

Dr. David A. deSilva, Hebrews, Session 7A, Hebrews 7:1-8:13, Better Priesthood, Better Covenant, Part 1

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Alright folks, buckle up. Today, we're diving deep, and I mean deep, into the Book of Hebrews. Oh yeah, this one is dense.

It's definitely a challenge, but don't worry, we've got the perfect guide to help us navigate its depths. With Dr. David A. deSilva's insights, we're going to uncover some truly fascinating stuff about Jesus. Definitely fascinating.

Now we're not just talking about Jesus as any high priest; we're talking about him as a high priest in the line of Melchizedek. Ah, yes, Melchizedek. He's one of those figures that kind of pops up in the Bible, right? Yeah.

Then, just as quickly, he's gone. Poof, vanishes, like he's from a whole different story. Exactly.

You see him in Genesis, blessing Abraham, even receiving a tithe. Yeah. And then, he just disappears.

So mysterious. Oh, it's definitely intriguing. And deSilva does a really great job of pointing out how the author of Hebrews uses this whole mysterious air, this enigmatic quality, to build his argument.

How so? Well, think about it. Genesis doesn't tell us anything about Melchizedek's genealogy, his birth, or his death. It's like a total blank slate.

Right. And that silence creates this sense that he's eternal, almost like a pre-echo. Of Jesus.

Of the Son of God, exactly. Okay, hold on. I need a minute to process all this.

We have this king and priest who suddenly appears out of nowhere, and his name means King of Righteousness. Yeah. It's like he stepped out of a prophecy.

And he's reigning in a place called peace? I mean, come on, talk about symbolism. Loaded right. And get this, the author of Hebrews, he doesn't miss a beat.

He takes all those details, and he just runs with it. He uses them to argue that Jesus, as a priest in Melchizedek's order, is way, way superior to the Levitical priesthood. Whoa, he's throwing down a challenge.

But wouldn't it have made more sense to connect Jesus with the Levitical priesthood? I mean, that's the one everyone knew. You'd think so, right? Yeah. But deSilva actually calls this a really, really clever use of ancient rhetoric.

Oh, how so? Well, back then it was common to compare ancestors to elevate someone's status. Like a, my dad is stronger than your dad kind of thing. Exactly.

And that's what the author of Hebrews is doing here. He's saying, hey, look at my ancestor, Melchizedek. He's way more impressive than your Levi.

But how does Melchizedek even stack up against Levi in the lineage department? I mean, Levi's got a pretty solid lineage, right? Yeah. He's got the whole tribe named after him. Well, the author of Hebrews argues that Melchizedek is actually higher up in the pecking order.

Really? Even though we don't know anything about his lineage? Exactly. It's all about how the author weaves the story. First, remember how Melchizedek receives a tithe from Abraham.

Yeah. The father of the faithful. The one with all of God's promises.

Right. That's not just a random detail. It's a sign of respect.

It's like Abraham is acknowledging Melchizedek's greater authority. Makes sense. You wouldn't tithe to someone you thought was beneath you, right? Absolutely.

And here's where deSilva reveals a super subtle, but mind-blowing detail. Levi, through his ancestor Abraham, actually symbolically tithed to Melchizedek. Hold on, wait.

You're saying that Levi, way back then, was already acknowledging Melchizedek's authority. Boom. Mic drop.

It's like a lineage trump card. Centuries in the making. Whoa.

The author of Hebrews was playing some serious chess moves with this argument. Right. And then there's the whole eternal versus mortal aspect.

Oh, right. Because we have no record of Melchizedek being born or dying. Exactly.

He's presented as this figure existing outside of time, almost like he always was and always will be. The Levitical priests, well, they were tied to the limitations of human life. So we have Melchizedek, this mysterious eternal figure, setting the stage for a priesthood that goes way beyond earthly lineage, even death itself, right? But how does this all connect to Jesus? Well, that's where things get really interesting.

The author of Hebrews is building to the idea that Jesus's priesthood, modeled after Melchizedek, is superior. It's unchanging. Yeah.

