

## The Peril of Victory

Genesis 14:17-24

Last week we found ourselves swept up in the world of ancient geopolitics, and massive military campaigns. Armies marched across the ancient near east and clashed on a desert plain next to the Dead Sea. The invading armies were led by king Kedorlaomer who was seeking to secure his trade routes with Egypt against a group of rebellious city-states struggling to get out from under his thumb. Among the opposing forces was the army of Sodom which was home to Abraham's nephew, Lot. When the tide of battle quickly turned against the rebelling armies, Lot and his family were taken captive and carted off by Kedorlaomer. Lot was the victim of his own foolish choices in Genesis 13.

Meanwhile, Abraham could have washed his hands of Lot. After all, his nephew been more trouble than he was worth. What did Abraham owe him anyway? Abraham could have counted himself lucky that he and his own had escaped the carnage unscathed, Abraham could have cowered in panic, intimidated by one of the most feared conquerors of his day. He could have done all of these things.

But he didn't. Driven by a sacrificial love for his nephew and by an incredible faith in God, Abraham rounded up 318 of his best trained men and went after the invaders. Abraham pursued them for more than 150 miles. Most likely he caught them during a time of drunken celebration. But with God's blessing, Abraham and his band of men routed the prematurely confident Kedorlaomer. And not only did Abraham rescue Lot and his family, but he recaptured all the goods and people that had been pillaged from Sodom and the other cities of the plain.

The story does not end here, however. Our text does not read, "and they lived happily ever after." Though the battle is over, the war certainly is not. Abraham will find that his biggest fight is not physical, but spiritual, and his greatest enemy will not meet him on the field of battle, but in the trenches of his heart. Abraham has learned in this physical battle that he is never outnumbered with God. If that is true in earthly terms, then how much more so in the spiritual realm. We will see God here providing support from unexpected quarters, and we will witness Abraham progressing in the journey of faith as he grows from past mistakes. And from this we can learn a little about the battles we face in our own lives.

<sup>17</sup> *After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the*

*king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).*

<sup>18</sup> *Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High.*

Imagine Abraham and his men as they head back south after their victory. They are jubilant after defeating one of the most powerful armies on the face of the earth. They are surrounded by the spoils of their victory— the riches and the citizens of five cities. According to ancient custom, all of these things now belonged to Abraham and his men, as they were won in battle. All of the sudden, this immigrant, nomadic, shepherd has within his grasp unbelievable wealth and unimaginable political power. So much hinges on what he does right now.

As Abraham is returning from his conquest, the king of Sodom hears the news of what has happened. He rushes north to meet Abraham. He wants to bargain with Abraham. Perhaps he can make some kind of deal and salvage some of his power.

This poses a great spiritual threat to Abraham. We have already seen how Lot was hurt by being too closely connected with Sodom. Sodom and the other cities of the plain were infested by incredible wickedness. Throughout Scripture Sodom and Gomorrah are used to characterize the worst of the evil that resides within human hearts. When Abraham and the king of Sodom meet there is potential for great temptation, spiritual compromise and moral corruption.

We saw a couple of weeks ago how times of spiritual success and victory are often followed by times of letting down. This is what happened to Abraham when he finally made it to the land of Canaan, He obeyed God completely. He built an altar, and spent time worshipping and honoring God. God spoke to him. It was a time of success and victory. But then there was a famine in the land, remember? Instead of building on his success, and growing in his faith, Abraham let down. He took matters into his own hands and fled to Egypt, where he got himself, his family and others into all kinds of problems. Again, here in chapter 14 we see how great success often precedes great temptation. Will Abraham let down again, or will he learn from his past mistakes? We all blow it sometimes. Everyone in this room has blown it. We have stepped off the deep end, stuck both feet in our mouths, and have made a complete mess of things. What makes the difference is this: do we learn from our mistakes.

### **Melchizedek An Encouragement to Abraham**

As we read on in our text, an unexpected thing takes place. A mysterious and numinous

character walks into the pages of our story, and he intercepts Abraham before he meets with the king of Sodom. He enters the story without introduction, or fanfare. Our text matter-of-factly states *“Then Melchizedek, king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High.”*

Who is this guy? Where did he come from? What's he doing here? This is his one and only historical appearance in the pages of Scripture. As quickly as he enters the story, he leaves. But his brief encounter with Abraham is significant for a couple of reasons. First, he has a profound spiritual impact on Abraham.

