

## LOVE THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

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Series: **LOVEFIRST**

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Love, Jesus, Priest, King

Hebrews 5:5-10, Hebrews 7:12-13, Genesis 14:17-20

In February of 2006, a research scientist named Jeff Hann completely changed the way I looked at technology. Hann was a presenter at TED, an annual conference that gathers some of the brightest minds in the world and is focused on sharing new ideas and technology.

At TED 2006, Jeff Hann gave an eight minute and forty-five second presentation that stunned the TED crowd. What he presented was something he and his team had been working on for years. It was an intuitive touch interface for computing devices. And that might sound super geeky and unexciting, but the crowd at TED understood one thing as they watched Jeff Hann move things around on a screen with his hands. *This changes everything.*

As I watched the video of Hann using two fingers to make things larger or smaller, to zoom in and out, to rotate things and look at them from a different angle. That same thought was being shouted in my head. *This changes everything.*

Remember, this was 2006, when the only way we interacted with machines was through buttons and keyboards and mice. The idea that you could just touch the screen to do what you wanted to do was unheard of. Not only did it change everything, but it was obvious, I think, to most people who viewed that presentation that the first company who could jump on this new multi-touch technology and create a usable device with it would make a *whole lot* of money, and could potentially change the tech world forever.

Just under a year later, one company did just that. The company was called Apple, and in a keynote address in January of 2007, the founder and CEO of Apple, Steve Jobs, stood on stage and unveiled something that had been speculated for months - the iPhone. But what almost no one expected was what the iPhone *didn't* have. No keyboard. Almost no buttons. No stylus.

Just a year after Jeff Hann's mind-blowing presentation at TED, Steve Jobs held the results of Hann's research in his hand. And nearly everyone who watched that keynote presentation walked away thinking the same thing: *This changes everything.*

And it did. The original iPhone sold over 6 million units, even though it was far more expensive than other phones on the market, even though some critics slammed it for not having a physical keyboard, even though it had a big piece of glass on the front that was prone to crack. The iPhone sold over 6 million units because it completely changed the game in the phone world. No more tiny screens, no more tiny buttons. One big screen with a touch interface that just a year earlier seemed impossible.

Companies who had been making phones for years scrambled to come up with an answer for the iPhone. Some of the biggest players in the mobile phone market at the time are now, only 8 years later, just also-rans in the sector. Companies like Motorola, Nokia, and RIM (makers of the BlackBerry) were never able to come up with an answer to the iPhone.

Meanwhile, other companies started getting into the multi-touch phone mix. Today, we have touchscreen phones and tablets all over the place. You can buy a touchscreen tablet for 3,500 shillings - everybody is making touchscreen everything. The technology world changed with Jeff Hann's research and multi-touch interface. The mobile phone world forever changed when Apple introduced the iPhone.

It's been said that systems typically move along quite slowly and predictably, but every so often, in every system, a seismic shift takes place that completely upsets the system and either pushes it backwards, propels it forward, or completely changes the direction. And when we're caught up in those seismic shifts, we take it in and we say, "This changes everything."

The church is no different. Throughout history, there have been these kinds of shifts within the church. Some of them, you could see coming. Others were completely unexpected. I think of Martin Luther, and his protest against the Catholic church - that was a seismic shift in the church, and it upset things for quite some time, but it propelled the church in a new direction.

But, without a doubt, the greatest shift in the history of the church came in the form of a man named Jesus - a man about whom those who met him would say, "This changes everything."

I'm going to wrap up our **LOVEFIRST** series this morning. For six weeks, we've been talking about the love of God. We've looked at how God's love restores, how it's a love we can trust, how it brings hope, it empowers, and it endures. Today, I want to talk about how God's love brought a seismic shift to the way we view God, the church, and other people. I want to take about "Love That Changes Everything."

But before I do, I want to pray that God will open our eyes, ears, and hearts to what he has for us this morning.

## Prayer

If you happened to be here for our very first weekly celebration back on February 15<sup>th</sup>, you'll remember that I talked a bit about Lent. Lent is the six week period leading up to Easter when we sort of focus more intently on Jesus' life, his teachings, and ultimately, his death and resurrection.

Some of us have spent this time fasting - or denying ourselves some kind of food or other luxury - as a reminder that other things should command our focus and devotion. And over the course of this time, our Sunday mornings here have revolved around some readings - some portions of the bible - that are part of what is called the lectionary. These are passages that are sort of scheduled to be read, studied, and preached on throughout the year.

There are actually lectionary readings for the entire year, which I won't always use on Sunday mornings, but I thought during Lent, it might be nice to teach on some of the same things that other pastors around the world are also teaching on. In some way, we have a chance to join in unity with all kinds of different churches all over the world when we do this.

