

Melchizedek: Genesis 14:18-20
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Last week in Genesis 12-13 we saw Abram as faithless and faithful. In Egypt he was an example of unbelief, but then he exhibited great faith when he allowed Lot the first choice of where to settle. This morning, as we move to chapter 14, we're going to see another example of Abram's faith, and we're also going to meet an amazing Christ-like figure named Melchizedek.

First of all, let's learn how Abram's faith causes him to take a great risk. The first section of chapter 14 records a war which involved 9 kings. It was 4 against 5, and the 4 won. The alliance of the 4 kings defeated the alliance of the 5 kings. Sodom and Gomorrah were on the losing side of this. The king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah were part of the 5-king alliance. Look at verses 10-11, "Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits [tar pits], and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way." Now do you remember from the last chapter where Lot chose to live? Remember, Abram gave Lot the choice to settle wherever he wanted. He said, "If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left" (13:9). And Lot decided to settle in the Jordan Valley and "moved his tent as far as Sodom" (13:12). Bad choice, Lot. It was like choosing Door #1 or Door #2, and Lot picked Door #1 because it looked nice on the outside. But once he walked through that door he had nothing but trouble. Even chapter 13 clues us in to the fact that Lot had picked the wrong place to live. It says, "Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord" (13:13), and we'll see that very vividly in chapter 19.

But aside from the wickedness of Sodom, Lot finds himself in a predicament because the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah lost this battle. The four kings defeated the five kings, and since Lot was living in Sodom he and all his stuff were taken away as part of the plunder. Chapter 14 verse 12, "They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way."

Apparently Lot was completely helpless. He had no way of defending himself against these kings, so he was at their mercy. But look at how God worked in this situation. Someone escaped and found Abram and told him what happened. And here's where we see Abram's faith leap into action by taking a great risk. Verses 14-15, "When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus." This is remarkable! Remarkable faith. A remarkable risk. And a remarkable victory.

318 trained men was not as small as it sounds to us, today. It was a decent sized army in those days. Abram also had 3 allies who are mentioned in verse 24. But still, the odds were against him. He was attacking 4 kings and their armies. The four kings who had just defeated an alliance of 5 kings. This would have been intimidating to go up against such a foe. But it doesn't seem as though Abram flinched. He simply did what he knew had to be done, and he trusted that God was in control of the results.

He was like Joab in 2 Samuel 10, when he went up to fight against the Ammonites, and he realized that he was surrounded in front and in back. The odds were against him. So he chose some of the troops to fight the Syrians, on one side, and he put the rest under the charge of Abishai, to fight the Ammonites on the other side. And Joab said, "If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me, but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to him" (v. 12). That's risk. And that's faith. Joab didn't know if they would win the battle. In fact, it looked as though they would certainly lose. But instead of surrendering, he was willing to risk his life and the lives of his troops. He did the right thing. The courageous thing, trusting in God's sovereignty over the situation.

Abram, likewise, did not know if he would win the battle. The odds were against him. But he had faith in God. He trusted that God could enable him to rescue Lot. And He did. Verse 16, "Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people." God gave him the victory. God enabled him to rescue his kinsman Lot.

As Christians, we must be risk-takers. Not foolish, but risky. There are some people who take risks just for the sake of being risky. That's not what we're talking about here. The kind of risks we must take are risks for the sake of Christ's kingdom. God-exalting, faith-filled risk. The kind of risk Abram took in the last chapter when he told Lot, "You choose where you want to live, and I'll take the leftovers." Was that foolish? Was he failing to be a good steward of what God had given him? No! He was trusting God, and his trust in God prompted him to make sacrifices for others. And as we saw, and will continue to see in the chapters to come, Abram is the one who is really blessed.