And it's built on something more profound and eternal. Something that resonates with God himself, right? Right. But we can't forget about this idea of perfection that deSilva keeps talking about.

How does that fit into all of this? And what does perfection even mean in this context? That's a great question. And it's a big one. We'll need to dig into that a bit more.

Okay. So perfection in Hebrews, it doesn't actually mean like being flawless, you know? Like never making a mistake. Right.

Right. Instead, deSilva points to two really important aspects. Okay.

Shoot. First, it's about having a clean conscience. Wow.

Like having the stain of sin wiped away. So we can stand before God. Exactly.

It's about being able to stand before Holy God without, you know, all that baggage. So it's like having this clean slate, like a fresh start. You got it.

And the second part, the second aspect is all about eternity, about entering that heavenly realm, a place where sin and death have no power. Okay. I'm starting to see the bigger picture here.

So is the author of Hebrews saying that the Levitical priesthood with all those sacrifices couldn't achieve this kind of perfection? Yeah, that's exactly what he's saying. Right. He's arguing that the Levitical priesthood, even though it was ordained by God, was still tied to the Mosaic law.

Okay. I see. And that law, he's saying it couldn't offer true cleansing or access to that eternal realm.

Right on. So when this priest in the order of Melchizedek shows up, centuries after Levi, well, it signals something huge is happening. Like a seismic shift, right? Something's changing.

And deSilva really emphasizes this point. It points to a change in the law itself. Whoa, a change in the law.

But how can that be? God gave the law. And to really hammer it home, the author points out that Jesus wasn't even from the tribe of Levi. Right.

He was from Judah. Boom. Another point for Team Melchizedek.

Okay. So we have this mysterious Melchizedek, this better priesthood, and now the law itself is changing. This is getting really interesting, but I still have so many questions.

Like what makes this new priesthood better? Yeah, exactly. And how can a law given by God be changed? Well, that's where deSilva's deep dive into the guarantor of a covenant comes in. The guarantor.

Yeah. It's like, think of a covenant as a promise, but a promise is only as good as the person backing it up, right? Okay. That makes sense.

So who's backing up this covenant? Well, when it comes to Jesus, we're not just talking about any guarantor. We're talking about the Son of God himself. Oh, wow.

Okay. Now we're talking. But what makes this guarantee so special? Like what sets it apart from, say, the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai? Well, deSilva points to two really, really incredible guarantees that underpin this better covenant.

Okay. Lay them on me. First, you've got God's own oath declared in Psalm 110.4. The one where God establishes Jesus as a priest forever.

You know it. And this isn't just some casual promise. This is a divine oath.

Unbreakable. It means God's will; it can't be changed. So it's like God is putting his own reputation on the line, like making it clear that this covenant is unshakable.

You got it. That's guarantee number one. And for guarantee number two, we have Jesus's indestructible life.

Oh, right. Because the Levitical priests, they were constantly dying and needing replacements. Exactly.

But Jesus, he lives forever. So his priesthood, it's never interrupted. Meaning he can always intercede for us, right? Always.

He's always there advocating for us. Wow. It's pretty powerful to think that we're never without someone who gets us and is pleading our case before God.

It's pretty incredible. But if Jesus's sacrifice was once for all, and he's constantly interceding, what about our need to repent? That's a good question. Where does repentance fit in? If Jesus took care of it all, does that mean we don't have to worry about repenting anymore? That's a tough one.

It's really the heart of the matter, isn't it? And you know what? DeSilva acknowledges that Hebrews, well, it doesn't offer a simple black-and-white answer. It's not like a rule book. Nope.

But he does point us to chapter eight. That's where the author of Hebrews lays out his case for this better covenant with, as he puts it, better promises. And it's there we find a clue, a clue to understanding repentance in light of Jesus's sacrifice.

Are you talking about that prophecy from Jeremiah 31? Bingo. The one where God promises to write his law on people's hearts. Yeah.

That's a powerful image. So how does that prophecy connect to repentance? Well, that prophecy, it's pivotal, you see, because it's all about a new covenant, not like the one etched in stone on Mount Sinai. This one is about an internal transformation.