So, each week, I've taken some of the lectionary readings for that week, and I've tried to talk about them. What did they mean in their original context. What do they mean for us. How do they reveal a certain characteristic of God and his love.

So, even though I haven't talked about Lent each week, I've kind of snuck it in on you!

And I say all that to say, we are still in the midst of this Lenten season, and we are beginning to peer forward toward what is the most significant day in the history of God and man. In just two weeks time, we'll celebrate Easter together, and it's an incredible opportunity to invite people to Trinity. Even people who don't go to church *ever* will probably come on Easter if you invite them.

So, make that part of your Lenten commitment - to invite someone to church on Easter. Chances are they'll say yes.

But *why* is Easter so important? Why is *Jesus* so important?

This is a question that was being asked in the first century by many people, not least of whom were the Jewish people who were hearing wild claims that this guy Jesus was the long-awaited Savior - the Messiah - the one the ancient prophets had said would come and save the world.

And there's a book in the bible - a book called Hebrews - that was written expressly to this group of people to try to help them understand how this Jesus guy could possibly be who his followers said he was.

The author of the book of Hebrews attempts to do a bit of what I've tried to do over the course of this series. If you've been here the past several weeks, you know that each week, I've made an attempt to show how Jesus, his life, his actions, his words, all tie into a much larger story of God and his people.

We've looked at Jesus' life and how it links back to ancient stories, prophecies, and poems. We've talked about some of the history that led to and foreshadowed Jesus' life. And some of you have commented on how great it is to be able to put some of those pieces together in your minds - to begin to get the bigger picture of scripture.

And if it's important for us, a bunch of people from around the world gathered in a tent in 2015, how much more important would it have been for the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews who had been waiting for generations for the Messiah?

So, the book of Hebrews was written in an attempt to connect all of those ancient prophecies and stories and traditions with the story of this guy called Jesus.

From a literary perspective, the book of Hebrews is beautiful. Those who have the ability to read it in the original language call it a literary masterpiece - perhaps the finest in all the bible. But it's more than good wordcraft. The book of Hebrews successfully connects the Old Testament and the New Testament - the story of God and the people of Israel with the story of Jesus.

As you read through the book of Hebrews, you find distinctly Jewish themes. The book reads very differently from the rest of the New Testament, because it was written for a very specific audience and in a very specific manner.

One of the themes that appears throughout the book is one of Jesus as High Priest.

In the Jewish world - both ancient and modern - the priest has a very important role. The priest actually serves as kind of a go-between - a liaison between God and man. In the first century Jewish world, the priest at the temple was the one who would offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. He was the one the people looked to for instruction from God. It was a very important role.

And one of the themes that the author of Hebrews tries to drive home is that Jesus has become the High Priest of the temple. Let's take a look at part of what is said in the book. Hebrews chapter 5, verse 5-10:

*In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,*

*“You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.”*

*And he says in another place,*

*“You are a priest forever,  
in the order of Melchizedek.”*

*During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.*

*Hebrews 5:5-10*

By way of a little housekeeping, whenever I read a phrase like “In the same way,” I have to ask myself, “In the same way as what? *In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest.*”

In the same way as what? For that, we can look back at verse 1 of this same chapter that says:

*Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.*

*Hebrews 5:1*

So, in the same way that high priests are selected and appointed, the author is saying, Jesus was also selected and appointed. *In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest.* Instead, God selected him and appointed him. And we have a couple of examples of God, sort of, doing that.

*But God said to him,*

*“You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.”*

*And he says in another place,*

*“You are a priest forever,  
in the order of Melchizedek.”*

*Hebrews 5:5b-6*

Now, that begs the question: Who in the world is Melchizedek? Well, I can tell you this: that is one fine name. There are a couple of women in the church here who are pregnant right

now. Just keep that name in mind for your coming baby. Melchizedek. I really think it could work for a boy or a girl, so, you know, at our first baby dedication, I expect to have *at least* one Melchizedek in the bunch.

But, who was Melchizedek, and what made him so special that his name would be mentioned here?

This is where we have to dig back into Jewish history. Again, the writer of Hebrews was writing about stuff that the majority of Jews at the time would have known. We, however, might not be as enlightened to the nuances of Jewish history, so we have to go look stuff up.

And if you look stuff up about Melchizedek, you might be a little disappointed. The truth is, we don't know a ton about this guy. Some of what we do know is found in the first book of the bible - the book of Genesis, chapter 14 tells us a bit about him.

*After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).*

*Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying,*

*"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,*

*Creator of heaven and earth.*

*And praise be to God Most High,*

*who delivered your enemies into your hand."*

*Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

*Genesis 14:17-20*

So, basically, this guy Abram, who we've talked about a couple of times here recently, goes out and fights a battle against the guy with the long funny name and his allies. Then, when he comes back from that battle, the king of Sodom is there and he's super happy that his enemies have been defeated, but Abram's a little leery of this guy, and we read later, that he doesn't really want anything from the king of Sodom. He kind of feels like anything that comes from this guy comes with strings attached.

