February 13, 2022

Sermon 15

Genesis 14

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Go ahead and turn to Genesis 14. No one has ever accused me of being eloquent but I appreciate the prayer, anyway. I know what’s at stake[[1]](#footnote-1), so I’m going to be efficient, but I am very excited about our text tonight and getting into Genesis 14. So, we’re going to go to work. I’m going to do a quick recap, just briefly. We’ve moved into this section that is primarily focused on the life of Abraham. What we’ve already seen so much is the promises made to Abraham, this covenant made to Abraham, and his faithful and faith filled response to the Lord. There have been highs and lows and there have been huge bumps in the road but, ultimately, he’s demonstrated his faith by his obedience.

So, to remind you, from chapter 12,

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”

We know, with Gospel hindsight, that that includes us, ultimately, through the person and work of Jesus. Hebrews 11 remembers this moment, when Abraham gets this first command and promise, and he simply obeys. This is how Hebrews 11 remembers that. In giving a defense for saving faith, it says, in 11:8,

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

So, we’ve seen that Abraham is held up as the father of faith. Okay? In chapter 13, God reaffirms and then makes even more specific and broadens that promise to Abraham. In 13:14,

Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever…”

Here it is.

*16 “…I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. 17 Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”*

He’s had these incredible promises and, again, we saw where he messed up in Egypt, he messed up when the famine came, when he was fearful that there wouldn’t be enough. He goes into Egypt, he makes mistakes, but God still carries him through, and ultimately, we see his faithfulness. And we get to chapter 14 and I’m going to go ahead and read the entire chapter and then we will work through it.

I really wanted to make this our responsive reading tonight just so I wouldn’t be the only one.

In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, 2 these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). 3 And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). 4 Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. 5 In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, 6 and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness. 7 Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh) and defeated all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon-tamar.

8 Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim 9 with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five. 10 Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. 11 So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. 12 They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way.

13 Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram. 14 When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16 Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.

17 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). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) 19 And he blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,

 Possessor of heaven and earth;

20 and blessed be God Most High,

 who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. 21 And the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.” 22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, 23 that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ 24 I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.”

Pray with me one more time.

Lord Jesus, again we come before you and ask that you would be exalted, that you would be glorified, that we would have ears to hear your Word. God, I pray right now for someone who’s become dull of hearing that by your grace and by your Spirit you would open their ears, Lord, and break down any hardness of heart that would keep us from allowing your Spirit to work in us. I pray you would draw us to yourself. I pray that this would be an encouragement for your Church and that you would draw lost people to yourself for salvation. In Christ’s name, Amen.

Again, we know that when this story starts that Lot, Abram’s nephew, has gone to live in Sodom. Tonight, in this passage, we will see how this plays out, but we’re also going to meet a character who is one of, if not the most, mysterious individuals in the Bible. We’re going to see what the Scripture has to say about him, but ultimately, what we’re going to see through this passage and the Scriptures that support it, is that we would see more clearly and comprehend more deeply who Jesus is and what He has done for us. Maybe tonight we will get to see that in a unique way. That’s the main point of our passage tonight—to see Jesus more clearly so we can obey Him and worship Him more passionately.

So, the Battle of the Nine Armies. You have all of these kings and what’s going on here is that these city-states down around where Abram is living, close to Jerusalem, Abram is living on the west side of the Dead Sea, the Salt Sea, and you have all of these city-states that kind of surround it, and all of these city-states, these little kingdoms, have been paying tribute to Chedorlaomer for years, for 12 years. Well, in the 13th year, they decide, “You know what? If we’re all in this together, we’re done. We’re done paying him anything.” And they stop. So, the 13th year goes by and the next year Chedorlaomer goes, “Okay, guys.” And all the folks around him mount up and they are going to make their way to bring them back into subjection. The idea is that, most likely what is so valuable here is that when they’re sending tribute is that it was a copper-rich area. In that area, in the Ancient Near East, that was a rare commodity but it’s what they were making their tools and their weapons out of. They were very motivated to make their way down there to bring them back into subjection so that they can pay that tribute. So, they make their way down. It’s fascinating if you want to look at maps. Probably as they came down they were just taking out more people. They came through and they sacked all these city-states and they are taking over and they dominate.

