

Following Jesus

Do what the High Priest asks you

Hebrews 12:28-13:6 and Mathew. 25:31-46

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Sources:

Hebrews 5:1-10, 7:1-3, 12:28-13:6

Mathew 25:31-46; 7:8

Following Jesus... A subject we explore each week looking for practical applications, and today we continue this journey. But first something totally different. I want to start with a question. Who is acquainted with a child asking you the “why” question? And not just once, but over-and-over-and-over-and-over again... I usually don’t mind them asking me why because it shows they’re really curious and interested to learn but after the 12th or even 15th time “why” a line is about to be crossed... ;-)

And still, the “why” question is a very valuable question. An important question to use because without it we won’t be able to grasp the reason or cause to our situation and tribulations in live. Asking “why” can give you valuable insights especially when you get in depth answers. But answering a “why” question isn’t always easy. How do you explain a child where her little brother or sister comes from? Or why do we suffer so much violence in this world, like last Friday with the attacks in Paris where more than a hundred people were killed? Just because some people can’t stand other people, why does this happen? Today I won’t address this violence question with you but I want to take a step back in our journey. Why do we need to follow Jesus and what does Jesus ask us to do when we want to follow Him? Sheet 2

Why is it important for people to choose for Jesus and even more direct: why is Jesus himself so important? What is His role in your and my life? And if we’ve figured out why Jesus and following Him is so important we’ll directly step into what Jesus asks from us when following Him. Let us first read Mathew 25:31-46.

1.1 Why is Jesus so important for you and me?

Here in Mathew we read about Jesus telling us that it is important to choose for Him and what He expects from us when we want to follow Him. But first I want to address the “why” question about why is Jesus so important. For this we need to go all the way back to Genesis!

In Genesis, after the first chapter about the creation of the earth, the third chapter about the fall into sin by Adam and Eve, moving through to the destruction of all living things on earth (except for Noah, his family and pairs of each type of animal) by flooding the earth in chapter 6 and 7 and reading on to the dispersion of men by scattering their language in chapter 11, we arrive in chapter 14. Here several wars are being fought with one of them Abram rescuing his nephew Lot and it is in this chapter where we find our first piece of the puzzle in answering “why is Jesus so important”. In this chapter all of a sudden a priest, a priest of the God Most High, appears, blessing Abram. We read in Genesis 14:17 : “Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ He gave him a tenth of all.”

After all these stories with destruction and dispersion we all of a sudden meet a priest. A priest of God Most High and... Abram acts as if it is the most normal thing in the whole world. Until then we find no record of any priest in the Bible. And here all of a sudden a priest appears and disappears. Who is this Melchizedek? Not until Psalm 110 before Melchizedek is mentioned again. And not just mentioned, but this Psalm, written by David, speaking of the upcoming King Jesus, links Jesus to Melchizedek stating: “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever

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According to the order of Melchizedek.” But then, he disappears again... But who is this Melchizedek and why is Jesus compared to Melchizedek and above all, what has Melchizedek to do with our question “Why is Jesus so important”

1.2 Jezus as High Priest

It's not until the book of Hebrews in the New Testament that we hear of Melchizedek again. And this time we get a closer look into who he was and what his role is in answering the question of “Why is Jesus so important”. If we look at Melchizedek in Hebrews we learn that there are two reasons why Jesus is compared to him. First of all Melchizedek is a priest and not just a priest, Melchizedek is a high priest. [Sheet 2.1](#)

We don't need an in-depth study for now since we're handed the abbreviation of what it means to be a High Priest in Hebrews 5:1: “For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;”. A High Priest is placed between us and God to mediate and restore our relationship with God by bringing God the gifts and sacrifices needed to cover up our sins. God has created this position of High Priest after the Fall and in Genesis 14 is the first place in the Bible we read of this position. Even though it is for us the first place to read about a High Priest it was apparently already common and normal for Abram since his reaction shows that Abram is familiar with the position of Melchizedek. He even knew how to react by giving the High Priest 10% of what possessions he regained during battle for his nephew Lot. A principle we see applied to the Jewish nation and the role of priest for the Levites. The Jews needed to give tenths (tithes) of their income from their labor to the Levites to supply in their living. And from this same tribe a High Priest would be appointed to mediate between God and the Jews. And as we see this principle was apparently already common in Abram's life, a High Priest to mediate God and the people and this was Melchizedek's role, mediator between God and men.