So let's take risks. Let's take risks by sacrificing ourselves for the sake of others. Sacrificing time, like so many of you did this past week for Vacation Bible School. Sacrificing comfort, whether it be material comfort or relational comfort. To talk to a friend about your relationship with Christ, or to talk to a family member, or a co-worker. That's risky! And that can be so scary! But God is calling us to take these risks. Sacrificing financially, in order to support the ministries of the church and give to the poor. God may even call some of us to sacrifice our very lives as martyrs. God may call some of us to minister in the hard places of the world where Christians are persecuted, and we may be tortured or killed for Christ. Are we willing to take these risks for the sake of Christ?

Let's take risks in going to rescue our brothers and sisters in Christ. Like Abram risked his life to rescue his kinsman, we should take risks for the sake of our church family. It could be physically rescuing a brother or sister from harm's way. Or it could be rescuing someone from spiritual disaster. This could involve some uncomfortable conversations trying to persuade someone that they are heading down the wrong path. But we need to do whatever we can, whatever the risks may be, to rescue them from spiritual peril.

So let's be risk-takers. May it never be said of us, "They're too calculated. Too careful. Too stingy. Too routine. Afraid to try anything new. Afraid to take risks." Again, not foolish. But as we trust in God and dream big dreams about how He may want use us, individually and as a church, let's step out in faith and witness to the

neighbor, and help those in need, and get involved in missions, and pray about how we can bless this city. All of these things will involve risks, and they will be good risks.

I'll tell you one more risk that I want every one of you to take this fall. We're planning to do a 10 week study in small groups, starting in September, and it's something we would love to see everyone participate in. These kinds of groups are risky because you need to be transparent with other believers. You have to let other people get to know you, and love you, and pray for you, and exhort you. That's not something that comes naturally to a lot of us. Talking about spiritual things, and confessing sin, and sharing about our own shortcomings, that's risky. We would all rather stay in our comfortable shell. Take this risk, friends, and you will be blessed.

In the first section of chapter 14 we see Abram, the man of faith, taking a bold risk to rescue his nephew Lot. Faith in God frees us to risk our own comfort and safety and security, and make sacrifices for others.

Now let's turn to the next section of the chapter, in which we meet this mysterious and intriguing character named Melchizedek. There are many unanswered questions that surround Melchizedek's brief appearance here in Genesis 14. We don't know where he came from, or why he's in Canaan, or how he knows about the true God. We don't know how he became king of Salem, or how he came to be a priest of God Most High. Moses, who wrote the book of Genesis, didn't record any genealogy for this man. So we don't know who his parents were, or when he was born, or when he died. In a book filled with genealogies, it is all the more peculiar that no details are given about this important individual.

What we do know is that he was called Melchizedek, which means "King of Righteousness." *Melek* means King, and *Zedek* means righteousness. He is Melchizedek, King of righteousness. That's the meaning of his name, and then the next words in verse 18 describe him as king of Salem. Salem was an ancient name for Jerusalem, and Salem means peace. So he is king of righteousness and king of peace. And in addition to being a king, he is also a priest, a priest of God Most High. All of these things about Melchizedek point us to Jesus Christ, who is king of righteousness and king of peace, and who combines the offices of prophet, priest and king. Melchizedek is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.

This is one of the amazing things about the Bible, that God ordains every individual and every event, and His inspired Word records those events and describes those individuals in a way that presents an entire Book that points to Jesus. It is all about Jesus. Some might say, "Well, the New Testament is about Jesus. But the Old Testament is just all the stuff that came before Jesus." But that is such a shallow view of the Bible. Yes, the New Testament is about Jesus. And the Old Testament is about Jesus, too!

The Old Testament anticipates Jesus' arrival. The Old Testament foreshadows Jesus Christ in different ways. It's like a preview. Like watching the trailer of an upcoming movie. You see a few clips, and you're intrigued by the basis for the plot, but you don't know all the details yet. That's kind of what it was like for the Old Testament saints. God gave them all these previews of coming attractions. And the Old Testament saints recognized these things, and they looked forward to the day when the Messiah would come to fulfill all these promises. One very profound foreshadowing of Jesus Christ is found in this man Melchizedek. He was king of righteousness, king of peace,

also a priest, and had no recorded genealogy. All these things are used in God's inspired Word to point to Jesus Christ.