It says the kings run away and fall into the tar pits, and what is translated ‘fell’ can also be translated that they lowered themselves in. It’s possible that they go in to hide but it’s also possible that they fell in and died. So, they sacked these cities and they were taking all their goods, all their possessions, and their women, and Lot gets swept up in this. Now, they probably come down the east side of the Dead Sea and now they’re coming around the west side, but they bypass Mamre, and Salem, which becomes Jerusalem, and they’re headed back home, and somebody comes and makes Abram aware of what’s happened. So, he mounts up with his 318 trained soldiers, his personal detail, and then all the little city-states that he has an alliance with, go together and travel somewhere around 150 miles to catch up to this caravan of this axis of power that came down to sack these cities. They catch up and Abram divides his forces, and they take them out, and he’s victorious. They bring all the people back, all the possessions, all the women who were taken captive, and Lot included, and they are coming back home. There’s this huge celebration and you can go read more about it, but the battle, even though it’s the first battle we see in the battle, the battle is not the main point. The battle is the stage on which we get to meet this mysterious character.

I did stop and think about how this is an awesome scene. You have Abram coming back in victory, and he is not a young guy by our standards. I do think there were different standards at that time but he’s not a young man. He goes, and he’s coming back, and he’s bloodied, and he’s dirty, and I see him at the head of this caravan of soldiers for hire, and those who were taken captive and who now have been released and freed, and they are coming back with him to the land. No doubt, there was a huge celebration. I just had to stop and think that, as a believer, as a Christian, there’s a slim chance that any of us would have to do this for someone that we care about, physically. There’s probably a slim chance that I will ever have to rescue a family member, a friend, or a member of Red Oak, physically from being taken captive. But for all of us, there will absolutely be people that you care about, family members, members of Red Oak, people that you work with, that have been taken captive, spiritually. And we’ll be called to go after them. Just pausing before the Lord, I wrote this down. Sometimes a person will be in that situation because they put themselves in that situation. Sometimes they will be a victim of somebody else’s sin and they will be taken captive, spiritually. Sometimes, when you go after them, they will hear you, and they will respond to the warning; they will respond to the encouragement; they will respond to your ministry, and they will return home, and you will see them healed. Sometimes, they will choose to remain in captivity. Sometimes, they will just walk further away from Jesus. Sometimes, they may hate you for even trying to rescue them. But we know we will always be blessed for our obedience and we can trust the work of the Lord, even the work that we don’t see or fully comprehend in somebody else’s life. As I pictured Abram’s awesome victory, physically, I couldn’t help but to think how there are so many stories in our church, just our church alone, where this has taken place. We’ve seen all different kinds of results but, absolutely, we will be called to go rescue people. Ultimately, this is what Jesus did for us. We were taken captive in sin to the enemy and then Jesus came and rescued us. He led captivity captive.

So, they come back and these two kings come out and meet Abram. One of them is the king of Sodom and one of them is the king of Salem. This gets set up by Moses, by the Holy Spirit through Moses, to really contrast these two kings. I don’t know if this is Bera the king of Sodom, who maybe hid in the pit for a while, and then when Abram rides out to go be victorious he climbs out. Maybe this is the same guy or maybe this is whoever takes his place if he died. It doesn’t really matter. But listen to this:

The meeting with the two kings is set out in a contrast: In this sequence we have the king of Sodom going out, the king of Salem bringing out, the king of Salem blessing, and the King of Sodom bartering. The central thrust of the story is clearly the action and speech of Melchizedek. — it separates the action and the speech of the king of Sodom. Abram was far more prepared to resist the offer from Sodom after receiving the blessing of Melchizedek.

