

Two Blessings

Genesis 14:17-24

I noted the struggle I had in preaching a couple weeks ago from the first part of Genesis 14, because the apparent subject of the first 16 verses is military strategy. The verses describe the war of the kings. There was a confederation of four kings which conquered great amounts of territory, subjecting the five kings of the Jordan plains to slavery for twelve years. Then those five kings united and rebelled, and were subsequently crushed. The King of Sodom was one of the defeated kings, and Abraham's nephew Lot was carried off into exile and imprisonment.

Abraham found out about that disaster, and sent 318 of his men in an expedition to free Lot. Those few men, with the strength and blessing of God, routed those five victorious kings, "attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. 16 So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people."

I really worked hard at not letting that sermon be reduced to a description of military strategy, and I hope that the sermon was helpful. We studied the wicked rebellion of men, the destruction they will experience, and God's gracious deliverance for his people. But actually, the text we studied last time is inseparably connected to our text this morning. I believe that the reason why that military conflict is recorded for us in Scripture is because it gives the context for the very profound event we have before us this morning.

So please connect what I have to say this morning with the passage last time. Abraham has returned victorious from battle. And something very typical and quite expected happened to him.

Other kings came to him with tribute, with their blessings to give him in honor of his great success over that oppressive confederation of kings.

Actually, two kings come to Abraham to bless him, but their blessings couldn't be any more different. For Abraham, at this point, as one commentator writes, "the harder battle begins, for there is a profound contrast between the two kings who come to meet him." There is Melchizedek, the King of Salem. And there is the King of Sodom. We'll look first at the King of Sodom.

v.17

v.21

What did Abraham do? Well, it is accurate to say that he responds in faith. But perhaps, surprisingly,

I. IN FAITH, ABRAHAM REJECTS THE BLESSING OFFERED BY THE KING OF SODOM.

v.22-24

Now, we should see this as a genuine offer by the King of Sodom. It was, in a sense, a business offer. It was a generous offer, by a king who himself had been humiliated in battle and had fled to the safety of those tar pits. The King of Sodom must have greatly rejoiced to hear that Abraham defeated that confederation of four kings. He must have felt a great sense of gratitude, and probably some satisfaction of vengeance. His enemy had been defeated, so he comes to honor the man who brought about that defeat.

He offers him all the spoils of the victory, all the goods that the kings had taken from Sodom, no doubt a great deal of wealth. He wanted his own people back from their imprisonment, but all the booty would be Abraham's to keep.

But therein is the great problem with this offer. And the great danger of it. It was a blessing of worldly wealth. Only worldly wealth.

A. The blessing offered to Abraham had only worldly value.

Money, things, possessions, riches, wealth, gold and silver, precious garments, weapons, cattle, etc. Things of great value. But only when measured by the standards of this world.

Now, in one sense, Abraham could have properly accepted this gift. He could have justly accepted the spoils of a great victory, particularly when they are so specifically offered to him. It was his due, the appropriate reward for winning the battle.

But Abraham had a much higher road to travel. His conquest was not in pursuit of worldly treasures. His blessing would come only from God, he would prosper only as a result of God's blessing. And he would have no man contribute to his wealth, most especially a man of the moral degeneracy of the King of Sodom!

Simply put, the acceptance of this gift from a man who ruled a city whose citizens are described as men who "were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD" would have seriously impugned and questioned Abraham's own spiritual standing. Abraham's conviction to stay separate from the wickedness of Sodom by rejecting the offer of the King is deep-rooted, so deep-rooted that we see that,

B. The blessing offered to Abraham actually contradicted God's call.

This is a serious situation.

"I have taken a vow," Abraham said. "I have raised my hand to the Lord." "I have taken an oath. So Abraham would take nothing, not even a single thread, so great was his concern to obey God's call. Abraham would accept nothing extra, no spoils, no booty.

And why? Because of God's call! And what was God's call? It was the call to leave his home, and to accept GOD'S blessing!

Gen. 12:1 "Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing."

God said to Abraham, "I will bless you." And if Abraham accepted this worldly blessing from the King of Sodom, he would be denying God's blessing.

There are some very important applications for us from all of that. Primarily, this should remind us of the importance of seeking God's blessing, and ultimately, God's blessing alone! Paul explains that priority in characteristically plain words,

1Cor. 4:3 "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord."

Similarly, the danger of seeking man's blessing is apparent in the words of,

Gal. 1:10 "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ."