It's a shift from external rules to internal change. So it's like following traffic laws because you're afraid of a ticket versus choosing to drive safely because you value the well-being of everyone on the road. Perfect analogy.

One is pressure. The other is genuine change. And deSilva really emphasizes how this prophecy ties in with Jesus as the guarantor.

See, it's not just a hopeful prediction. It's a reality, a divinely ordained reality made possible by Christ himself. Okay.

So we're not just talking about tweaks to the system. We're talking about a whole new way of relating to God, and that's made possible because of Jesus. Right.

We've moved from those repeated animal sacrifices to the single perfect sacrifice. And now we're talking about a covenant where God's law is etched on our hearts. Wow.

It's really making me rethink what it means to live a life of faith, but we can't forget about that other mind-blowing imagery deSilva unpacked. You mean about the heavenly sanctuary? Yeah. Hebrews talks about Jesus entering the holy place in heaven, not some earthly temple.

Oh yeah. That's a powerful image. And deSilva explains that the author of Hebrews is drawing on all that rich symbolism from the Jewish tabernacle and temple.

Like the day of atonement, right? When the high priest would enter the holy place. Exactly. The most sacred ritual, the day of national repentance and atonement.

And it was a big deal, right? It was the only time the high priest could go into that inner sanctum. Right. But in Hebrews, Jesus becomes the ultimate high priest.

And he enters the true heavenly sanctuary. Not some replica, but the real deal, a reality that's beyond time and space. So instead of going through some elaborate earthly system, Jesus just bypasses all those limitations and goes straight to the source.

That's a powerful picture of his authority. And access to God. Absolutely.

But I'm still wrestling with that question about repentance. If Jesus's sacrifice was perfect and complete, and we have this new covenant, what about those times we mess up? We all still sin, right? Right. We do.

It's like a paradox, isn't it? We have this assurance of Jesus's once-for-all sacrifice, and yet we still struggle. We still fall short. So how do those two things work together? DeSilva doesn't shy away from that tension.

He acknowledges that Hebrews doesn't give us a simple answer. Right. Like a one-size-fits-all solution.

Exactly. But he does encourage us to consider a few key themes. Themes that might guide our understanding of repentance in light of this new covenant reality.

Okay. I'm all ears. What are those themes? First, he emphasizes Jesus's ongoing role as our high priest.

Remember, Hebrews says that Jesus always lives to make intercession for us. So even though his sacrifice was complete, his work continues. Absolutely.

He's not just some distant figure who did something amazing in the past and then, you know, stepped back. He's actively involved right now. Right.

He's a present advocate, a constant companion who understands our struggles and is pleading our case before God. It's comforting to know we're not alone in this, that Jesus is walking with us through all of it. Definitely.

It's encouraging, right? And then deSilva points to the theme of perseverance. Oh, right. Hebrews talks a lot about that, doesn't it? Like not giving up, even when things get tough.

Exactly. And it's not sugarcoating things either. It's very real about the challenges of following Jesus.

We're urged to hold fast to our faith, to not grow weary, you know? So even though we have this amazing promise and Jesus's perfect sacrifice, we still have work to do. We still need to keep going, keep fighting the good fight. It seems that way.

DeSilva suggests that the author of Hebrews, well, he knew temptation and sin were realities in our lives, but he also emphasized God's grace; that grace is there to help us overcome these challenges. So it's not about our strength, but about God's strength working through us. Right.

It's both hands. We have the assurance of Jesus's sacrifice and the new covenant, but we also have the responsibility to persevere knowing that we're not alone. It's a partnership, isn't it? We're not just passive recipients; we're active participants in this whole process.

That's a great way to put it. It's a dynamic dance between God's grace and our own effort. We're surrendering, but we're also actively engaged.

And that brings us to another theme, sanctification. Oh yeah. Sanctification.

It's one of those churchy words. What does that even mean though? Does it mean becoming a saint, like someone who's perfect and never does anything wrong? Well, not exactly. Okay, good.