There is only one other verse in the entire Old Testament that mentions Melchizedek. It's in Psalm 110, where David writes of the coming Messiah, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." In the Old Testament there was the priesthood in the order of Aaron, which was the Levitical priesthood, and then there was this priesthood in the order of Melchizedek. And David identifies the Messiah as "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

In the New Testament the writer of Hebrews quotes this Psalm and spends quite a bit of time in chapter 7 explaining the similarities between Melchizedek and Jesus. [You may want to turn there with me. Pg. 1004 in the pew Bibles.] Verses 1-4 of Hebrews 7 retell the story of Genesis 14.

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever. See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!"

By the way, I don't believe Abraham's tithe means that we are required to tithe. Let me explain what I mean. A tithe is 10%, and that is what Abraham gave to Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High. But when we look at the New Testament we find a different model for giving, and one that is far more radical. Instead of being told that we are to give 10%, we're told to give cheerfully and generously. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9, "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (vv. 6-7). Here the requirement reaches down into our hearts, because it's much deeper than what percentage we give. That's not the point. The point is our desires. The point is: Where is your treasure? And as we cultivate a spirit of cheerful and generous giving, most of us will meet and exceed the 10% principle that we see in Genesis 14. Let's give sacrificially and generously and cheerfully, because our treasure is not in this world. Our treasure is in heaven.

Now to the main point of Hebrews 7: Jesus is the superior priest. Jesus is not like the Levite priests who were in the order of Aaron. Rather, Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek. Verse 11 shows how the Levitical priesthood is inferior to the Melchizedekian priesthood. "Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?" You see, perfection couldn't come through the Levite priests. They were sinners. And their sacrifices were not effectual. Those sacrifices did not forgive sins. They offered sacrifices again and again, but those animal sacrifices could not forgive sins. And then the priests died. They were not around forever.

On the other hand, Jesus is sinless. He is not like us, nor like the Levitical priests. He is not a sinner. He is perfect and righteous. Also, Jesus' sacrifice does forgive sin. Rather than offering an animal, He offered Himself. And He did this once for all. No

more sacrifices are needed, because Jesus offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin, the sacrifice that all of the Old Testament sacrifices were a preview of. And finally, Jesus is a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. Jesus doesn't die and leave us searching for another priest. He is our eternal priest.

Look at verses 23-25, "The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

This is an amazing promise. And this is the point I want you to take home about Melchizedek. You may feel confused about who this guy is, and how he relates to Jesus Christ. I'm certainly still confused about many of the details here. But here's the take-home lesson.

You need a priest. All of us do. We need Someone who is going to stand between us and God. Here's why: God's wrath burns against sin. And since we are sinners, God's wrath is directed at us. We deserve His punishment. And our only hope is that Someone who is sinless would step in between us and God and plead on our behalf. The next verses say, "For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself" (vv. 26-27).

Jesus became our priest by offering Himself as the sacrifice. He stood between us and God and absorbed God's wrath against sin. As God unleashed His punishment for our sin, Jesus stepped in front of us and took it upon Himself. That's the only way we can be saved. The only way we can draw near to God is through Jesus Christ, our eternal priest. This is all by God's design. This is how God is just AND gracious.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that your sin is minimal. Don't think that God will just overlook your sin, or sweep it under the rug. God's justice won't allow that. Every sin must be punished. And every sin will be punished, either eternally in hell for those who never trust in Christ, or, for those who are trusting in Christ, their sin was punished in the Person of Jesus Christ when He died on the cross. God is just. And He is also gracious.

Are you trusting in Jesus as your priest, as your only access to God the Father? He is our only hope. Trust in Him. Rest in Him. The One who is King of righteousness, King of peace, and a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.