

THE MOST INTERESTING MAN IN THE WORLD

(Genesis 14) Our subject today is -- the most interesting man in the world – or at least one of them. We looked at this portion of the history of Abraham a couple of weeks back but did not have time to complete it. We saved the best part of it for today. To set our reading in context you should know that war had arisen in the land of Canaan where Abraham was living. His nephew, Lot, who was living in the city of Sodom was carried off by the victorious armies of the East. Possibly, Lot's lot, was God's way of disciplining his servant. In choosing to live in Sodom, with its corrupt moral climate, Lot had put himself and his children in the way of undue temptation. They were surrounded by wickedness. And the fact is that if you lie down with dogs you may rise up with fleas, even if you aren't a dog yourself. That is what happens for Lot. He was a good guy in the midst of bad guys. On occasions good guys go into such places to be agents of change, but Lot went there to get rich and guess what happens? Lot suffers. He was taken away with all his possessions and things looked very bleak until our hero, Abraham Do-Right, comes on the scene. When Abram found out what happened he decided he could not sit back and be Abram Do-Nothing. He had to do the right thing, the bold thing, the risky thing. He took his SWAT team and went to fetch Lot back home, and, by the help of God, he did it. In triumph, Abram brings home the captives, and their possessions and the spoils of battle. And as he comes home he is met by two kings - one is the king of Sodom, and one is the king of Salem. Last time we covered the interaction with Sodom's king, so this morning we focus on the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek. **17-20** *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.*

The firmly entrenched leader of the great nation of Russia is President Vladimir Putin. The story goes that one day Putin was late to a meeting and he told his chauffeur to step on it, but the chauffeur would not drive fast enough to please his boss. Putin urged him on, but when he failed to get the kind of speed he was looking for, Putin made his chauffeur stop the car and

trade places with him. The president took the wheel and really put the pedal to the metal. But as he was speeding along he was caught by a Russian patrol car that pulled him over. There were two officers in the car and the one got out and approached the limousine to write up a citation. When he returned to his police car his partner asked, “Well, did you give him a ticket?” The officer shook his head and said, “Oh no, the person in that car is way too important for a ticket?” “Oh really,” says the partner, “who is it? The officer said, “I don’t know, but President Putin is his chauffeur.” It is understood that the lesser does the driving for the greater. In the same way, Hebrews chapter 7 verse 7 makes this comment on the blessing of Abraham by Melchizedek **7** *without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.*

Wow! That tells us that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham. That seventh chapter of Hebrews, in verse **4** (NIV) *Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!* Think how great this man is - greater than father Abraham. That’s really something. This Melchizedek is both one of the greatest and least known Biblical characters. We read of him only here in Genesis 15, once in Psalm 110, and then at some length in the New Testament book of Hebrews. It is there in Hebrews 7 that we are shown the greatness of Melchizedek. **4-10** (NIV) *Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! 5 Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. 6 This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. 8 In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. 9 One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, 10 because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.* Wow, wow, wow. Melchizedek is held in very high esteem. So great he is that he is the blesser, not the blessee of Abraham.

One of my personal biological traits is a tendency to sneeze when I step out into bright sunlight. Often on Sunday when I leave this building or when I walk to my car I will sneeze as I get into the sunlight. If I am around others when I sneeze they often say, “Bless you.” My once clever but very worn-out response is to say, “Hey, that’s my job!” I’m the clergyman, I’m the religious professional. The implication is that blessing is done by the “superior” party. I’m just kidding when I say it but as you read the Scriptures you generally find that to be true. It is

parents who bless children. It is the priests who bless the people. And Hebrews 7 tells us that this is the rule. Point being that Melchizedek was considered, in some way, greater than even Abraham. That is a high position indeed. So we see first that Melchizedek was a great man.