Because that sets the bar a little high. In Hebrews, sanctification is more about being set apart for God. It's about becoming more like Christ.

In our character and actions, right? Right. And deSilva explains that Hebrews views this as a process, a journey. So it's not a one-time event.

We don't get zapped with instant holiness. Not quite. It's a process of growth and transformation that unfolds over time.

So how does repentance play a role in this? That's where it gets really interesting. DeSilva explains that repentance, in Hebrews, is not just about feeling sorry for our sins. It's more than just feeling bad.

It's deeper than that. It's a radical reorientation, a turning away from the stuff that separates us from God. And turning towards Him.

Exactly. With our whole hearts. So it's not a one-time thing either.

It's an ongoing posture of surrender and transformation. We're continually aligning ourselves with God's will, even when we mess up. You got it.

And deSilva points out how this understanding of repentance fits perfectly with that image of the new covenant written on our hearts. It's about an internal change that motivates our actions. I'm starting to see the connection.

It's not about following rules because we have to. It's about a change of heart that flows out into our lives. Exactly.

So even though Jesus' sacrifice happened once, for all time, our journey of faith, repentance, and sanctification, it continues. It's an ongoing adventure. An unfolding story.

And we're all part of it. That's the beauty of it. And deSilva highlights how this offers us hope and motivation for living a life that honors God.

It's not about earning our salvation. It's about responding to grace, to that incredible undeserved grace we've been given. That's so freeing, isn't it? To know that we're not striving for something we could never achieve on our own.

It is. And it allows us to live out of that grace, letting it shape us into the people we're meant to be. This has been such an eye-opening conversation.

We've covered so much ground from mysterious Melchizedek and better covenants to heavenly sanctuaries in this ongoing journey of sanctification. But I have to ask, does Hebrews ever acknowledge that this journey isn't always easy? Are there warnings about potential pitfalls? Like, what if we stumble? What if we get discouraged and want to give up? Great question. And you know what? Hebrews doesn't shy away from that.

DeSilva points out that while the book is full of encouragement and hope, it also has some pretty serious warnings. Oh, like what? Well, it talks about the danger of hardening our hearts, of becoming calloused, you know, unresponsive to God's voice. Ooh, that's a scary thought.

Like becoming so used to sin that we don't even notice it anymore. Exactly. And it warns against neglecting God's word too.

Because when we do that, our spiritual lives dry up. It's like a plant that doesn't get water. Right.

Right? It just withers and dies. Right. And it even talks about apostasy, like totally walking away from the faith.

Whoa, that's intense. So Hebrews is giving us a reality check. I think so.

It's reminding us that this faith thing, it's serious business. It demands our attention, our commitment. It's like a parent warning their child about playing in the street.

It's not about trying to control the child. It's about protecting them from harm. That's a great analogy.

Yeah. DeSilva explains that these warnings are not meant to scare us, but to wake us up to the reality of what's at stake. It's like, hey, pay attention.

This matters. But does Hebrews just leave us hanging with these warnings? Or does it offer some encouragement too? Oh, definitely. DeSilva makes it clear that Hebrews is full of encouragement and support.

It reminds us of God's faithfulness, his love that never lets go. So it's a balance, right? Warning and encouragement. Exactly.

It's about persevering, even when it's tough, but knowing that we're not alone and that God, he's got our backs. God's not just watching from the sidelines. He's right there in the trenches with us.

That's it. And DeSilva highlights how important this balance is for understanding Hebrews. It's not about living in fear, but about embracing God's grace, knowing that he's for us, not against us.

That changes everything, doesn't it? It's not about trying to earn God's favor. It's about responding to the love he's already shown us. Right.

And speaking of responding, DeSilva takes us deeper into Hebrews by exploring this idea of faith as a confident expectation. Confident expectation. I like the sound of that.

Right. It's not just about believing certain things. It's about living them out, like really trusting that God will keep his promises.

It's faith in action, not just faith in our heads. Exactly. And he starts by pointing out how Hebrews actually defines faith.

It's more than just believing, right? Right. It says faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. It's not just a head thing.