This was from Ross. The king of Sodom tries to give payment to Abram, possibly to bring him into an alliance that would compromise Abram. Abram will share his allegiance with no one. That’s what we see. Abram swore he would not enter into an ungodly alliance with Sodom, choosing rather to trust the promise of God over the riches of the world. Dale Ralph Davis said it this way,

Abram rejects Sodom and its gifts for the bread and wine of Salem offered by Melchizedek.

I’m going to read this again, because it’s been a minute. For the Christian, when we meet Melchizedek, everything about him screams that he is, at minimum, foreshadowing Christ.

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). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) 19 And he blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,

 Possessor of heaven and earth;

20 and blessed be God Most High,

 who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

You have this king, Mechizedek, coming from Salem, which eventually would become Jerusalem. He’s bringing out bread and wine to refresh Abraham. As believers, with Gospel hindsight, we should already start to know where this is going. But before we get there, we’ve got to back up and realize, for the Israelites, this guy, from the beginning, was so mysterious. Who is he? Who is this king-priest who knows Yahweh? Who knows the Lord? Who is serving the Lord? The priesthood hasn’t even been established yet. Israel’s priesthood doesn’t exist yet. Abram has been called out and he’s the father of Israel. He is the patriarch. Who is this guy? How does he know God? And who is this guy who so clearly is superior to Abraham? The writer of Hebrews will tell us that it’s obvious that he’s superior because Abram pays a tithe to him and Melchizedek blesses Abram, putting him in a superior position. Who is this man? Over the years, people would say that maybe this is actually an angel in human form. Or maybe this is Enoch, or maybe this is Shem. There’s all this mystery that surrounds him.

So, fast forward. You have this scene and you fast forward—Abraham has Isaac, and Isaac has Jacob. If you haven’t read ahead, sorry for the spoiler. He’s gonna have a kid. Then he has the twelve and Joseph is one of them, and they go into Egypt, and eventually into slavery. Then, God raises up Moses, who is writing this by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, and Moses is used to lead the children of Israel. And the promise is true—they are a nation. And he brings them out of slavery and he’s taking them back to this Promised Land, where Abram right now is just camping out. God’s going to bring them into the land, but before He does that, He stops and He gives them the Law. He gives the Law and while He’s giving them the Law, He takes Moses up on the mountain, and He somehow shows him. Moses is able to see into this heavenly reality and he’s told, “What you are going to do is make a sanctuary just like the pattern I showed you in Heaven.” Moses gets the pattern for what would be the Tabernacle and eventually the Temple. This would be the center of worship for the Israelites. Then, God establishes a priesthood. It wasn’t just anybody who could serve the Lord in the Tabernacle or the Temple. There was one tribe, the tribe of Levi, that could serve the Temple. They could draw a little bit closer to the Lord. Then, the family of Aaron could serve even closer, and the high priest would come form that family.

I want to pause here because I want us to see. I want us to get the picture. There are only two places outside of Genesis where Melchizedek is mentioned. Psalm 110 is a messianic Psalm, which means that God was promising, through David, that one day there would be a King who would come and His reign would never end. God had promised David that. That the throne would never leave his family, that it would never leave the tribe of Judah, specifically, of David’s line. In that messianic Psalm, it says this, talking about the Messiah, the King to come. Let me read it so I don’t mess it up.

The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, “You (the Messiah) are a priest forever…”

This king, who will sit on the throne forever, Yahweh, the Lord, is swearing—is making an oath—and saying of the Messiah, this:

 “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

The Jews didn’t know what to do with that. They didn’t know what to do with this. Is this two different people in the same Psalm? Do we have a king who will serve as king forever and will we have a priest who will serve as priest forever? What’s going on? Because when God set up the priesthood it was very clear what He was doing; God, in His grace, was drawing near to His people. But when you examine their religion, it is still all about degrees of separation that were necessary because God is holy and we’re sinful. That’s how all this started, right? We fell. Why is He starting with Abram. Because all of humanity fell away from God. We’re His enemies. We’ve broken fellowship. We’re not being the people that He created us to be. So, God in His grace is drawing near to humanity through this one nation, Israel. All the other nations of the world are still kept at a great distance because of their sinfulness and God’s holiness. But God is making provision, so this one nation can come closer to God. Then, out of that nation made up of twelve tribes, one tribe could come a little bit closer, the tribe of Levi. Then, out of that tribe, that one family could come even closer and serve as priests, making sacrifices.