Secondly, we see that he was a mysterious man. He is sort of like Darth Vader. Or is he Anakin Skywalker? Where did he come from? Who is he? He sort of comes out of nowhere and then vanishes with so little mention of him. And what is said is perplexing. He is called the *King of Salem*. Some think that Salem, which means “peace” is an early form of the name *Jerusalem*, which means “the city of peace.” We don’t know. Salem is an essentially unknown ancient city, if it was a real city at all. Then he is called a priest of God Most High. How did he even know about the true God? How does he become a believer in the midst of this pagan land? How does he get to be a priest? This is the first mention of anyone holding that office. Who recognized his priesthood? How did Abram know that he was truly a priest of God? And why did Melchizedek get chosen over Abram to be the priest? Then there is the name of this mysterious man. *Melchizedek* means *the king of righteousness*. Was this a family name or a nickname? Was he born with it or reborn with it? Why have none of us named a son this? The questions about Melchizedek just go on and on. Rather than explain the mysteries the Bible actually multiplies them. Look at Hebrews 7 again. **1-3** (NIV) *This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, 2 and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” 3 Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.* What is all that about? No parents, no beginning? A perpetual priest? Melchizedek is the ultimate mystery man.

Thirdly, we see that Melchizedek was a king. As I said, we don’t know exactly what he was king of. Salem or peace? Was it a place or a state of mind? Most believe it was really a place, a city. Melchizedek would have been one of those monarchical mayors. He is one of two kings that came out to meet Abraham after his victory. There was the king of Sodom and the king of Salem. The king of wickedness and the king of righteousness. Who got the warm reception from Abe? It was Melchizedek. Abraham accepted the blessing of God over the blessing of the world. That raises the question of whose blessing you are after?

Fourthly, see that Melchizedek was a priest. Now this is a rare combination. King and priest. It is thought that such a dual role was one of the ideas behind the order of Melchizedek spoken of in Hebrews. Hebrews 7:**11** (NIV) *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?* Now among the tribes of Israel there was a kingly tribe and a priestly tribe. The kingly tribe was Judah, and the priestly tribe was Levi. The Messiah of God was to hold not just one but both offices: king and priest. How could he do it? Which tribe would he come from? The answer is the tribe of Judah, the kingly tribe. But that leaves us asking, “how then can he serve us as priest?” In the Old Testament the two offices were separate. Kings could not offer sacrifices. Only the Levites were allowed, but with Jesus his rights to the priesthood came in another way - namely thru the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 7:**14-17** (NIV) *For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. 15 And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, 16 one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is declared: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”* All that is about the Lord Jesus. He is in the priestly line of Melchizedek. Hmm. That seems to have something to do with being both king and priest. It also seems to have something to do with being immortal. Hebrews 7:16 spoke of the power of an indestructible life. Hebrews goes on to suggest that this is another thing that made Melchizedek and his order special. **23-24** (NLT) *There were many priests under the old system, for death prevented them from remaining in office. 24 But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever.* To be a permanent priest you first have to be a permanent person. That is maybe what Melchizedek was. It certainly is what Jesus is **28** (NIV) *For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.*

Alright, we are getting into our fifth point about Melchizedek which is that he was Christ-like. ® In Hebrews he is compared to Jesus. Some interpreters have, for very good reasons, actually held that Melchizedek is a preincarnation form of the Son of God. He is without question a type of Jesus, a parallel figure intended to point to Jesus. His names move us that way don't they? *King of Righteousness. King of Peace.* The words of Hebrews 7:3 moves us

that way. 3 *Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.* If you take that literally you have no way to conclude anything other than that Melchizedek was the son of God himself. No parents? No beginning? No end? The receiver of tithes? The perpetual priest? Was this mystery man, not a man at all, but an unusual expression of deity? That's too hard to call, but he certainly points us to Jesus. To whom shall we look for blessing? To whom do we give our tithes? Where do we find a priest of God Most High? His name is Jesus, the king of Righteousness, the king of Peace.

Years ago there was a TV show that I saw on just a few occasions, but that fascinated me tremendously. It featured Steve Allen, the former Tonight show host, and was called *The Meeting of the Minds*. It used a talk show format with Steve Allen as host but the guests were great figures from history. You may have a show that featured Galileo, Joan of Arc and Martin Luther, all obviously played by actors. And the writers of the show had fun imagining the dialogues that would go on between these great persons. Well, in Genesis 14 we read about such a meeting that actually did take place. The encounter of the great Abraham with the great Melchizedek. I have a hunch that both of these men would point to this providentially arranged meeting as a highlight in their lives. Abraham and Melchizedek were both men who had this extraordinary relationship with God. What a sense of wonder must have surrounded their conversation with one another.

