

Scripture Reading: Genesis 14:16-24

“So [Abram] brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people. 17 And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley), after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him. 18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. 19 And 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." And he gave him a tithe of all. 21 Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself." 22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to Jehovah, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, 23 that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'-- 24 except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.”

'Melchizedek, King of Salem'

This morning as we finish up the 14th chapter of the Book of Beginnings we are going to consider one of the most mysterious appearances in the Old Testament: The person of Melchizedek. As we do we will see how the military campaign we studied two weeks ago is resolved, we will consider this person Melchizedek & his gifts, and Lord willing learn some important lessons about our wealth & possessions from the response of Abram.

To begin with, we should see that there is a chiastic structure to our text where we have the King of Sodom coming out to meet the victorious Abram, the appearance of Melchizedek as the center of the account and then Abram's response to the King of Sodom.

Verse 17 tells us that “the king of Sodom went out to meet [Abram] at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).” We learn here that the King of Sodom has survived the battles with King Chedorlaomer and now God adds grace upon grace as He gives him the opportunity to thank Abram and to be in the presence of Melchizedek. However, we quickly learn in verse 21 that the King of Sodom is set in his wicked ways which will shortly lead to the total destruction of Sodom...

“21 Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself.”

➤ Not a hint of humility, and no acknowledgement of Melchizedek's presence or gifts...

Just an “I know you are going to keep the stuff, but at least give me back my people” attitude.

The rules of engagement of that time would have allowed Abram to keep all the spoils of war and since that is what I suspect the King of Sodom would have done if he were the victor, he assumes Abram would try to do the same. We will consider Abram's response in a moment, but for now we want to focus on the person at the center of this account, just as Abram did and just as the King of Sodom should have done.

Just as we anticipate the interaction of Abram and the King of Sodom we have a sudden interruption...

18 “Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. 19 And 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.”

If this were all that we knew of this King of Salem, he would truly be a mysterious person, but he does not fade away into history, but turns out to be at the very center of God's plan of salvation.

I am going to do my best to explain to you what I think all of this means, but before I do so I want to go back and touch on an important question that Greg asked during our Q&A session last Sunday. He asked how we deal with the reality that people don't usually get what they believe the Bible reveals or teaches only from the Bible, but always bring to the Scriptures what someone has taught them.

This is very true and is confirmed by the Apostle Paul as he tells Titus that a pastor must hold "fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." Or where he commended young Timothy for imitating the faith seen in his mother and grandmother.

Our covenant children will be raised in the fear and admonition of the Lord and see the truth of the Bible as we have taught them! [quite a responsibility] This also means that it should not surprise us that a child born to Mormon parents grows up to believe the lies of the Mormon Church or that a child born to Buddhist parents in India grows up to be a Buddhist.

The skeptics are quick to pick up on this reality and try to argue that all religion is simply trained behavior. So the important bottom line of Greg's question is how then do we know that what we believe about the Bible is the truth that the Bible is revealing?

As faithful followers of Jesus we have two great truths that give us the confidence we need to know that we have the truth and that we need NOT fear having that truth challenged... The first is found in the Scriptures themselves where the Apostle Paul goes on to instruct Timothy in the third chapter of his second letter: "you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

➤ **The Bible not just another book!**

And of course this must always be linked to the final instructions that Peter gave the Saints in his second letter reminding them that, "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

➤ **But again, how can we be sure we are seeing the actual truth the Holy Spirit has revealed & not just some doctrine of men or even an error?**

That assurance comes as we 'test the spirits' or as we see in the Book of Acts, we are to be good Bereans. Now you hear your pastor and others here at Church of the King often challenge people to be good Bereans, so just what does that mean? It comes from the example of the faithful Saints in the city of Berea that is recorded for us in the 17th chapter of the Book of Acts: After being persecuted in Philippi and Thessalonica, Paul and Silas are brought by night to the city of Berea:

Acts 17: "When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men."