It's a heart thing. It's a trust that impacts how we live. So it's about living as if what we believe is already true, even if we can't see the whole picture yet.

You got it. It's about trusting God's promises even when things are tough. And deSilva points out how this understanding is rooted in all those Old Testament examples.

Oh, yeah. Hebrews has a whole hall of faith, doesn't it? It does. All those heroes like Abraham, Moses, Noah, Rahab, and so many others.

They all face some crazy challenges, but they chose to trust God even when it seemed impossible. What does deSilva say about those examples? Well, he points out that these figures didn't just believe in God in some abstract way. They acted on it.

They stepped out in faith, even when it seemed illogical or risky. They were willing to put their faith on the line. Right.

And in their actions, they demonstrated this confident expectation that God would be faithful, even when they couldn't see how it would all work out. It's like they were saying, okay, God, I trust you, even though I have no idea what you're doing. Exactly.

And you know what? Hebrews is calling us to the same kind of faith. Whoa, that's a high calling, to live with that kind of trust, that kind of boldness. It is.

But it's also exciting, isn't it? To think that we can partner with God in this way. It's definitely not a boring way to live. Right.

DeSilva argues that Hebrews is challenging us to move beyond a faith that's just theoretical. It's calling us to a faith that impacts our lives, our choices, our actions. It's a faith that dares to believe that God is who he says he is.

And that he will do what he promised, even when things look bleak. That's powerful. And it leads us to another idea that deSilva unpacks.

Inheritance. Hebrews talks about inheriting God's promises, entering into his rest. Okay.

Inheritance and rest. Those sound pretty good. What does deSilva say about them? Well, he explains that these ideas are rooted in that Old Testament imagery.

You know, Israel finally entering the promised land. After all those years of wandering in the wilderness. Yeah.

But in Hebrews, the inheritance isn't just some physical place. It's a spiritual reality. So it's not about real estate in heaven.

Nope. It's about experiencing God's presence, his blessing, his shalom, truly experiencing it in our lives. So it's like we're on this journey, this pilgrimage towards something much bigger than ourselves.

Towards an inheritance, a heavenly rest that transcends our circumstances. I like that. It gives a whole new meaning to the idea of heaven.

It does. And you know what? DeSilva emphasizes that this journey takes perseverance, takes that confident expectation we were talking about earlier. So we can't just sit back and wait for it to happen.

Nope. We got to keep moving forward, even when it's tough, trusting that God will get us to our destination. So it's not about earning our inheritance.

It's about trusting God to lead us there. You got it. And here's another crucial piece.

Community. Oh yeah. Hebrews talks a lot about that, doesn't it? The importance of encouraging each other.

It does. Because this whole pilgrimage thing is not meant to be a solo trip. We need each other.

We weren't meant to go it alone. Right. We need that support, that encouragement.

Someone to remind us of the truth when we start to doubt. And to pick us up when we fall down. Because let's face it, we all fall down sometimes.

We do. And deSilva highlights how Hebrews keeps emphasizing that. Gathering together, spurring each other on towards love and good deeds.

It's in community that we truly get to experience what it means to be God's people. It's like we're all in this together, running the race of faith as a team. I like that image.

It's not about competition. It's about collaboration. Exactly.

And this whole emphasis on community, it also ties in with that concept of better hope. It's not just about me and my salvation. It's about us.

Right. It's about God's people being redeemed together. This is really expanding my understanding of faith.

It's so much more than just believing the right things. It's about living it out, persevering, supporting each other. And pressing on toward that inheritance, that incredible experience of God's presence.

Wow. What a journey. It is.

And you know what? DeSilva then takes us into the final chapters of Hebrews. That's where the author wraps it all up, bringing everything together. Okay.

Time for the grand finale. What does deSilva highlight in these last chapters? It's all about approaching God's throne with boldness. Boldness.

We can just waltz right up to God and say, hey, what's up? Well, not exactly. It's not about being arrogant or anything. It's about confidence.

