

Heb. 7:1-3; Gen. 14:17-24 The Blessings of Ancient Worship

And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all – Gen. 14:19,20

In our last study we looked at the character of Melchizedek. We're told in v. 4 to *consider how great this man [was], unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils*. In our study today I would like to look at the event that is being referred to by Paul – i.e. the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek.

In this event we find Melchizedek coming to meet Abraham. We find Melchizedek providing bread and wine for Abraham and those that are with him. We find Melchizedek blessing Abraham and we find Abraham giving a tithe of his spoils to Melchizedek. I think it would be fair to say that in this meeting between Melchizedek and Abraham we find an example of ancient worship.

Worship is foundational to Christianity. Calvin once made the remark that the two things that stand forth chiefly in the Christian religion are the knowledge of true worship and the knowledge of salvation. And he mentioned worship first because he viewed salvation as not an end in itself but a means to an end – the end being worship. Christ saves us, in other words, that we might worship Him.

I've been viewing recently a DVD series of lectures on the subject of marriage by Dr. Paul Tripp of 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. We want to try to arrange a time frame for the showing of these lectures to our families here at the church. One of the things that impressed me about these lectures is that Dr. Tripp advances the notion that the foundation for marriage is not romance or the mutual benefit that spouses may gain from each other or the propagation of children – the foundation of marriage is worship, he says. And the failure to recognize that basic truth is a leading factor in marriage problems.

Now when we read through our Bibles, we notice that over the course of many hundreds, even thousands of years worship has been manifested in a variety of ways. Animal sacrifices have been a part of worship since the garden of Eden when God Himself provided a covering for Adam and Eve's nakedness through the slaying of animals. Abel offered the right kind of sacrifice – it was a blood sacrifice and Cain did not. Cain, instead thought he could offer the fruits of his own efforts by offering what he had grown and we're told in Gen. 4:4,5 that *the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering; But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect*.

Eventually the offering of animal sacrifices would become the function of the Levitical priest. Although at the time of Melchizedek it was not. We have a number of instances of Abraham building altars and offering sacrifices to God. Today, of course, we do not offer such sacrifices. New Testament worship has changed in form. Christ predicted such a change to the woman at the well when He told of that hour to come in which Jerusalem

would no longer be the central place of worship. The bomb, I mentioned last week, that Paul is dropping in Heb. 7 tells us that the form Levitical worship was rendered obsolete. *For the priesthood being changed, he says in v. 4 there is made of necessity a change also of the law.*

So worship has changed throughout the course of history as far as the form of it is concerned and yet, having said that, there are some aspects of worship that have not changed. There are some aspects of worship that transcend the ages. And these are the things that I want to bring to your attention this morning from the meeting of Melchizedek with Abraham. We could analyze this meeting between these two men by noting the elements and effects of ancient worship, but I want to take a more simple approach by simply noting:

The Blessings of Ancient Worship

And I use the term *blessings* very deliberately because I want you to be able to view your worship of Christ as a blessing. There are many, you know, that view worship as a duty, and it certainly is a duty. Some view it, unfortunately, as a duty that must be grudgingly performed. They drag themselves out of bed on a Sunday morning and view the day as a burden but a burden that must be borne because God requires it. So they force themselves through the motions of getting out of bed on Sunday.

And following the strenuous effort (ironically on a day of rest) of getting everybody ready for church they somehow manage and when they arrive at the place of worship it takes an equally strenuous effort to engage in worship, singing the psalms and hymns through stifled yawns, straining to pay attention to the sermon while eyelids become insurmountably heavy but through great strain and strong resolve they manage to perform their duty all the while looking forward to their afternoon nap.

Oh that we would learn to approach worship as a blessing, rather than a grudgingly performed duty. Perhaps if we understand, better, the blessings of worship we'll be able to approach worship each Lord's Day with a greater sense of expectancy of God's blessing. That is certainly my aim, today, to equip you to approach the worship of Christ positively.

What then are the blessings of ancient worship?

