need to repent of it.

Search me Holy Spirit and show me where I have settled for second best; where I have loved the wrapping too much to open the present. Open my eyes to reality and grow me according to your will, even through I know that it will cause me discomfort. Amen.