These faithful men & women went to the Scriptures with what Paul had taught, but they went honestly to them to test what they had been taught IF they did that with the Apostle Paul, I think it is important that we do it with any of today's teachers, including myself or your other elders & even with your own parents.

However, I would warn you that it is very important to do so with a humble and honest attitude like that of Mary who said to the angel Gabriel, 'How can these things be?' wanting to understand the difficult truth she had been given. We DO NOT want to be like Zacharias who asked a very similar question with a very bad attitude and was silenced for nine months to ponder how poorly he responded!

So all of that to say that I am going to teach you this morning what I believe the Bible reveals about Melchizedek, encouraging you all to take what I say back to the Scriptures to see if it is true.

- **The same will hold true for the lessons from our text that I hope we see regarding our wealth and riches.**

Some of our young people who have never considered the question of just who Melchizedek is or these financial lessons, may accept what I have to say and hold and build on those teachings for the rest of their lives. Others who have been taught something different will have to reconsider what they believe and what I have taught in light of the Scriptures!

- **They many change their mind or they may come away believing that it is I who needs to change!**

We can all be faithful in what we believe and teach as long as we realize that when there is a difference, one of us has to be wrong in the end, or in our fallen world, perhaps both could be wrong.

- **So who is this Melchizedek who comes bringing wine and bread?**

I want to make the case that Melchizedek is a theophany... That is a fancy word for when God appears in a form that is tangible to our human senses. We will see this in January when the Lord comes to visit Abram before the judgment of Sodom. God appears to Moses as a burning bush and perhaps the most famous example is the 'fourth person' that King Nebuchadnezzar sees walking with Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace, who is described as 'one like the Son of God.'

So why do I think that we have an Old Testament appearance of the Son of God here rather than teaching that Melchizedek is just a man who was the King of Jerusalem at that time or even Shem as others have taught? Well as we have tried to do with much of what we find here in the Book of Beginnings, I think we should look to how the rest of the Scriptures treat this King and there are quite a number of references that give us a great deal of information about him.

I will cover it quickly this morning and leave it to you to 'search the Scriptures to see if what I am teaching is true! The next reference to Melchizedek, whose name simply means King of Righteousness, is in Psalm 110. I would argue that this is significant because Psalm 110, though short is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament!

Psalm 110: 1 Jehovah said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." 2 Jehovah shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! 3 Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. 4 Jehovah has sworn And will not relent, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.""

Now of course those who believe that Melchizedek was Shem or an earthly King can argue that he had a priestly function and was a type of Christ: But if we go on to what the New Testament teaches about this priesthood, I find it hard to believe it to be anything other than Jesus Himself visiting the victorious Abram: Not as the incarnate Son of Man, but as a pre-incarnate appearance, not unlike others we see in the Old Testament.

- **My confidence comes from the teaching we have in the book of Hebrews!**

Paul, who I believe wrote Hebrews, begins the Epistle by showing how Jesus is superior to the angels and superior to Moses and beginning in chapter five shows how Jesus is superior to the Old Testament priests! At Hebrews 5:1 he says that Jesus was not taken from among men [reminding us of the importance of the virgin birth] but, quoting Psalm 110, he says Jesus is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

In chapter six Paul warns them against remaining only with the milk of the Word but spurs them on to greater understandings, and then in chapter seven he provides us with much greater insight into the King of Righteousness who came to meet Abram...

Hebrews 7: “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.”

Paul goes on to show how great Melchizedek is by explaining how even Levi who would one day receive God's tithes actually paid them here as one in the loins of Abram [along with all the children of Abraham including Judah].

Paul goes on for two and a half chapters to show how the Levitical priesthood could not save because it was made up of sinners like you and I, but that Jesus came as the greater Melchizedek to present Himself as the greater sacrifice in the greater sanctuary in heaven, of which all that Moses or David or Solomon were instructed to build was just a shadow.

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.”

- **Thus Jesus comes as the “priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.” Without beginning of days nor end of life as the incarnate Son of God and goes forth to perform His priestly duty...**

24 “But He [Jesus], 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.”