I. The Blessing of Meeting with God

Note what it says in Heb. 7:1 how *Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him.*

Melchizedek met Abraham. There was personal contact and communion between them. And Abraham knew and respected the office of Melchizedek as a priest of the most high God. I think there's a sense in which Christ's statement in Jn. 8:56 could be applied to this meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek where Christ says: *Abraham rejoiced to see my day and he saw it and was glad.*

In meeting Melchizedek Abraham was seeing Christ's day by seeing one that typified Christ and by seeing one that represented the superior order of priesthood that Christ would take to Himself. There was a seeing of Christ's day by receiving the blessing from Melchizedek and there was a seeing of Christ's day in Abraham's paying of tithes.

And underlying this meeting between Melchizedek and Abraham was the seeing of God's hand in the tremendous victory that had been gained by Abraham against the federation of kings that had captured Abraham's nephew, Lot. *Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth* Melchizedek says in Gen. 14:19 *And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand.*

Are we not reminded in this meeting between Melchizedek and Abraham that in our gathering together to worship Christ there is, or there certainly should be, a meeting between us and our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ? Just as Melchizedek came to meet Abraham, so does Christ, our high priest, come to meet with His people.

I've said it often, and it's based on the truth of Christ's promise that where two or three are gathered in His name then He is present in the midst of His people. This is the primary blessing of our worship. We meet with Christ. It is the presence of Christ that makes the feast, so to speak. It is the presence of Christ that compels us to bow and worship. It is the presence of Christ that makes the meeting worth while.

And could I say here that this truth of meeting with Christ ought to govern our expectations and preparation in the place of worship. I remember listening to a sermon by Joel Beeke some time ago that addressed the matter of parents helping to prepare their children for worship. And one of the most effective ways for parents to instill in their children a right sense of reverence and a right sense of expectancy is to stress to your children that we're going to church to meet with Christ!

And if parents themselves are governed by that kind of anticipation and will communicate that anticipation to their children then certainly the children will catch on to what church is all about. It's the blessing of meeting and worshipping our Lord. It's the blessing of learning of Him and hearing from Him and offering to Him our praise and thanksgiving.

Why do we go to church? That's a good question to pose to your children as a sort of catechism question that could be asked each Sunday. And the simple and short answer to the question is that we go to church to meet with Christ. And though we don't see Him with our fleshly eyes yet we see Him with eyes of faith. And we know that He'll be there to meet with us because He has promised in His word to meet with us. This is what lifts our worship out of the doldrums and infuses into it the fire of spiritual vitality. We meet with our Savior.

And would you note from the narrative in Genesis something else that applies to our worship as well. The occasion for worship in the case of Melchizedek and Abraham was the great victory that had been wrought by God for Abraham. *Blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand*, we read in Gen. 14:20. And this

was indeed a great victory wrought by God. Abraham and 318 of his servants had gone against a confederacy of 4 kings which had just put down a rebellion of 5 kings. It reminds me of the 300 man army of Gideon which also defeated a confederation of rulers whose armies were as numerous as the sand by the sea, and why? It was because God gave His people the victory.

And why do we come to church to meet with our Savior, Jesus Christ? This is the next Sunday morning catechism question you could formulate for your children. And the reason is simple and sublime. We go to church to meet with our Savior because our Savior has given us great victory. He's given us the victory over sin, and over death. He's given us the victory over the devil and over hell and over the world. We go to church in order to shout hallelujah! Christ has given me the victory.

I dare say that if these simple truths will govern our going to church – the truths of meeting with Christ because of the occasion of the victory gained by Christ then our worship experience will be a blessed experience and we'll be spared from the drudgery of forced and compliant worship.

So the first blessing of ancient worship is the blessing of a meeting between Christ and men. Melchizedek typified the greater high priest to come. And this blessing of ancient worship ought to share something in common with our modern day worship. We, too, meet with Christ. But would you consider with me next that not only is the blessing of ancient worship the blessing of meeting with Christ but there's also:

II. The Blessing of Receiving from Christ

Gen. 14:18 tells us that when he met Abram returning from the slaughter that *Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he [was] the priest of the most high God.*

He brought forth bread and wine. The literal idea here is that Melchizedek provided food and drink for Abram and his army. You can well imagine the haste with which this army was put together and the effort that was put forth to advance upon this confederation of kings and then overtake them and defeat them. Food and drink never are high priorities when the urgency of a matter is pressing hard but they become high priorities once the task is accomplished when there's time at last to listen to your hunger pangs.