Fortunately, Abram doesn't have to accept any gifts or even food from this guy, because another king named Melchizedek comes along and gives Abram bread and wine - he gives him the sustenance he needs and saves him from having to accept these kind of tarnished gifts from the king of Sodom.

And we're told that Melchizedek was the king of Salem *and* the priest of the Most High God. This is kind of an unusual combo - like being the president and the pope. It's a different sort of vocation.

The author of the book of Hebrews gives us a little more info on Melchizedek in chapter 7, verses 2-3:

*First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.*

*Hebrews 7:2-3*

OK, what’s that about? Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life? As crazy as that sounds - you know, like this guy just sort of materialized out of thin air one day - what most biblical scholars say is that the writer seems to actually be indicating here that Melchizedek’s genealogy wasn’t recorded. His lineage wasn’t on record. His birthday and day of death weren’t written down anywhere. And that’s kind of a big deal for a king and priest. He had these two really important roles - held both positions simultaneously - but wasn’t, sort of, “officially important” enough to have his vital information written down.

And we’re told he resembles the Son of God - meaning Jesus. In what way does he resemble Jesus? Jesus actually had a genealogy. He had mother and father. He had a birthday and a day of death. All of it had been recorded. So how are Melchizedek and Jesus alike? What is the author of Hebrews getting at here?

There are a couple of ways.

First, remember I said that it was unusual for someone to be both king and priest. Yet, what we’re being told here is that Jesus is just that - he is the king of all creation - of everything. He is also the high priest of God. He’s both. The ultimate authority in earthly and heavenly matters.

Second, when Jesus is called a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, this should be understood as standing in contrast to a typical priest of the day. You see, from almost the beginning of the nation of Israel, the priests who served in the temple were all from the same lineage - the same tribe. They were Levites, decedents of a guy named Aaron. Not all Levites were priests, but all priests were Levites - generation after generation after generation of them.

But Jesus wasn't a Levite. And we need to understand what a big deal this was. Jesus was the wrong tribe to be priest. Jesus, I've mentioned before, was from a very respected line - from the line of the famous king David - part of the tribe of Judah. It was a good lineage for a king, but not for a priest.

What the writer of Hebrews is saying here is, "Jesus is High Priest, nonetheless." He says, "Remember Melchizedek? He wasn't a Levite either - he couldn't have been because there *were* no Levites then. Yet he was the High Priest of the Most High God." He's setting a precedent for this idea that Jesus could be priest even though he wasn't a Levite.

So, there are some parallels here between Jesus and Melchizedek. He was both king and priest. He was not from the priestly tribe of Levites. And you can imagine that these things would be really important for a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew to wrestle with - that there was some precedent for Jesus being who he was said to be.

By why does it matter to you and me? What difference does it make to us?

First, I think it's important because Jesus upends existing thinking about how God works. Existing, prevalent thought is a powerful thing. It actually informs our actions much more than facts. We read facts through the lenses of our preconceived notions - which are strongly tied to our emotions.

Have you ever gotten into a discussion...or maybe an argument...where you and the person you were arguing with read or saw or heard the *exact same thing* but interpreted it in completely different ways? How is that possible? Shouldn't we read facts and come away with the same conclusions?

But we don't. And the reason we don't is because we're really bad at separating our feelings, our traditions, and our preconceived notions from the facts in front of us. We respond emotionally even when we should respond with reason.

In his book *The Righteous Mind*, author Jonathan Haidt called this "The Elephant and the Rider." He says that our ability to reason is kind of like a little jockey trying to ride the elephant of our emotions. Ultimately, if the elephant decides to lean in one direction, the rider will go that way, too. If the elephant decides to move, the rider will go with it. You see, our reasoning very often is a little jockey riding on the back of that enormous elephant of emotions - and perhaps nowhere is that more evident than in religious thought.

And the reason that it should really matter to us that Jesus is the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek is that it completely upended the existing thought of the day. It removed artificial requirements for vocational service in the place of worship. It changed the definition



of what a real king looks like. It broke down barriers between Jew and Gentile, because this guy Melchizedek existed long before there was any such separation.

Melchizedek was around before the nation of Israel. He was around before the temple. What Melchizedek represents is a type of priesthood and a type of church that is not exclusive to one people group, but is open to others and a leadership that is reliant on appointment by God, rather than tribal affiliation.

Not only that, but I think it gives us hope, too, that some of *our* existing ways of thinking of God might yet be upended. I have a feeling that God has a few more ridiculously loving surprises in store for us feeble-minded humans - that he is not finished upending our emotionally-charged religious thinking.