The Temple or the Tabernacle was set up so there was a holy place. There were these thick curtains that were separating everything and the priests could enter in to the Holy Place and day, after day, after day, they could make sacrifices. They could kill lambs. They could kill bulls, and burn animals, and offer incense, all for the worship of the Lord, and to make some sort of covering for the unintentional sins of the people. All day, every day, that’s all they did. Then, one special day was set apart, the Day of Atonement, where the high priest, one man, could go one time a year, through the second set of curtains into the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies is where God’s manifest presence, His Shekinah glory, would dwell. God’s presence dwelt in the Holy of Holies. Ultimately, what was in there was the Ark of the Covenant, this box that’s covered in gold, and the top of it, called the Mercy Seat, is a solid piece of gold. In the Ark are the tablets of the covenant, the Law that God had given, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and some manna. So, God dwelt in the Holy of Holies, dwelling above the Mercy Seat. And one time a year the high priest could go in but he’s only going in to offer the blood of animals for the unintentional sins of the people, first for himself, but then for the people. It’s this crazy picture, that God wants to be near to His people, but who wants that job? Who wants to be the high priest? Not me. Aaron didn’t want it. Aaron’s own two sons went in there and they died because they did something wrong. Then, God told Moses to tell Aaron, “Tell Aaron not to come into the Holy of Holies at any time, lest he die.” Then He sets up the Day of Atonement.

Every year, as the Day of Atonement would come around, is this very clear reminder that because of God’s holiness, we don’t belong in His presence. Even those that He is bringing near to himself. Tradition would tell us that when the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies, when he would pass through that second set of curtains, they would tie a rope to his ankle because if he thought, or said, or did something wrong while in there, and God struck him dead, are you going to get him? Nope, I’m not even Jewish. I’m not going in there. Who’s signing up? No, I’ll drag him out. That’s what tradition teaches us. They didn’t belong in there. But year after year, the High Priest would serve until he died, and then another High Priest would take his place. Day after day, animals were being killed.

So, you have the mystery, who is this Melchizedek? Who is this one that David says is Messiah and a priest forever? How can he be a priest? If the Messiah is from Judah, how can he be a priest? How can he serve before the Lord? But they also have to deal with this question, because in that system we have the Law that shows us our guilt, and provision is made to make sacrifice, but only for our unintentional sins. I would ask you, if you’ve ever sinned intentionally, but I think I know most of you, and I’m going to assume on the rest of you. That’s a problem.

So, turn to Hebrews 7. The mystery hangs in the air for years. The Holy Spirit, through the writer of Hebrews, is going to use this historic person, this historic figure of Melchizedek, and He’s going to use the mystery surrounding him, to give us a very unique understanding of the person and the work of Jesus. Start in verse 1,

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. 3 He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but….

Here it is.

…resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

Melchizedek is a real guy. This isn’t an angel. It’s not Enoch. It’s not Shem. It’s not a pre-incarnate appearing of Jesus. He’s a real guy, but the author of Hebrews uses him because of his likeness, to Jesus, both in what is said and in what is not said about him. He says this,

He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness,…

Melchizedek, king of righteousness. We know that’s who Jesus is. He rules with the scepter of uprightness. He rules in complete, total justice. Not just that Jesus will rule with justice but that He is the King of Righteousness in that He shares His righteousness with us. But He’s also King of Peace, in that He defeats all of our enemies, subdues all enemies, makes a footstool of all His enemies. But also a King of Peace because He brings us into a right relationship with God. He’s able to remove the hostility between us and God. How could our King do that?