A deep assurance that we're loved and accepted by God because of Jesus. So it's not about us being awesome. It's about Jesus being awesome.

Right. And because of what he's done, we can come to God without fear or shame. We're welcomed with open arms.

That's a beautiful image. It is. But if we can approach God with that kind of boldness, does that change how we live? That's a great question.

And it's one that we'll tackle as we move into part three of our deep dive. Okay. So this idea of approaching God's throne with boldness, it's exhilarating and a little scary all at the same time.

But how does it actually play out in real life? You know, in the nitty-gritty of everyday stuff? Yeah, that's where it gets real. And deSilva, he does a great job of bringing those big theological ideas down to earth, connecting them to our everyday lives. Right.

Because it's easy to get lost in the abstract stuff. It is. And remember, the people who first read Hebrews were facing some serious challenges: persecution, social pressure.

Yeah. Like the temptation to just give up and go back to the way things were. Exactly.

This idea of boldness, it wasn't just some nice theory for them. It was a lifeline. It was about survival.

Right. They needed that unshakable confidence to keep going, to stay true to their faith. Yeah.

And deSilva, he really emphasizes that this boldness, it's not about arrogance. It's not about thinking we're better than everyone else. No, not at all.

It's not about strutting around like we've got it all figured out. It's about a deep assurance. An assurance that comes from knowing Jesus.

Knowing who he is and what he's done for us. So it's not about us earning our way into God's favor. It's about resting in what Jesus has already done.

You got it. It's about that bedrock of grace. But how does that affect how we treat others? How does it play out in our relationships? That's a good question.

Does it change how we interact with the people around us? Well, deSilva points out that Hebrews encourages its readers to keep going, to hold fast to their faith, to not give up on doing good. Even when it's hard. Especially when it's hard.

This boldness turns into action. It becomes a life that's marked by love and service, even when it's tough. So it's about staying the course, even when we face opposition or when people try to discourage us.

Right. It's about not compromising our faith just because it's easier. It's about letting that inner confidence, that boldness shape our actions in the world.

It makes me think of all those stories we hear about people who faced incredible challenges but never wavered in their faith. They just kept going no matter what. Yeah, exactly.

And deSilva says it's perseverance. It's not fueled by fear or obligation, but by gratitude. Gratitude for God's grace.

Yes. It's like a response to that incredible love that rescued us. That love, it transforms us.

It changes us from the inside out. And it motivates us to love others, to actually do good in the world. That's what I love about the book of Hebrews.

It's not just about escaping this world and going to heaven. It's about bringing heaven to earth. Yes.

It's about letting our light shine, letting that transformation be seen. Living out that new covenant written on our hearts. Showing the world what God's grace can do.

DeSilva really emphasizes that. He says that Hebrews paints this picture of a community that embodies that better hope. A community that loves extravagantly, sticks together through trials, and lives out its faith with that boldness.

Exactly. A community that points others to the source of its hope. This has been such an incredible journey.

We've covered so much ground. Melchizedek, Jesus's priesthood, the new covenant, perseverance, community, that better hope. Wow.

It's a lot to take in. It is. But deSilva reminds us that it's a journey that continues.

The message of Hebrews, it's not just for those first-century believers. It's for us too. It's for anyone who's trying to follow Jesus in a world that doesn't always understand.

Absolutely. And as we wrap up, I keep coming back to that question deSilva leaves us with. What does it mean for us to live as people of better hope? How do we take all of this and actually put it into practice? That's the challenge, isn't it? To move beyond just knowing about it to actually living it out.

It's a call to action, to embody that confident expectation, to persevere, to love each other, to lean into that grace and to be bold. Not because we're perfect. But because we know who holds us, who loves us.

And because we know what he's done. Beautifully said. It's about reflecting God's heart to a world that needs it so desperately.

Folks, that's a wrap for today's deep dive. We've covered a lot of ground, but hopefully you're leaving with a renewed sense of wonder and a deeper understanding of that better hope we have in Christ. And hopefully you're ready to live it out.

So until next time, keep exploring, keep questioning, and keep diving deep into the mysteries of faith.