[Sheet 2.2](#)

But there's more that made this Melchizedek special. Melchizedek is called a High Priest forever. What this means about his life here on earth is not really clear, but Hebrews 7:3 shed some light on this: “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.” [Sheet 2.3](#)

This makes Melchizedek stand out compared to the High Priest from the Levites, because every Levite would die and a new High Priest would be appointed, where Melchizedek is a priest “perpetually”, forever a mediator between God and men.

These are the two reasons why Melchizedek is important in our quest to finding the answer on “why is Jesus important”: Melchizedek is a mediator between God and men in his role as High Priest and Melchizedek never died, he is a mediator forever.

In other words: we, as people on earth, need a mediator to restore what goes wrong in our relation with God. So after the Fall God appointed somebody to fulfill this role and this mediator needed to do so by bringing offerings to God on our behalf and this is still a valid construction, better said the only construction, today to restore our relationship with God. We cannot correct what we did wrong, somebody, appointed by God, needs to mediate for us. And that's where we find our answer to “why is Jesus so important” and why David, through the Holy Spirit, says that Jesus is a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. [Sheet 2.4](#)

Jesus is our mediator, forever! But it doesn't stop there. There is more to why is Jesus so important. Jesus is not only our mediator, Jesus also changed the role of this mediator a High Priest.

Throughout the Old Testament a High Priest would first bring offerings for his own sin before he could do so for the Jewish nation. In this way (and order) he would restore the relationship between the Jews and God. Jesus changed this multifold: He not only does not have to offer for his own sin, because Jesus is simply without sin, secondly Jesus IS our offering to God. By dying on the cross and being victorious over death Jesus became our offer to God. And if that was not enough: since Jesus overcame death He is our mediator and offer FOREVER. [Sheet 2.5](#)

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So whenever you make a mistake, we can by faith go to Jesus to ask forgiveness for them and Jesus through Jesus we will receive forgiveness because Jesus is our High Priest and offer for God. Jezus is our mediator and offer forever. Because of this Jesus can save you and me, forever! And that's why we read in Hebrews 7:25-27: "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."

Following Jesus means that we have a mediator in Jesus with God forever! And because Jesus gave his life as offer as well we don't need to bring one anymore when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. This is the answer to "why is Jesus important". He can save you and me because Jesus is our High Priest, Jesus is our mediator and Jesus is our offering forever and ever. Hopefully this also gave you some insight into standard Christian and Jewish terms like Savior, Offering an priests.

1.3 What does Jesus as our High Priest asks from us?

We just answered the why question to "why is Jesus so important?". We did this by going through Hebrews. Hebrews is for many a difficult book to read, compared to the other Bible books, simply because it's not a letter or a historic narrative. It's written in a style more commonly used in synagogues and since we as non-Jews are not that familiar with this style it can be hard to read. BUT it contains valuable information about what God wants to tell us. Like it explained the role of Jesus clearly it doesn't stop there. It continues with the question "what does Jesus ask from you?". What does Jesus, as High Priest, asks us this very day? Because being saved by Jesus, accepting Him in your life as your Lord and Savior is just a starting point. Then your life as a follower of Jesus takes off and usually with a lot of questions. How should I live my life, do I need to change things and how is Jesus going to help me with this? In other words: what does Jesus as our High Priest asks us to do? [Sheet 3](#)