What a blessing, then, when one comes out to meet you who so generously ministers to the pressing need of hunger and thirst being satisfied. You may remember, if you know the historical narrative of 1Samuel, that one of the foolish things that King Saul did was to impose a fast upon his soldiers until his enemies were defeated. And once the task had been accomplished the soldiers were so famished that they *flew upon the spoil, and took sheep, and oxen, and calves, and slew them on the ground; and the people did eat them with the blood* (1Sam. 14:32). Saul's lack of leadership skills led the people into sin.

But in Abraham's victory bread and wine were provided to satisfy Abraham's victorious band of servants. But not only did Melchizedek bless Abraham's army with material

provision but he blessed them with a spiritual benediction as well: *Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand.*

This scene certainly depicts for us the spiritual analogy of our worship today. In our worship we receive from Christ the food and drink that are essential for our spiritual nourishment and soul satisfaction. And while the bread and wine that Melchizedek provided for Abraham's men is emblematic of food and drink it can certainly be regarded as spiritually emblematic of the food and drink that we receive when we meet to worship Christ. So we read in Jn. 6:54-56 *Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.*

Here is how we know eternal life not only in life's duration but in life's highest form or quality – we eat the flesh of Christ and we drink the blood of Christ which is tantamount to saying that we feed on Christ by faith, we affectionately meditate on His suffering and death and in the process take in spiritual nourishment to our souls.

Isn't a blessing that in our worship of Christ, Christ utilizes the occasion to take care of His sheep. Three times he pressed the matter upon Peter while Peter was being restored to fellowship with Christ *if you love me* Christ said in effect, *feed my sheep*. And of course you know the account in Acts 6 of a dispute that arose in the early church about the neglect of some of the Grecian widows in the daily ministration of temporal food. The apostles guarded the priority of their ministry by saying in Acts 6:4 *we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word*. The ministry of the word corresponds to feeding the sheep.

And so we see another great blessing that takes place in our worship. Our souls are fed. The bread and wine of God's word is ministered to our souls. And here again if parents know this and appreciate this then it should aid them in teaching their children what to expect and how to behave in church.

Why do we go to church? We go because we're going to meet with Christ and we go because we're going to hear the word of God. Does that govern your sense of expectancy? Can your children detect in you the anticipated blessing of hearing the word of God read and preached so that your soul is fed by Christ?

Too many of the Lord's people, I'm afraid, view the reading and preaching of God's word from a purely academic point of view. And especially does this seem to be the case in Reformed circles. Many of us have our "hero theologians" so to speak. And we use the occasion of the preaching of God's word to approve or disapprove of the preacher and the sermon depending on closely he aligned himself with my heroes or my point of view and the whole thing becomes dry and academic and critical.

But when the preacher has sought the Lord for a word and the Lord has given the word and the word goes forth with the witness of the Spirit and the Spirit makes the application

to each heart need as He sees each heart need then the Lord Himself is ministering to souls and heart needs are met and the people of God are built up in the faith and their love and zeal for the glory of Christ grows. It grows because they've met with Christ and they've received from Christ the very things that were needful for them.

So worship is meant to be and should be a great blessing to the people of God. The mark of a genuine believer is that he sees the value of worship and he senses his need to worship and he comes to appreciate that the practice of worship is indeed a great blessing and not a burden.

Would you consider with me next, yet another element of ancient worship:

III. The Blessing of Giving To Christ

Our text in Hebrews tells us in v. 2 that *Abraham gave a tenth part of all*. I realize that many preachers would utilize this text to go into a series of messages on the subject of tithing. I'm not going to do that. The thought in fact occurred to me that of all the messages I've ever preached I don't know that I've devoted even an entire message to this subject. I have nearly 400 sermons uploaded onto sermonaudio and none of them are on this subject.

