

Lent 5—March 21, 2021

Text: Hebrews 5:1-10

Theme: Our High Priest Has Forgiven Us

Melchizedek is a great character in the Bible. I keep trying to get new parents to name their child Melchizedek, but no one takes me up on it. He shows up out of nowhere in Genesis 14 and seems to be a pretty insignificant person but keeps getting referenced throughout the Bible, finally being compared to Christ himself. In order to appreciate this text from Hebrews, you have to look at the text from Genesis 14 where we are told this of Abraham.

“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). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)”

Abraham had just finished defeating some marauders who had captured his nephew. He conquered the marauders, rescued Lot and came into the Valley of the Kings, which was near Jerusalem. King Melchizedek (which means King of Righteousness) was King of Salem which you know means peace and he brought Abraham a feast of bread and wine. Of course, Abraham did not understand the deeper message at that time, but we do because we have seen the true King of Righteousness who comes to us with bread and wine

that is his body and blood and gives us true peace. Melchizedek blessed Abraham saying,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” Having been blessed, Abraham gave him an offering of 1/10th of everything.

Melchizedek, like all of God’s priests, had to atone for his own sins as well as the sins of all his people. The priest had to follow all of God’s instructions for offering sacrifices for the sins of the people he served. These instructions would become very specific and documented under Moses. Read Leviticus for a full accounting of all the rules. Suffice it to say, he prayed specific prayers, slaughtered the lamb that was offered by the penitent and cast some of the blood on the altar and some of the blood on the people.

He did all of this to point forward towards the day when the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world would come from God and allow his blood to be spilled for all God’s people. But until the Messiah arrived, the sacrifice had to be made over and over again because an imperfect priest could only point forward towards the real high priest who was coming. He could not remove even one sin by himself.

As Melchizedek brought out bread and wine to Abraham to celebrate his victory, so the final High Priest, Jesus Christ, brings out bread and wine to us at his altar to celebrate his victory over sin, death and the devil. This is not a beseeching of God to forgive us but a celebration of the forgiveness already won for us. Nor is it a re-sacrifice of Christ. Christ's one sacrifice on the cross was sufficient for all people of all times. Abraham was not begging for help from Melchizedek to combat the ones who had taken Lot. Nor was he asking Melchizedek to offer sacrifices for his sins. He was celebrating and thanking God for the victory God had given him. Today, we boldly come forward and receive the very body and blood of Christ not as frightened sinners or beseeching supplicants, but as bold children of God for whom this battle has already been fought and won!

However, like father Abraham, we too are failures at obedience. We know what is expected of us even more than Abraham because we have had the Law written down for us in black and white. In love for our God, we try to fulfill his Law, but, try as we might, we fail again and again. As we grow in faith, we become slightly better and fail slightly less often, but in the end, if you have failed even once, you have failed eternally for the only way to heaven is through perfection.

Christ, our high priest, did not fail. The author of Hebrews tells us,

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.” He was perfectly obedient for us. It does not matter how horrible the sin is that you have committed. Regardless of what you have said, done or thought, you are perfectly obedient. You are perfectly obedient not because you have made yourself so but because Christ was perfectly obedient for you.

That means we have to both let go of our own self-righteousness, patting ourselves on the back for all we have done, and we have to stop damning ourselves for everything at which we have failed. Neither matters anymore. Our high priest was perfectly obedient for us and therefore you and I stand in the light of God. You and I are inheritors of paradise and princes and princesses of Heaven. And like father Abraham, we gather together to offer our High Priest our worship, our offerings, our abilities and everything we have, for we know that were it not for Him, we would have nothing.