Sermon for Mid-Week Lenten Service, Week 1

# The Text: Genesis 14:18-20

# Shadows of the Savior—Melchizedek

What has this text got to do with Lent and with our sermon series on “Shadows of the Saviour”? There doesn’t seem to be any mention of Jesus in the verses.

In the mysterious person mentioned in our text, that priest and king named Melchizedek, we find a shadow of our Saviour. Though Melchizedek is mentioned in only three places in Scripture, he can teach us something about Jesus Christ. For in him we have a shadow of:

1. What the Saviour does for us and,
2. What the Saviour deserves from us

**I. What the Saviour does for us**

The first war recorded in the Bible was over. With the Lord’s strength Abram had defeated the kings from the East. Earlier they had conquered the Jordan River valley and had carried off the inhabitants of those cities as prisoners of war. Among those prisoners was Abram’s nephew Lot. Abram had come to the rescue, and now, traveling back from the battle, he was met by a mysterious figure named Melchizedek, who brought Abram a message. Our text calls Melchizedek “king of Salem” and “priest of God Most High.” Nothing more. In the New Testament letter to the Hebrews we read, ***“Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he [Melchizedek] remains a priest forever.”*** (7:3). Suddenly he appears in the pages of Scripture, just as suddenly to disappear. And all of this was intentional, so that he might serve more strikingly as a shadow of the coming Saviour.

Can we see how all this points to Christ? He could tell the Jews, ***“Before Abraham was, I am.”*** (Jn.8:58). Jesus has neither beginning of days nor end of life. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. As true God begotten of the Father from eternity, He is without a mother. As true man, born of the Virgin Mary, he is without a human father. Moreover, like Melchizedek, His work goes on without end. Obviously Melchizedek was born at a certain time, and did die, but Scripture does not record them in its intent to use Melchizedek to describe our Saviour’s unending work.

Furthermore, Melchizedek means “king of righteousness.” He is called “king of Salem,” referring to Jerusalem and meaning “king of peace.” With this mysterious figure two important concepts are connected - righteousness and peace. What a rich combination and what a shadow of our Saviour! Jesus is truly the King of righteousness, not only that He was righteousness in Himself, but that He fulfilled all righteousness for us so that we might be in right relationship with God. And flowing from this right relationship with God is the reconciliation of enemies- that beautiful thing called peace. A just God, whose love has cleansed us from all sin through his Son Jesus, can look on us with his full favour, *that* is what true peace is.

There’s still more to the shadows in our text. Melchizedek blessed Abram saying, ***“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.”*** These words were not just a formal greeting or a fervent wish. They were Gospel fact. God, not Abram, had done these things. God, not Abram, had brought him victory over his enemies. And God would continue to care for Abram, as He promised. Do you sense the tone in Melchizedek’s words? God and Abram are close; there’s nothing standing between them, not even Abram’s sin, because ***“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God’s friend”*** (James 2:23).

Like Abram, let Melchizedek remind us of what our Saviour has done for us. Jesus, our priest, is far greater than was Melchizedek, for He is *the* Priest who sacrificed Himself for us as an offering to God on the cross! All those sins we’ve dragged here tonight - the ones we know and the ones we don’t - the ones that bother us grievously and the ones that should bother us more; the ruts we slide into daily and don’t even seem to notice; and the cliffs we plunge over so suddenly and feel so mightily - all these He paid for in His body in death. And ***“by His wounds I am healed.”*** (Is.53:6).

The story is told of one day when the devil approached Martin Luther and tried to accuse him for his many sins. He presented the Reformer with a long list and started reading from the top. When Satan had finished, Luther said, “Think a little harder. You must have forgotten some.” This the devil did and added more to the list. For several more exchanges they went on until the devil could come up with nothing more. Then Luther simply said, “That’s fine. Now write across that long list in red ink, “‘The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses me from all sin.’” And the devil had to slink away.

Tonight, let’s also remember that, like Luther, that Christ has canceled our sins and cleansed us from the accusations of the devil. Have some of us come tonight weak and weary, worn down by life’s endless burdens, worried because of today’s unsolved problems? Does today look dark and tomorrow even darker? Small or large, life’s pains can blister our peace and rub away at our well-being. Anybody here know what I’m talking about? Abram had his war with the kings from the East. He had his differences with his nephew Lot. He had his moments of weakness when the fulfillment of God’s promises seemed long in coming. But he also had the King of peace, the coming Christ in whom he believed.

So do we! In Jesus, our God Most High guarantees us, not the absence of storms, but sure shelter in the midst of life’s storms. In Jesus, our God Most High guarantees us, not a five-pound limit when it comes to problems, but almighty shoulders next to ours under the load. From him come only blessings, in him we have all things. My King of peace rules, today and tomorrow, over my heart and life with his grace and power, until he finally takes me to his glory.

**II. What the Savior deserves from us.**

“Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything,” our text continues. This offering was not to pry something loose from God, but to thank Him for what had been freely bestowed. Abram responded to God’s blessing. He showed the fruit of His faith, for behind the outward offering was a greater one, the offering of himself. Abram was God’s man. He belonged totally to this God Most High who had done and would continue to do such great things for him.

Again we can see the shadow, this time pointing to us, God’s people. Our loving Saviour makes no demands. He doesn’t have to. Paul puts it into perspective with the words, ***“He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again”*** (2 Corinthians 5:15). To such a God of infinite love, true Christians bring willing offerings. Faith and gratitude go hand in hand. God doesn’t just deserve something from us. He deserves *everything*. Our moments and days, our hands and feet, our voices and lips, and yes, our silver and gold- in short all our hearts and lives are offerings to be laid at Jesus’ feet.

Oh but how we resist these things! We may want God, but how often we want Him on our terms. Yes, He can die to save us, but He better not tell me what to do with my time or my money. And so we need always to have the image of Christ before us, as Melchizedek stood before Abram, to remind us of what blessings I have from God that in repentance I may kill the damned perversion that my life and my talents and my money is for me. Thus it is necessary that we receive this message of Lent once more to take us back again to the foot of the Saviour’s cross to see, in sorrow and shame, the death which His love for us led Him to. We no longer need shadows to point to him as in the Old Testament, but we do need to stand in the shadow of his love more fully.

Then and only then will our response be: *“Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”* Amen.