1.3.1 The correct focus

Following Jesus start with a clear and above all correct focus. Like in your daily life you know what you want but making decisions isn't always easy to do so, making it harder to determine if we really want it. For instance I want more peace and quiet time in my live, for me and my family but I also need to work to earn my living and on top off that we still want to go on a holiday this year. So we need the extra money as well but at the same time it isn't going that well at my job but switching doesn't make it directly that much easier. What should I do? If there was anyone who could tell me the right decisions and what steps I need to take, that would make it so much easier. [Sheet 3.1](#)

Following Jesus can be just like this. What do I want and what does Jesus ask from me? What should I do, how should I do it? Luckily Jesus himself gives us the answer to this exact question. First of all with a general, but o so important mission statement. A statement to give you focus. In short Jesus says in Mark 12:29-31: "Love God with all you heart, soul, mind and with all your strength and love your neighbors as yourself." A very clear statement: Love. ACTIVE love towards God and everybody around you! [Sheet 3.2](#) Focus is necessary because it will show you whether or not something is important or not and this will help you to make the correct decisions. Due to this focus one thing will become more important than the other. Because this one thing will bring you closer to your goal: Living your live as a follower of Jesus. Later on we'll briefly come back to this topic of correct focus.

1.3.2 Actively acting with passion for the other

For now we'll dig a bit deeper into the how question, how does this love, this active love, look like? How should I show this, through what should I express this? How should people recognize me as a follower of Jesus? Jesus is very clear about this and also VERY direct and hard! In Matthew 25:41

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Jesus says: ""Then He will also say to those on His left, ' Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;"

When you do not believe in Jesus and you do not restore you relationship with God, you'll be punished forever. But if you do believe in Jesus you'll receive eternal live in the presence of God! This is very hard and confronting and a topic usually avoided because it's hard to explain to non-believers who are looking for Christ to tell them that if they do not decide this same God that send Jesus will also be the same God who'll punish them forever if they make the wrong decision, said aside for what will happen to all their friends and family who do not believe in Jesus (as yet).

And stil... In the same passage we read a call, clear call, to everybody who believes in Jesus. A call from Jesus to spread his love and a call in which attitude and intention are the key ingredients to showing this active love. Jesus asks us, his believers, to show His love with PASSION to the world, to everybody around us. Like Solomon in Proverbs and Paul in Romans state we, as followers of Jesus, are called to spread the love of Jesus and his message of grace and salvation with a seriousness and a passion because the lives of everybody how do not believe as yet, depend on it! And that's exactly the passion that Jesus is asking us. In Proverbs 24:11 we read "Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold them back." We, as followers of Jesus, need to care in such a way about the people around us that if we do not tell them and show them the love of Jesus that they are doomed to die. Paul states this very clearly in Romans 10:1: "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation." My heart's desire, from the bottom of my heart...Sheet 3.3

People who do not believe in Jesus are sentenced to one thing: death. This punishment that awaits them is so severe that God doesn't want us to receive so He gave us the solution through his only Son Jesus Christ, our mediator, High Priest and Savior. Like Solomon, Paul and Jesus we need to take up the work that Jesus asks us to do with the same passion and attitude for salvation of everybody! Now we have focus and passion, but still, practical, what should we be doing for Jesus?

Together with the prayer as mentioned by Paul in Romans 10:1 it is Jesus who gives us the answer to this in Mathew 25. Jesus says: "For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me. ' 37 Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You? ' 40 The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me. '" Sheet 3.4

Give the people around us food, water, clothing and go visit them when they're sick or in prison! A very clear and practical assignment to show our "neighbors" the people around us, who Jesus is and what his love and life means for us and for them. And even though it's a very practical assignment many of us take it and just send money to the people who're passionate about visiting people who are sick, in prison or are hungry and thirsty... But Jesus gave us this assignment not for others; he gave them to YOU and ME! Because doing these activities means we need to take our time and energy to invest in people. Of course it takes money as well, but that's not the point here. It's about you and me using our time and energy to actively care about the people around us. And with actively, Jesus really means actively: we need to visit them; we need to go out, kook, buy or make clothes and bring this to the people in need. And why? Because care and love are not shown from a distance, but you experience love and care from a close distance. An arm on you shoulder, comfort in hardship times and a listening ear, an uplifting conversation, just plain looking after each other. And by doing this we start building relationships with the other and essentially that is how Jesus tells