We must continually be examining our motives, and continually re-focus our thoughts so that we, like Abraham, do not seek the blessing of man. For ultimately, like Abraham, the blessings of men actually contradict God's calling upon our lives.

So seek after the greater blessing, the spiritual blessing offered by God. That blessing is reflected in the appearance of that most mysterious of all biblical characters, Melchizedek. In all my years of study, this particular man still intrigues me the most. Who is he? Some say he is Shem, the son of Noah who was the patriarch of this whole line of God's people, likely still alive in Abraham's day. But there is no proof of that. Others say he is actually Jesus Christ himself, appearing in the OT prior to his actual incarnation. But again, no direct proof.

In verse 18, Melchizedek is called the King of Salem, likely an abbreviation for the King of Jerusalem. In Hebrew, Salem, or shalom, means peace, so he could be called the king of peace. And in Hebrew, the name Melchizedek is literally translated, the King of Righteousness. He was a man, a king. And also, as we'll see, a priest.

More importantly, as we will see, he is a type of Jesus Christ. And as such, offers to Abraham the great blessing of God. This time, Abraham accepts.

II. IN FAITH, ABRAHAM ACCEPTS THE BLESSING OFFERED BY THE KING OF SALEM.

Initially, the King offers genuine fellowship, food rations for the weary soldiers.

v.18a

But we immediately learn something about Melchizedek,
v.18b "He was priest of God Most High."

He was a priest, the first priest mentioned in the Bible. And he is a true priest, for it says that he was "priest of God Most High." That's a very significant name for God, in Hebrew, El Elyon, God the most high. That name stresses the absolute superiority of God to the multitude of gods and goddesses worshiped in Canaan. Melchizedek knows this one true God, the God of the Hebrews, the God of Abraham, for he identifies him correctly as "Creator of heaven and earth." He is the one true and living God.

Now, how and when Melchizedek got this knowledge we don't know. But he clearly knows and serves the same God as Abraham, and Abraham recognizes that, using this same identification of God when he speaks to the King of Sodom,
v.22

So the king of Salem was priest of God Most High. Therefore, the blessing he offers had great value, spiritual value. Though, admittedly, only spiritual value.

A. The blessing offered to Abraham had only spiritual value. There was no money attached to these words. Therefore, with the direct contrast to that offered by the king of Sodom, Abraham accepts this blessing.
v.19

And there is a very obvious definition of why this blessing had such spiritual value. The blessing is focused on the giver, not on the receiver. In other words, this blessing is focused on God, not Abraham.

B. The blessing offered to Abraham was focused upon God.

"Blessed be Abraham," Melchizedek says. But even more so,
v.20

You see, Abraham was not the center of this praise. Abraham was not being exalted. The God of Abraham was being exalted. Melchizedek's blessing is in every way what it should be: it ascribes glory to God and lets Abraham appear merely as what he is, an instrument God determined to use. The focus of the blessing is upon God.

I can't stress the importance of that enough, nor emphasize clearly enough just how practical this is. It's a situation that all of us face frequently. It comes to us in the form of receiving compliments. A compliment is a form of blessing. How do you respond when you receive a compliment, when you are praised?

Well, many Christians, having been taught humility, actually deny compliments. They are uncomfortable receiving praise, they don't believe themselves worthy of such a blessing, and refuse to accept it. They reject all praise, thinking themselves unworthy.

The world calls that low self-esteem, and comes up with the solution of learning how to love yourself, so that you can accept praise from others. But that's an empty solution, and harmful. The solution is not to build your own pride, but to learn to receive blessing and praise as Abraham did, with the appropriate blessing upon God. Compliments, or blessings that we receive, should actually be expressions of thanksgiving to God.

We should learn to give, and receive, compliments and blessings that are ultimately focused on God. There are plenty of examples,

Rom. 1:8 "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."

"I thank God for you." That is the greatest blessing you could ever hear!

1Cor. 1:4 "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus."

Phil. 1:3 "I thank my God every time I remember you."

Col. 1:3 "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints."

1Ths. 1:2 "We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

2Ths. 1:3 "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing."

There are other examples. The point is, we must learn to give and receive such blessings, blessings which focus on God, not on man!

Too often these days, the solution to man's problems is so often defined in terms of learning to focus on yourself. Never is that more obvious than in the theories of self-love. But those blessings are empty, for you can't bless yourself and be strengthened. Emotional or spiritual strength doesn't come by praising yourself. Instead, the blessing has to come from others, and all of us live with the sense of needing to be loved and accepted. But even so, that blessing from others can't be focused on us, either. It has to be focused on God.