Abraham was about to have a meeting that posed great temptation and potential for compromise. He was particularly vulnerable after his victory. But his encounter with Melchizedek gave Abraham an interlude of worship and a blessing from God. Melchizedek is a righteous, godly man. His name means King of righteousness. He was king of Salem, which means peace. This is the city that would later be called Jerusalem. He was a priest for God. He came at a time when Abraham could use some Godly encouragement and advice. We don't know what was said between these two men as they ate the bread and drank the wine, but there is no doubt that not only was Abraham nourished physically, he was nourished spiritually as well.

Then Melchizedek gives Abraham a blessing from God. In verses 19 and 20 he says, *“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.”* This is an important reminder to Abraham that God is the source of his success. His victory was totally a God thing. Abraham was not the author of his own victory, but he was protected and provided for by the hand of God. It was not a time for Abraham to grow self-confident like he did before. It was time for Abraham to thank and praise God as the giver of all good things.

This would be important to keep in mind as he met with the king of Sodom. It wasn't up to Abraham or the king of Sodom to decide what belonged to whom. Abraham wasn't to use this as an opportunity to leverage more wealth or power for himself, or forge an unholy alliance with Sodom. Abraham needed to remember that God was his provider and protector.

We know that Abraham learned his lesson; because he gave a tithe of all he had. He honored God first. You see, the most important thing about our giving is not the money. God isn't short of cash. He's not in some desperate situation that he needs something from us. It's all his anyway. The cattle on a thousand hills belong to him. He can do whatever He wants with what you have. No, the most important thing about our giving is that it keeps our hearts in the right place. We give priority to those things we invest in. If you have money in the stock market, you will keep an eye on those stocks. If you spend a lot of your money on game tickets and merchandise for your favorite team, you will follow them closely. I have a lot of heartbroken friends in Oklahoma this week with \$50 Kevin Durant jerseys that aren't worth \$5 now. If you sink a lot of money into a hobby, your heart will be there.

Jesus said it this way, *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* If we invest first in God, he will be first in our lives. One of the lessons here is take care of the God stuff first. Whenever you are making a major life decision, or you are going through a life transition, attend to the spiritual matters first. Tithing helps us keep things in perspective and helps keep our priorities in order.

You see, it is a very good thing that Melchizedek came into Abraham's life. God used him to give Abraham just what he needed at a very vulnerable time. God does the same for us. Has there ever been anyone who has entered your life unexpectedly, maybe even briefly, but God used them to touch your life in some special way? Sometimes these people guide us, sometimes they encourage us, sometimes they challenge us, and sometimes they teach us. But often, those unplanned, accidental, and unexpected encounters in our lives, are not unplanned and accidental from God's point of view: He brings people into our lives for a very specific reason.

There have been such people in my life: (eg. Roberta Fowler and Don Sues) What about you? Who has God used to bless your life? We need to thank God for these people: And we need to be open to them. Sometimes we can be so busy and focused on what we are doing we may miss it. Abraham could have said, "Thanks but no thanks, Melchizedek. Can't you see I'm busy: I've spent several days in hot pursuit, then a couple more in heated battle. I'm tired. I've got an important meeting and business to take care of" If he had done so, he could have missed the very blessing of God: How often we miss out on the blessing of God because we are too

busy and focused on earthly things. We need to be open to Godly interruptions.

### **Melchizedek A Picture of Christ**

Melchizedek is important for another reason as well. It is a reason that we would completely miss, if Scripture did not tell us. You see, what is not said about Melchizedek is as important as what is said. Melchizedek isn't here just to encourage Abraham, but to paint a prophetic picture as well. Melchizedek is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.

When Melchizedek leaves our story, he disappears from the pages of Scripture for 1,000 years. Then suddenly his name reappears in Ps. 110:4 in a prophecy of the Messiah. Speaking of the messiah, the inspired hand of David writes, *"You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."*

What does that mean? Well, his name disappears from Scripture for another 1,000 years but then we see it again in Hebrews chapter 5, where the author quotes this psalm, There the author of Hebrews is writing to fellow Jewish Christians to convince them that Jesus Christ is superior to Moses, and that Christian faith is greater than the O.T. law. By saying that Christ is a priest in the order of Melchizedek he is saying that he belongs to a priesthood greater than the O.T. priesthood of Aaron.