It says,

He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life,…

This is talking about Melchizedek. The writer uses silence here. I think Melchizedek had a belly button. It’s just my personal opinion. I never saw him but I think he had one. I think he had a mom and dad. But what the writer of Hebrews is doing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is using what’s not said to highlight what we know to be true about Jesus, because Jesus also had an earthly mother. But we know that Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity. He’s Jesus from all of eternity. He exists in perfect relationship with the Father and with the Spirit. He is eternal. Pay attention to what he says, Melchizedek resembles Jesus, not the other way around. He’s eternal and that’s going to matter a whole lot here in a minute. He doesn’t have a beginning, he doesn’t have an end, and his priesthood, unlike the priesthood in Israel, unlike the Levitical priesthood, it’s not dependent on your ancestry. Let’s read on.

Are y’all with me? It doesn’t matter, I’m loving this. Alright, here we go.

See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! 5 And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. 6 But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. 8 In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. 9 One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, 10 for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

He’s setting up that Jesus’ role as high priest is not only possible that Jesus could be both our eternal King and our eternal Priest, because He’s not of the tribe of Levi, and that’s good. He’s from an order that is far superior, far superior, and that’s demonstrated when Abraham paid tithes. It’s as if the whole tribe of Levi, through Abraham, was bowing down, not before Melchizedek, the man, but the Man that he resembled, Jesus, the eternal Son of God, the Great High Priest.

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? 12 For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

It’s saying this. If the priesthood changes, the whole Law is done away with. Not the moral law, but the old covenant, the Old Testament is done away with. They’re dependent on one another. We know that when the writer of Hebrews penned this, the Temple was most likely still standing, but it’s not there today. It’s not there. Do you know who is serving as high priest on the Day of Atonement this year? That’s right. I’ll also use your silence for my answer—nobody. Nobody. It doesn’t exist. You can’t be an Old Testament Jew. It doesn’t exist, and it doesn’t exist for this purpose—it was old and it was passing away. It was giving way to what is new, to what is better, to what is far superior.

Verse 15,

This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.

He’s eternal and we know He died, but He rose again.

17 For it is witnessed of him,

“You are a priest forever,

 after the order of Melchizedek.”

18 For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. 20 And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, 21 but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:

“The Lord has sworn

 and will not change his mind,

‘You are a priest forever.’”

22 This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

The Law couldn’t make anyone perfect. That was never the plan. It shows you your sin and there are all these pictures, but they are all pointing to something better. Those priests, every day, are serving, every day, are serving, and they’re never sitting down. All they do is serve all day long, killing animals, killing bulls, killing goats, and the blood of bulls and goats, it cannot take away sin. It was never possible. At best, it was just a picture. It set people apart physically to be able to serve but it could never make you perfect, and the writer of Hebrews has one thing in mind when he says, “Make you perfect.” Perfect, in Hebrews, means this—being able to come in and dwell in the presence of God. The Law couldn’t do it. It couldn’t do it for the high priest because he had his own sin. He didn’t belong in there. It could not make you perfect, couldn’t cleanse your conscience, couldn’t save you from dead works, couldn’t save you from your sin, couldn’t make propitiation, couldn’t remove God’s wrath from you. So, if you came into the presence of God, all there would be is the reality that, “I don’t deserve to be here and I should die, eternally.” What he wants us to see is that we have a superior High Priest. We have a better High Priest. The picture that he paints here and why he uses Melchizedek is so that we would see the work of Jesus in a very unique way. He doesn’t take us to the cross—He says this about Jesus as our High Priest.

In Hebrews 2, he’s going to say seven things. In Hebrews 2:17-28, he says,

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

He’s merciful and faithful. The high priest in the Levitical system couldn’t be both. He could be merciful, he could feel bad, he could want to do something about the situation people were in, but he couldn’t be faithful because of his own sin. Jesus can be merciful and faithful because, although He was tempted, He never sinned.