So learn to give those blessings to others, others whom you

love and appreciate. Thank God for other people, and communicate such blessings to those people for whom you are thankful. And accept such blessing from others. In fact, make it your ambition for God to receive blessing because of you.

In other words, don't do good things so that you will be praised. Do good things so that God will be praised, and work with all of your might to get rid of this terrible preoccupation our society has with the self. In everything we do, may our focus be upon God. Upon his praise and his glory, even as we bless other people.

So this blessing, offered by the King of Salem, by Melchizedek, was a blessing focused on God.

But there's more. Actually, this passage might have remained obscure if there had hadn't been references to Melchizedek recorded later in Scripture. And those references refer to Jesus, for Melchizedek becomes perhaps the greatest type of Jesus presented in the OT.

First, the reference in Psalm 110. David's words, speaking clearly about Jesus Christ,

Ps. 110:1 "The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.""

Then in verse 4, words that equally clearly speak of Christ, Ps. 110:4 "The LORD has sworn And will not relent, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."

And if that weren't clear enough, turn to the book of Hebrews. Hebr. 5:4 "And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to

Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." 6 As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."

And then,

Heb.6:19 "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. 1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace," 3 without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually. 4 Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. 5 And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; 6 but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. 8 Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. 9 Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, 10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him."

As clearly as anyone else in the whole OT, Melchizedek points to Jesus Christ. And Abraham understands that.

III. IN FAITH, ABRAHAM RECOGNIZES THE SUPERIORITY OF MELCHIZEDEK.

That superiority is made clear in,

Heb.7:6 "...but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better."

The lessor person, Abraham, is blessed by the greater, Melchizedek. How is that expressed in Genesis 14?

v.20b "And he gave him a tithe of all."

Melchizedek came to bless Abraham, and Abraham honored him as the greater. He honored Melchizedek as a priest, demonstrating that God's law was already written upon his heart, the laws that would later be written down by Moses. The law of the priesthood. The law of the tithe!

The priests of the temple were to be supported by the tithes of God's people. Thus, by giving his tithe,

A. Abraham recognizes the priesthood of Melchizedek.

And that's the superiority I've spoken about. Hebrews 7 makes such a big deal about that superiority, for the whole point of that chapter is to explain the priesthood of Jesus, and how superior it is to the priesthood of Levi. You see, in the OT, priests were in the line of Levi. Only the descendants of Levi could become temple priests, and their priesthood depended completely upon their physical ancestry.

But that priesthood was passing away. It was temporary. Not so the priesthood of Jesus. His was eternal, permanent. And so with Jesus, the OT system of the priesthood passes away, and we get something better.

Again from Hebrews, we read in,

Hebr. 7:18 "For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, 19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. 20 And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath 21 (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: "The LORD has sworn And will not relent, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek' "), 22 by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant."

Hebr. 7:23 "Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever."

Simply put, the priestly order of Melchizedek is superior to the priestly order of Levi, and would replace it, for,

B. The priesthood of Melchizedek represents the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

And that's why this is so crucial. Genesis 14 is all about Jesus. Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High, teaches us all about Jesus.

Again, in,

Heb.7:14 “For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. 15 And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest 16 who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. 17 For He testifies: “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.””

Don’t miss the practical applications of all of this. I don’t want to get you all confused with the references to orders of priests. The point is, we have a priest, one who intercedes for us before God. And because of our sin, we need that priest, a priest who, “is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” We need a priest who “does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people, [but who] sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.”

We have such a priest. And what is the direct application, that which should comfort and encourage your souls this morning, even as you consider your own sinfulness?

Hebr. 4:14 “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Heb.7:25 “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

And let me explain clearly to you just how practical this is. This priest has, by the one sacrifice of his own life, paid for all of your sins. And you, therefore, in Christ, are forgiven.

Heb.10:14 “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. 15 But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, 16 “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” 17 then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

It goes on, and even gets better. Great promises for us. Great encouragement.

Hebr. 10:18 “Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. 19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”

With that great encouragement, draw near Jesus as your worship him this morning, for through faith in Jesus Christ, you have been cleansed. In Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. For he is your priest, the priest of God Most High. “[D]raw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having [y]our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and [y]our bodies washed with pure water.”