You can understand how it would be a difficult subject for a preacher to address for what seem to be the reasons of his own self interest. But as Lloyd-Jones points out in his book on preaching, the value of preaching through a book is that it forces the preacher to deal with topics he might not otherwise deal with. And it keeps him from repetitiously thumping his own favorite doctrines.

What I want to do in closing this morning is simply look at this practice in the broader setting of giving to Christ. Tithing is a way that we give to Christ. And Christ is more interested in the giving of ourselves to Him than He is in merely giving a portion of what we earn back to Him. This is yet another blessing that we enjoy in our worship. We have occasion to give to God. We have occasion to give ourselves or present ourselves to God. It might be argued that giving to God is the very essence of our worship. In Rom. 12:1 we read *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, [which is] your reasonable service*. And the word *service* is a word that could be translated *worship*.

I can still remember a Baptist preacher of old who use to emphasize the truth that if you have not presented yourself to God then you have not truly worshipped. That really puts worship in a different light, doesn't it? How many people look for churches the way a person looks for a used car? He studies the features and checks the tires and the mileage and is then interested in the price. He wants to get the most for his money. And churches are sought the same way. What kind of features or programs does a church have? What kind of worship style do they utilize? And perhaps most importantly how much of the world will they allow me to have. This stands in stark contrast, doesn't it, to viewing church as a place to give rather than to receive.

Think about that for a moment. God doesn't need anything we have but He's pleased to accept our giving when our giving is offered on the altar of Christ Himself. I love the verses in 2Cor. 8:7,8 *Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.*

Here is the blessing of being able to prove to God, or really to prove to ourselves I should say, that we trust in God, we believe in Christ and now we have a means to prove the sincerity of our love to Christ. There is an acknowledgement in our giving that we recognize God to be our provider and we recognize our dependency upon God and we have the faith to say that we know that God will undertake for us in our every need.

I choose not to go into the issues of whether or not a person should give a tenth of his gross income or his net income. My advice to those that find the practice difficult and perhaps even impossible because of other binding financial obligations is to at least do something. When the Lord fed the 5,000 He utilized but a few loaves of bread and a few fishes and the Lord multiplied the loaves and the fishes and fed all. You could call that form of miracle a mediate miracle which means simply that the Lord used something and created more from that something. He didn't multiply the loaves and the fish out of nothing – He could have done that – but He chose to utilize something.

And it's the same with the Lord's provision for His people. He is pleased to utilize what we give Him and multiply it and use it for His glory. So it becomes important that we give something. And this is the blessing of our worship, not the burden of our worship. If giving is viewed as a burden but you do it anyway then you really haven't done it in the proper spiritual manner. The proper spiritual manner will affirm what Paul said to the elders at Ephesus, reminding them of the words of Christ *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts 20:35).

So we have these elements of ancient worship in our worship today. We meet with Christ – we receive from Christ and we give to Christ. Could I say in closing that when we worship the Lord aright then a number of things happen. I'll only take time to mention them. When we worship God aright by meeting with Christ receiving and giving to Christ then our view of God becomes exalted.

Notice the theology of this meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek. *For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him* (Heb. 7:1). Here is an exalted view of God. Here is the recognition of God the way he ought to be recognized. He is most high – most exalted – most glorious and our worship will cause us to raise our estimation of His greatness.

When the King of Sodom approached Abraham to offer him the goods of his people, Abraham replied *I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth.* This followed Abraham's worship of giving tithes to

Melchizedek. Abraham viewed God as most high. But there's something else here we may note about Abraham which followed his worship. He didn't need any provision from the king of Sodom. He didn't need the notion to be harbored by any that the king of Sodom had made him rich. In other words, Abraham's worship not only led to an exalted view of God but it led to his separation from the world. He didn't need the riches of the king of Sodom.

And so as we bring our meeting to a close this morning, I wonder, do you know the blessings of worship? Do you view the practice of worship to be a blessing. If you meet with Christ and receive from Christ and give to Christ then you'll certainly know those blessings and the effect of such worship will show themselves in your lives.