

A PRIEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Abram tithed to Melchizedek, a priest to God Most High, which would point to a greater priesthood than the one that was to come through Aaron.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Genesis 14; Hebrews 5–7

+ **SETTING:**

From the moment the first two people sinned, a promise has weaved its way through the story of Genesis: the promise of an “offspring” (Gen. 3:15)—a descendant of the first humans who would defeat the serpent that led them to sin against God. Generations later, we are introduced to Abram, whom God promised He would bless and through whom all the peoples of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). God made a covenant with Abram that would never be broken and further confirmed it by a priest of God Most High.

DAY 1

READ:

Genesis 14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 14:14-16

NOTES

The story of Abram fighting against four kings with his small gang of 318 men to rescue his nephew, Lot, sounds like the plot to an action-packed movie. But the difference between this true story and many movies we might see today is that Abram isn't the main character. Neither is Lot the main character. This story is not one about Abram mustering up enough courage or brawn to take on an impossible task. It's a story about Abram going in the strength that the Lord provides in order to restore his family member. The Lord, of course, is the hero of the story.

Similarly, our stories are not about us. Whether we've seen a lot of tragedy in life or we've seen little to none, the battles we face are meant to point us to something greater than ourselves. They're also meant to point the people around us to something greater than ourselves. We, or people we know, may have overcome much in life, but if that is all our stories are about, then our stories die when we die. But if our stories are about something eternal, then our stories will long outlast the span of our lives.

Ultimately, the paths we walk and the things we overcome in life are meant to point us and the people around us to God. If we boast in ourselves and our abilities, then people will remember us as long as we are boasting. But if we boast about Christ and the victory He's won for us, then the story that has outlasted countless generations will continue to be made known long after we are gone.

How can you use your life today to boast about the strength that God provides through the gospel of Jesus Christ?

DAY 2

READ:

Genesis 14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 14:17-20

NOTES

After Abram's battle with the four kings, he was met in the Valley of Shaveh by both the king of Sodom and the king of Salem. The king of Salem met Abram with refreshments for him and his army. When he spoke to Abram, he spoke words of blessing, a declaration of God's favor on Abram. It was also a declaration that God gave Abram the victory, and it was God who would continue to shower favor upon him.

Abram's response to Melchizedek, the king of Salem, was to give him ten percent of all he had. He did this both to honor Melchizedek and to affirm the blessing of Melchizedek. Abram's tithe to Melchizedek was a declaration of his trust in God to continue to provide for him and his household.

Whether precisely a tithe or not, when we give, in particular, to the local church, we are declaring that our ultimate allegiance is to God. Our giving to the local church is an acknowledgment that the Lord doesn't just own what we give but He owns it all. And the Lord doesn't just call us to give of our finances; He also calls us to give of our time and talents.

As the giver of every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17), God is the One who gives us the ability to do all that we do. Our giving in response to that is an acknowledgment of God's ownership. Our giving, much like Abram's, is also an acknowledgment of the victory that Jesus won on our behalf on the cross. We give of ourselves to advance the gospel mission because God has so graciously and generously given Himself to save us from our sin.

What are some ways you can give today to proclaim the gospel to the world around you?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"But one who is victorious should not claim the victory for himself; rather, he should attribute it to God. This is the teaching of Abraham, who became more humble, not more proud, in victory. Indeed, he offered a sacrifice and gave tithes; for this reason too, he received the blessing of Melchizedek."¹

-Ambrose (d. 397)

DAY 3

READ:

Genesis 14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 14:21-24

NOTES

In the Valley of Shaveh, Abram was met by both the king of Sodom and the king of Salem. Previously we talked about how Melchizedek's blessing on Abram was a declaration of the hand of God in Abram's defeat of the four kings. Melchizedek's first words of blessing are in stark contrast to what we hear from the king of Sodom when he speaks.

Instead of acknowledging the Lord's hand in Abram's victory, the king of Sodom began by demanding he be given back all of his people who were taken in King Chedorlaomer's conquest of Sodom. And while the king of Sodom's offer for Abram to keep the goods that were taken seems honorable, his offering was completely devoid of any acknowledgment of the Lord. It seems as though he was saying that Abram was solely responsible for the victory.

Abram's response to the king of Sodom was to declare the glory of God in the battle he had just won. In a sense, the glory of God marks the presence of God. Abram knew and believed that without God's favor on his life, he would have had no chance of defeating the four kings. In this moment, Abram had the opportunity both to take credit for what the Lord did and to add to his wealth. But Abram chose instead to magnify the Lord's name and to rely upon Him alone.

We often have the opportunity to take the credit for the Lord's work in our lives and in others'. But we, like both Abram and Melchizedek, have to declare the glory of God in all circumstances—even when it may mean we don't get to reap the benefits of taking the credit. One of the realities we must remember about God's glory versus our own is that God's glory, or presence, alone can save. All our glory can do is puff us up and cause people to admire us temporarily. So rather than lift ourselves up, we should do everything for the purpose of bringing glory to God (1 Cor. 10:31).

How have you seen God work in your life recently, and how can you use that work to glorify God among others?