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us to show His love to each other, brothers and sisters but ESPECIALLY people who are still lost and heading for eternal life without God. Sheet 3.4

This is extra emphasized in Hebrews. Show you love and care to each other like it was yourself in trouble. Love you neighbors as yourself really means that we need to act if we are the once in suffering. What would have done to you when you sick, hungry, thirsty or in prison? Hebrews says: "Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body." Of like how Jesus Himself says in Mathew 7:12: "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

And Hebrews continues about approach with passion and attitude: do not only take care for people who are not close to you, better yet start as close as possible with taking care of relationships: start with your partner! Hebrews 13:4 starts with: "Marriage is to be held in honor among all,..." This means looking after each other not only during the good times but especially during the hard times when there's pressure from work, family and other situations. Because if you do not watch out and take care of each other then the other will look for care and love somewhere else. And this is not an excuse for somebody to do so, because Hebrews is very clear about who looks for attention outside their marriage "...and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge..."

Sadly, more than often this starts with one of the two being neglected so please do not let there be any reason for the other to feel neglected. Take care of your partner as you want to be taken care of in your relation and since man and woman differ: please talk, how hard this may seem to be and please give the other room to talk or express him- or herself.

And to make the emphasis complete and to make sure we understand what it is about Hebrews tells us what we are not to pursue: money and all what it can buy. Hebrews is very clear on this as well in verse 5 and 6: "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,' 6 so that we confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'

Because if we pursue money and material things we simply do not have the time and the energy to put effort in what's really important: relationship with each other! Jesus as our High Priest is not only our mediator and savior but also calls upon us to show his love, his passion and our time with each other. And this needs to be visible, tangible, and feelable (for a lack of better word) for the other. And so we get focus and approach together in showing our active love for each other and choices will be easier, clearer and more effective. Active love for God and each other shows itself in time and effort addressed to it, so instead of all those extra office hours, go home and spend time with each other with the people who care about you. Instead of looking for your own comfort and material things take the time and start relationships with people who are in need by visiting them and taking care of them.

1.3.3 What can I expect from Jesus as a High Priest

We just went over Why is Jesus important and if we want to follow Him how can we do that in a practical way so I want to close off with a little but very important "side-note". In everything, but really EVERYTHING that Jesus asks us to do there are always two things you must not forget: Jesus promises you and me that he will bless us and the others abundantly beyond we can think or pray for and Jesus promises us He will always help us! Giving us strength, wisdom, insight, comfort and growth through the Holy Spirit and praying for us wherever and whatever we go and undertake for Him. Sheet 4

This means that we may and must expect Jesus to be on our side. This makes Jesus so much more than the perpetual High Priest! Jesus is always standing next to you, every day, every challenge, every difficult situation, every victory, every tear, every laugh, every moment: Jesus stands next to

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you! And where necessary: He will carry you! Jesus promises He will fight the spiritual battles with his angels for us. Sheet 4.1 So whenever the going gets tough and everything seems to fail, when we're stuck in our old habits and when it seems we're not able to rise above: Jesus will intervene for us. As long as our heart longs for Him then He will fight the battles for us from which we do not seem to overcome. Sheet 4.2

There's a beautiful drama video of this "little but so very important side-note". Not the best quality since it's over 9 years old but it shows how Jesus made us, intended us to live and more importantly wants to set us free for the life He has intended us to live! Jesus will always take care of you and me! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyheJ480LYA>

Is there anything right now in your life troubling you? Do you want to do what Jesus your High Priest asks from you but you find it hard to get free, to get out of your daily habits and already busy schedule? Or do you know people who are wrestling with this or do you want to thank God because He just helped you getting through such a situation? Then I want to invite you in silent prayer, (if present the open altar) and go to Jesus expressing these tears, fears, struggles, wishes, longings, thanks and glory: bring it all to Him and ask Jesus to help you! I will close with prayer afterwards.