Melchizedek was a priest before the law was given, before Israel was a nation, before Aaron, the first high priest, was even born. Abraham hadn't even received the covenant of circumcision yet, so he wasn't even a Jew, but still a Gentile. So Melchizedek not only belongs to a priesthood greater than Aarons, but to a priesthood that serves all people, not just Jews.

The author of Hebrews speaks extensively about Melchizedek in chapter 7. There is much more information there than his historical appearance in Genesis contains: And the writer of Hebrews makes a very big deal about what Genesis does not say about Melchizedek.

<sup>1</sup> *This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, <sup>2</sup> and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace."* <sup>3</sup> *Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.*

He points out that Melchizedek is both a king and a priest. He belongs to a royal

priesthood. He also points out that Melchizedek has no genealogy. There is no record of his birth or death. We know nothing of his family tree. This might not be a big deal to us, but to the Jews, such details were of utmost importance. Family line was essential knowledge. Genesis is replete with this kind of information, but not with Melchizedek. As far as the Scriptures are concerned, Melchizedek is priest without beginning or end, just like Christ.

What does this mean for us? We have a savior who is there for us when we need him. He ministers to us when we are vulnerable. He encourages when we are down. He strengthens when we are weak. He prepares us to face the temptations and trials of life. What Melchizedek was to Abraham, Jesus is to us.

### **Meeting With King of Sodom**

And so we come to the consequential meeting between Abraham and the King of Sodom on which so many things hinge spiritually for Abraham.

<sup>21</sup> *The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."*

<sup>22</sup> *But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup> that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'* <sup>24</sup> *I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share."*

One of our earlier lessons was that a flawed faith is not a failed faith. One of the reasons this is true is that God uses our mistakes to teach us: The flaws in our faith are lessons by which we grow. We saw Abraham let down before after a time of success and victory. But this time he is prepared: He does not let down: He has learned his lesson and he has grown in his faith.

The king of Sodom offers Abraham a deal. Keep the stuff, just give me the people. As I said before, according to ancient custom, it all belonged to Abraham now, but the king of Sodom is just trying to salvage something for himself. This might sound like a good deal to Abraham: He doesn't need all those people: He doesn't want to be responsible for them. The King of Sodom is willing to give up the stuff as long as he can keep his people. That way he maintains his political power, and he can build his kingdom back up. He figures Abraham will go along with it, if he gives up all claims to the material spoils.

Abraham could have jumped at this opportunity. It's mine, right? Didn't I fight for it? I've

earned this. This is just God's way of blessing me. But there is a subtle danger here: Though it is subtle, it is very dangerous. The most important battles are invisible, for they are fought in your heart. That is the danger here.

Abraham could give in to the allure of earthly wealth: This is one of the ways Satan tempted Jesus. We are tempted this way too. Abraham refused to have any sort of connection with the wicked city of Sodom. If he were to make this deal, the king might feel Abraham owes him in some way. Abraham was set apart for God; he wasn't going to tie himself to Sodom.

Notice it was because he was set apart, that Abraham was in a position to help. Because he was separate, he escaped the wrath of Kedorlaomer, and was in a position to rescue his nephew and the others. We too must be set apart in order to help the world. To save someone you must be near them (this is where love comes in) but yet apart from them (this is where holiness comes in.). You cannot save someone from drowning if you are drowning with them.

We can get too close and too involved in the world, and this like trying to rescue drowning people by pulling them into a sinking boat. At the same time, we must be close enough to the world to help them. Many people drowned when the titanic sank, not because there wasn't room in the boats, but because the boats were too far away to do any good. The boat must be in the water, but the water can't be in the boat.

How do you respond when your friends and loved ones get embroiled in sin, and wrong choices? We can get too close or too far. We must maintain a close separation.

***Conclusion:***

Abraham learned in this chapter that whether it's marching into battle against the armies of 4 kings with only 318 men, or facing the moral temptation and spiritual compromise posed by a wicked city, that he is never outnumbered with God on his side. We must learn that God is enough for us too. When we walk by faith, no enemy is too strong, and no battle too great for our God to handle: God will provide the strength and help we need. He will even bring people into our lives to help.