Thus it should not surprise us to read in Genesis 4:20b “And [Abram] gave him a tithe of all.”

- **I believe that Abraham knew in whose presence he stood, just as he will later when Jehovah visits his tent and thus he gave God his tithe.**

As a side note I find it interesting how many commentators try to read history into Moses with regard to tithing and the King who was also a priest. They have it backward, because we see here that the concept of a great High Priest who is the King of Kings runs all the way through God's story of salvation and we learn here that the principle of tithing goes way back as well. Thus it should not surprise us to see pagan cultures treating their Kings like gods or priests and those kings demanding a tithe from their people.

Now quickly, I want to close with some practical lessons we can learn from Abram in this account regarding our wealth and riches...

- **We see him acknowledging God as the source of His abundance,**
- **We see him treating others justly,**
- **And we see him caring for the needs of others.**

Abram did not just come up with the idea of giving 10% to Melchizedek at this chance meeting!

It was a practice he was familiar with and we don't know exactly how this important principle was revealed.

- **It could possible go all the way back to the sacrifices and gifts brought by Cain and Abel.**

I think what is important today is to remember that it predates the Law and its provisions for tithing. Many Christians recoil when the subject is brought up thinking we are trying to put people back under the bondage of the Law.

Nothing could be further from the truth when the principle is properly understood... A Biblical tithe is always given as the first fruits... The first part of the harvest in that time or the first line on the budget for today!

It is done NOT because the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills needs any money, but rather it is done because we need to remember where ALL of our provisions come from!

- **We give our tithe to remind us that all that we have comes from the hand of God and we are to always remember our dependence on Him!**

This is the first important step in keeping the proper perspective regarding our wealth and riches.

The next of course is to have the proper attitude about how we are going to use the other 90% and just how much ‘stuff’ we really need!

Abram has two more important examples to show us and they are especially important for American Christians who have the abundance of things on the one hand and the guilt trip to live more simply on the other. As we saw earlier, the King of Sodom expects Abram to keep everything and hopes to at least get his people back,

22 “But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to Jehovah, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, 23 that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'.

We see here the result of Abram’s proper perspective about how it is God who provides for him: He does not need to strive to have more and more, but can be content with what God has given him. Abram also prevents this pagan king for taking any of the credit for what God has done.

After his stunning victories, Abram could easily come back acting like the new tough guy on the block showing off his new riches, but that was not what we see.

Abram set out to rescue his nephew Lot and with that success he is willing to return all the other goods even to these undeserving Kings... A demonstration of God’s grace.

At the same time our final lesson is to see how Abram does not overlook justice while he is being content with what he has and giving his tithe to Melchizedek...

In verse 24 we read, “except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.””

These men were Abram’s allies in the battle and did have a right to a portion of the spoils of war and Abram was not going to be generous with what was rightly theirs.

- **Sadly a lesson that many, many of our elected officials today desperately need to learn!**
- **Well, I trust I have given you all plenty to take back to the Scriptures!**

I truly hope that you will because Melchizedek the King of Righteousness is a key figure in the Bible and we will consider his gifts as we come to the Table this morning.

And of course his visit comes as Abram is victorious in battle and provides the important lessons we have considered...

These are important lessons for us to learn when it comes to how we handle wealth and riches, especially in a nation like ours where we have them in great abundance.

We must remember that it is God who is the source of all our blessings and we acknowledge that each time we give Him a tithe with our first fruits!

We must learn to be content with what God has provided for us, not always striving for more and more like the man that just kept building bigger barns!

And finally we must remember that God's justice must always be maintained, even in monetary or property matters...

- **God's Laws of economics apply whether we acknowledge them or practice them.**
- **In all of this, may we be those who follow the example of faithful Abraham!**

Communion Meditation: John 2

Thinking about what kind of bread & wine Melchizedek brought...

"5 His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." 6 Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece.

7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it.

9 When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.

10 And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior.

You have kept the good wine until now!"

From a gift of bread & wine to a sacrament to a wedding supper!