I think that's good news. I want God to upend my thinking about some things. And I think it's important that we recognize how he's done that in the past and that we expect him to do it in the future.

Why else does it matter - this idea of Jesus being king and priest?

Very simply, I think it speaks to a new kind of authority. You know, Jesus was king and priest, but he wasn't either of those things in the way those offices were understood at the time. Jesus never physically sat in charge of the kingdom of Israel. He also never took the position as High Priest in the temple. So, if he was those things, then it was in a different way than people expected, and in a way I think is really relevant to us.

What this passage says to me is that kings and presidents and prime ministers will come and go, but through it all, Jesus is king. Popes and prophets and evangelists and pastors will come and go, but above all, Jesus is the High Priest. *This changes everything.*

This means that Jesus is my authority in *everything* - he's not only the head of the church, but the head of the kingdom which encompasses all of life. Submitting to his authority means surrendering to him control of every part of me - every part of my life.

Lastly, and this is a bit more abstract, but I think this whole king/priest thing is important to us because it represents the beginning of new life. We're told here that the old way of doing things has passed - that there is a new order here.

The author of Hebrews actually spells it out later in chapter 7, starting in verse 11:

*If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood—and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood—why was there still need for another priest*

*to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also.*

*Hebrews 7:11-12*

The *law* must be changed. That's a big deal. That's, like, the rock upon which people built their whole existence and their ways of thinking about God. And now we read that it has been changed by Jesus becoming king.

You know, Jesus described his death this way: He said that when a seed falls to the ground and dies, it gives birth to many seeds. Death that leads to life. That's how Jesus described his own death. And what Jesus represents is not only the death of a person, but the death of a religious and social philosophy that exalted one people group above all others. That's kind of a big deal.

And I look around here and I see that Jesus' death actually led to life here and now. That the death of those old ways of thinking led to life for some of us who wouldn't have been considered worthy under that old law. That his priesthood not only had massive implications for Jews in the first century, but for all people the world over forever.

Now, I don't know about you, but this is a picture of Jesus that is pretty exciting to me. It's a picture that upends existing ways of thinking, establishes a new (and perfect) authority, not only in spiritual matters, but in *all* matters, and it brings life to all people the world over. *This changes everything.*

We've talked for the last 6 weeks about the love of God. We've talked about what it means for us and what it means for the world. But I wonder if you've really taken it all in.

Do you know that the God of the universe - the Most High God of all creation - loves *you*? That statement alone, when fully understood, should rock your world. He loves you even at your worst. He loves you when you don't feel worthy of love. He also loves you when you're full of yourself, when you think you're too good for him, when you're riding high.

He's there in the highs and lows, the lightness and darkness, the good and the bad. He will never leave you or forsake you. His love is unconditional, unhindered, and unrelenting. He wants nothing more than to fill you to overflowing with his grace, to infuse you with his hope, to shower you with his love...and for you to do the same for others.

Receiving God's love in its fullness, and then reflecting that to others - *that changes everything.*

I'm going to close today with a time of personal response. And there are 4 ways we would ask you to consider responding:

## 1. Singing

We're going to sing a few songs that help us reflect on God's love.

While that singing is taking place, you will also have the opportunity for prayer.

## 2. Prayer

If you need prayer for anything - maybe you heard something today that made you think, or maybe you or someone you know has a physical, emotional, spiritual, or other need. Whatever the case, if you would like someone to pray with you, we have people here who are eager to do that.

Also, while that is going on, you'll have a chance to take communion

## 3. Communion

Communion is a symbolic act, instituted by Jesus as a way for us to remember him. The unleavened bread serves as a symbol of Jesus' body broken on the cross. The wine or juice symbolize his blood that was spilled for us. Over here, we have people ready to serve you communion. Juice is on your left, wine is on your right. Feel free to partake of either, as it fits with your tradition. Just break off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup, and eat.

We offer communion each week for *anyone* who wants to take it. There's no membership requirement or hoops to jump through. You are guests at this symbolic table of Jesus, so please feel free to partake.

## 4. Giving

Lastly, during this time, you will have an opportunity to give financially to the work of this church. If you're a guest with us today, we don't expect you to give anything. However, for those who consider this your church home, and for those who believe in what we're trying to do here, this is our chance to give back to God a portion of what he has given us, and to support the work he has called this church to in Nakuru.

There is a tall box at the back with a slot in it. You can place your gifts in that box at any time as we are singing together.

So those are the four ways to respond: Singing, Prayer, Communion, and Giving. All will be happening simultaneously. There's no order you have to do them in. You don't have to do them all. You don't have to do any of them. This is your time to respond in whatever way you desire.

At the end of that time, I'll pray a prayer of blessing over you before you go.

**Closing Prayer**