We aren't given details of their interaction but the record mentions three things which occurred. We will look at them under three heads: the money, the ministry and the meal. The money refers to the payment of a tithe to Melchizedek. Verse 20 says that Abe gave Melchizedek a tenth of all that he took from the battle. Interesting! This is the first time in Scripture we encounter the tithe. It later became the law for Israel under Moses, but the concept was somehow known prior to Moses. The point of the tithe is to be a tribute to the Lord who is seen as the provider of all. The idea pre-dates the Mosaic law. That is why some New Testament pastors and teachers claim that tithing is just as relevant for us as it was for Old Testament believers. It is not put forth in the New Testament as a requirement upon Christians but the concept itself seems to transcend covenantal divisions. We honor God as our Provider by returning to Him a tenth of what becomes ours. This return to the Lord is made via those appointed as his representatives. In the Old Testament that was the priests. In the New

Testament that would be the elders of the church. 4000 years ago Abraham had a bumper sticker on his camels that said, "If you love Jesus tithe. Anybody can honk." This man was not only the father of those who have faith, he was also the father of those who tithe. If you want to walk in the blessing of Abraham, tithing is yet another way to do that as it is certainly a way to honor God, to express trust in Him and to bless others in His name. What do you say?

The second thing that occurred between Abe and Melchizedek was the ministry. Verse 19 says that Melchizedek came out and blessed Abraham. 19-20 *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. This was a verbal act by the Priestly King, but the blessing goes beyond mere words. It is a calling down of divine favor. We read often of blessings in the Scripture. They are powerful forms of communication. I expect in this case that Melchizedek's purpose was to honor and encourage Abram. Words such as these can have a powerful effect upon their recipients. Some of you can testify of times when someone special to you said something special to you or about you that never left you and brought strength to your soul. When I was 13 I had a favorite youth pastor who was leaving our church to go off to seminary and on his last night at our church he took me aside and said, "Dan, I believe the Lord is going to use you in a tremendous way." It was his form of blessing and it did bless. My mother also many times spoke words of blessing into my life. This is preeminently the role of parents or those who become parental substitutes in the lives of others. Don't miss the opportunity to pronounce a benediction. Special blessings are usually suitable for special occasions: birthday, graduations, weddings. In Abraham's case it was the special occasion of a great triumph in war and in faith. The victory over the four kings set Abram up to do great good, but also made him vulnerable to new temptations. He was about to become very popular with the world, a dangerous position, but because his soul had been filled from his time with Melchizedek the allurements of Sodom held no attraction. When we know we have the blessing of God we can more easily part with the treasures of Sodom.

Thirdly and finally, let's look at the meal. 18 *Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High.* Does this remind you of anything we do in church? The Lord's Supper maybe? He brought out bread and wine. In this story there is a primitive blessing, a primitive tithe and there is too a primitive communion service. Bread is the symbol of life and God is the source of life. Wine is the symbol of joy and God is the source

of joy. In a more dramatic way they represent the body and blood of the Savior who came to give us His life, that we might know His joy. The sharing in bread and wine implies fellowship, it implies communion of soul. Here it is communion between Abram and Melchizedek, but there is at least one other with them. That is the invisible, but very real, presence of Christ. At the end of a week's battles we come to this meeting with God and his servants to be filled to overflowing with the sweetness of Christ. And once we are filled with Him and filled by Him the temptations of the world become far less formidable.

So, whether you come out of a week filled with victories, or a week marked by defeat the Lord has called you to this place to meet with him, to have your wounds healed, your courage bolstered and your eyes fixed upon the one and only King of Righteousness and King of Peace. Let's pray as we come to the table of the Lord.

Prayer (some God is speaking to about tithing, some about blessing with words, all of us to feed our souls with the meal of God's kindness)