DAY 4

READ:

Hebrews 7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 7:1-10

NOTES

Hebrews 7 affirms what we've already talked about in terms of Melchizedek's blessing on Abram and Abram's subsequent tithe. Hebrews 7 reinforces the idea that Melchizedek is a picture of Christ. Other than Jesus, Melchizedek was the only person whom God ordained as both a king and a priest. As the king over his people in Salem, Melchizedek led his people in times of war. He also ruled over them as the governing head of the people. As priest, Melchizedek's job was to intercede on behalf of the people with God and to make atonement for their sins through sacrifices.

Melchizedek, therefore, pointed to the coming of Jesus. Jesus reigns as both king and priest. But in His first coming, He didn't rule like a king. Instead, He took on the form of a servant in order to save us from our sin (Phil. 2:5-8).

Though Jesus was the Creator of heaven and earth, when He came into the earth, He didn't come in pomp and power. Instead, He came as a baby. Jesus lowered Himself to become like us in order to save us from our sin. Our mind-set and attitude toward the lost has to be the same. We could live in a prideful manner, as though we deserve to be God's sons and daughters, unlike others who don't believe in Jesus. But if we do that, then we completely miss the point. Jesus' call upon all sinners is not only for us to sit on a throne but first to take up our cross.

What are some circumstances in which you find it hard to humble yourself like Christ? How does the reality of Jesus' servanthood help you to walk humbly as He walked?

DAY 5

READ:

Hebrews 5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 5:1-10

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #53: CHRIST AS PRIEST

As our Great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of reconciling us to God. He is the One whose perfect righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and prays for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).

Hebrews 5 shows us the weakness and frailty of human priests. Though we don't live now with priests having the responsibility to make atonement for our sins, we could probably imagine the difficulty of such a system. In the sacrificial system, as Hebrews 5 points out, priests had to make atonement for their own sins along with making atonement for the sins of the people. Therein lies one of the problems of the sacrificial system. Even the priest himself had to have his sins atoned for before he could intercede before God on behalf of the people. Not only that, sacrifices only made forgiveness of past sins possible. So in order to be made right before God, people had to go constantly before the priest in order to atone for their sins.

Jesus, as our Great High Priest, did something that no earthly priest could ever do—atone for our sins once and for all. When it was time for Jesus to atone for our sins, He didn't do so with a lamb, for He is the perfect and spotless Lamb of God (John 1:29). He was sinless and right before God the Father in every respect. He had done nothing to deserve death on the cross, but God sent Him to the cross in order to cancel the record of our sin debt once and for all. Jesus' death was sufficient for our salvation because He was the Lamb who didn't stay dead (see Rev. 5:6ff). He rose from the grave on the third day and has achieved for us eternal life.

Some of these gospel truths may seem obvious, but it is necessary for us always to remember them. As others have said, the gospel is not just what saves us, but it is also what sustains us in our salvation.

How does the truth of the gospel sustain you every day of your life?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Likewise, in the priest Melchizedek, we see the sacrament of the sacrifice of the Lord prefigured according to what the divine Scripture testifies ... For who is more a priest of the most high God than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered sacrifice to God the Father and offered the very same thing that Melchizedek had offered, bread and wine, that is, actually, his body and blood?"²

-Cyprian (d. 258)

POINT 1: God's servant rescues a captured relative (Gen. 14:8-16).

With concern for his relatives, Abram's small force pursued and defeated the armies of four kings who had just beaten the armies of five kings. God proved His _____, His _____, and His _____ through Abram's victory and recovery of Lot's family and possessions.

? What are some ways God has proven Himself on your behalf when circumstances seemed stacked against you?

POINT 2: God's servant is blessed by a priest to God Most High (Gen. 14:17-20a).

Melchizedek is an obscure figure in the Bible, but he is significant, in part, because he was both a _____ and a _____ to God Most High.

? Why might we struggle to grasp Melchizedek's significance in Scripture?

Melchizedek's blessing of Abram reinforced the promise that God made to Abram: He would be a great nation to bless the earth because God was for him, giving him _____ over his _____.

? What are some ways God continues to bless us?

POINT 3: God's servant tithes to a priest to God Most High (Gen. 14:20b; Heb. 7:1-10).

A tithe is a _____, a representative gift acknowledging God's _____ of everything and declaring trust in God's continued _____.

NOTES

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #53: CHRIST AS PRIEST

As our Great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of _____ us to God. He is the One whose perfect _____ is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and _____ for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).



What are some examples of things you do that show that all of you belongs to the Lord?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been given so great a high priest in Jesus, we live as priests in our land, pointing others to the sacrifice of Jesus and interceding before the Father for their salvation.

- **HEAD:** How does realizing that Jesus is both your Great High Priest and King change your understanding of the gospel?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you will bless the Lord because of the great victory over sin that He has accomplished for us through Jesus?
- **HANDS:** What are some specific ways you will give to support the mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus both locally and globally?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The Bible recounts lives set in the ever-present context of relationships. And behind all the lives looms the Life, the Story, the great Lover, who from before time has envisioned and worked for a relationship with you and me."³

-George Guthrie