Chapter 4,

14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,…

Jesus didn’t pass through the curtains in the Temple. When Jesus lived out His earthly life, He never walked into the Temple. They wouldn’t have let Him. He never walked into the Holy of Holies on Earth. He didn’t pass through those curtains, but what the writer of Hebrews is saying is that He did something better because He’s of the order of Melchizedek. Listen to what Jesus passes through. He passes through the heavens.

…we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

Come on.

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near…

Do you see it?

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hmm. How did He do that? He passes through the heavens. Not through the curtains on Earth but through the heavens, into the heavenly reality, into what God had shown Moses. The writer of Hebrews wants us to see that as Jesus is dying on the cross, as God is pouring out His wrath, that there is this drama that’s being played out that the people standing there didn’t see with their physical eyes. In that moment, Jesus is passing through the heavens, and He’s going into the Holy of Holies, into the real presence before the real mercy seat, and He does not bring the blood of bulls and goats.

Chatper 9:11-14,

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

It’s eternal because it’s His blood. It’s eternal because He has an indestructible life. It’s eternal because He serves as our High Priest forever, and because of that He’s able to save to the uttermost. Eternal redemption.

 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh,…

If it sets apart, temporarily, just your body…

14 …how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Do you see it? He’s actually cleansed us. He’s actually purified us. He’s changed our conscience. Why? He already said it. So that we could draw near to God, so that we would belong.

Let me ask you, in the earthly Temple, when Jesus is absorbing, and satisfying, and making propitiation for God’s wrath towards us, what happened in the actual Holy of Holies on Earth? What happened to the curtain? It was torn top to bottom. That’s a crazy incident. I wonder if it had anything….Ohhh!! Jesus, behind the scenes, has gone through the heavens, into the presence of the Lord, before the real mercy seat, with His own blood, and He lays it down, and God’s wrath is once and for all satisfied. The writer of Hebrews knows that Jesus was on the cross and the writer of Hebrews knows that Jesus got up from the dead, but he doesn’t want us to picture that. He wants us to picture Jesus going into the Holy of Holies, laying down that sacrifice of His own blood, as a great High Priest, and not leaving, because He belongs. So, instead of leaving, He turns and He sits in the Mercy Seat that used to just be the barrier between the law that we’d broken that demands justice, and it now becomes the throne, the throne of grace.

(On the inside, I’m yelling, and it’s authoritative, and it’s passionate. Pay attention to that Rob, not to the Rob who can’t get a sentence out.)

It becomes the throne of grace. Listen to this from Hebrews 1:3,

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,…

Chapter 6:19-20,

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

The anchor of our soul. Do you see it? Jesus is tethered off, not with a rope but with a chain, and He’s an anchor for our souls so that we don’t drift. But that chain is not so that anybody could ever pull Him out, because Jesus always belongs in there, and He will sit forever as King and Priest. The chain is connected to us and it’s so that for the rest of your life that Jesus is pulling you in. So, why is He a priest like Melchizedek? He always lives, that’s why He’s able to save to the uttermost. He always lives to make intercession for us. What does He pray? To save you to the uttermost. What’s that mean? What’s He praying for? In a word, your perseverance, your perseverance. His prayers are what are pulling you in every day of your life, through the ups and downs, just like Abraham. You will finish faithful, you won’t ultimately drift, you won’t make shipwreck of your faith, because Jesus is praying for you and He is drawing you into the presence of God and saying, “Come, come boldly.”

Let’s pray.

Lord Jesus, the Gospel is so good. You’re so good. Thank you for giving us this glimpse behind the scenes. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your sacrifice. Thank you for this church. Thank you that they put up with my lisping and stammering and that we get to hear your Gospel. I pray that right now that you would bring men and women to repentance and faith and that you would save souls. I pray for us, that we would be encouraged to come daily into your presence to receive the grace and mercy that you have for us. God, I pray that it would encourage us to know that you pray for us, that you love us, that you save us, that you pray for us, and I pray that we’d be faithful with this message. I pray, now, that you receive the worship that you alone are worthy of. In Christ’s name, Amen.

1. This sermon was on the evening of the Super Bowl. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)