

“Hope, Melchizedek, and Jesus”

Pastor Jacob Hanson

05/17/2020

## Opening Prayer

Good morning, God willing hopefully everything is going wonderfully for you wherever you are and whenever you are watching this. Know that your church, your minister, and most importantly your Lord care about you and are here for you. Many prayers have been coming your way, and hopefully as we slowly start to return to normal in a safe manner as a nation, you are being well taken care of. Continuing our theme of hope and joy in the midst of crisis, we read this morning a few interesting pieces of scripture. In particular our readings for today focused on hope, a guy named Melchizedek, and Jesus. Our hope is found in Jesus, who is reckoned as a priest in the order of Melchizedek. To ruin the main idea for you, Jesus is where we place our hope, not in men or things or anything else... even someone as great as Abraham.

Our first reading for today, and our main one, comes from the book of Hebrews chapter six. This book, one of the longer ones in the New Testament, is focused upon providing encouragement to people who are under threat. The churches it is written to (possibly by Luke, but we don't know for sure) were of Jewish origin and were under the threat of persecution by the Roman government. These were people who had seen and heard about the great suffering of their brothers and sisters in Christ at the hands of the Romans, and so some were falling away from the church. The writer's goal in this book is to encourage these Christians to hold fast to the truth, and to remain in the salvation of Christ. Not only does this provide salvation, but it firmly grounds them in hope in this life and the next.

Verses nine and ten begin: “But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.” We recognize that the core of our hope is eternal salvation, that is spending eternity with our Creator in the manner to which our souls long. But the writer here also says that there are things that accompany salvation that come from our good works. Our good works do not, of course, buy our salvation... Jesus alone does that. But our good works done in Christ do bear out the hope that we have. In verse ten the writer mentions that God does not forget the things we do according to His will. This is important because when trials come, especially trials that specifically accompany being a Christian, it is easy to burn a little dimmer, to turn down the volume if you will. The old adage of “The squeaky wheel gets the grease” or the more sinister equally old adage of “The nail that sticks out gets hammered” both apply. These Christians, under persecution, need to continue in their Godly work not only for their hope and salvation, but so that others might see and

come to know as well. That is why this is such a big deal. To help undergird the reasoning behind holding fast to God even in the middle of difficulty, to help undergird this argument for hope and good works in the middle of persecution, the writer calls back the forefather of all Jews. It makes sense, that in writing to Jewish Christians, that he would call upon Abraham's story to show God's faithfulness.

In verses thirteen through fifteen the author states "For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you.' And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise." Every Jew worth their salt (and really any Christian who knows where Israel comes from) would know that God made a promise to Abraham and kept it, to give him a descendent and to make his descendants numerous throughout the earth. They also would know the history of Abraham having problems and issues in the meantime while he waited on that promise. Abraham tried to fulfill it on his own by sleeping with his maid (at his wife's urging... insanity!), Abraham had fought against several other people in trying to keep his own land secure, and Abraham had endured entering old age without a proper descendent... yet he kept believing. This is accounted to Abraham as righteousness by the Lord Himself, and so we rightfully remember that Abraham is extremely important even though he sinned quite a bit and had many problems along the way. It is worth noting that at the outset of this promise, the promise to bring about many descendants and bless the whole world, God and Abraham make a covenant with each other. Abraham promises to follow the Lord and the Lord promises to bless Abraham.

When you would take an oath in those days, at least from what we can tell, you would swear upon something as you did it. Often men would hold each other's "inner thighs" to signify swearing upon their manhood. Other things you see sworn upon in scripture are the alter, one's family, etc. Here Abraham does something really smart and he swears upon God, and God (knowing that Abraham is a sinful human) swears upon Himself. This isn't an equal oath, in other words, because God will be faithful even when Abraham is not. It sets a precedent that God is greater than man (duh), which we often forget.

Back to Abraham... Eventually, at 100 years old, Sarah and Abraham see Isaac born, the beginning of the fulfillment of that promise by God. From Isaac came Jacob, and from Jacob came the twelve tribes, and from those twelve tribes came the entire Jewish nation, and from the bloodline of one of them (Judah) came Jesus, and from Jesus's death and resurrection the whole world is saved if they cling to Him. That is how you and I enter into this great promise made to Abraham, and if you read Genesis 12:3 you can see that this is God's plan all along. Genesis 12:3 reads "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." If you have been with us in the pews much over the last year you definitely heard a whole lot about this promise and how it is traced all through scripture. You heard how it opens the door for Gentiles, and how it is

fulfilled by Jesus's blood. Now that alone should give you hope, but there is even more to it than that in our scriptures for today. We have to also talk about this guy named Melchizedek.

Melchizedek is somewhat of an enigmatic figure. He only shows up a few times in scripture total. There are a couple verses in Hebrews, one in Psalms, and a few in Genesis. In other words, we read almost all that scripture has to say about this guy this morning. Yet, the writer of Hebrews makes some startling claims... he uses Melchizedek to connect Abraham and Jesus! Verses 19-20 out of Hebrews six read "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." What on earth does that mean, and why the great hope? Well, that is where the background from Genesis really comes into play.

In Genesis 14:18-20 the context is that Abraham has just come out of a bunch of great battles. He had rescued his nephew Lot from certain death, along with Lot's whole family. At this point Abraham is still relatively young, and he does not have an heir. When he returns to the land he was living on he encounters this guy Melchizedek, who is noted as being "A priest of God Most High." Melchizedek, a man of God and the king of Salem (which means peace by the way), then pronounces a blessing on Abraham (who at this point is still known as Abram) saying "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand." Abraham's response to this holy man? Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of all he owned, as a tribute to the Lord and to the priest. What are the implications here? The writer of Hebrews, if you were to continue on reading, makes the claim that Abraham by paying tribute showed that Melchizedek was greater. Or at least, not that Melchizedek himself was greater, but that the Lord whom he represented was greater. To the Jews, who regarded Abraham and his lineage as the top of the line, the writer of Hebrews is making it clear... God's lineage is greater. What does this mean? Well, in verse 20 he states "Where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." In other words, Jesus is greater than Abraham, and is worthy of your hope and adherence.

For us this may be an easier lesson to take to heart than it was for these Hebrew Christians who had spent their whole life hearing only about Abraham. However, we can definitely apply this logic today, because we too often forget where our hope really comes from and who really fulfills that promise of salvation. In our world right now this is painfully clear. Depending on your political persuasion and preferred tv/internet sources, you may be hearing that such and such politician is the answer to the pandemic that surrounds us. This is normal during any election year (ever notice how every election is the "most important election of our lifetime?" but it is ramped up with Covid this go around. Another place that we see our hopes being placed in something lesser than Christ is in our jobs, or our hobbies, or even our families. All of those are good and worth pursuing, but if you think you are going to find your meaning in

getting promoted or buying a new boat or finding the right boyfriend/girlfriend, then you are destined for disappointment. This world would have you place your hopes in human beings, in human successes, in things that do not save and do not last. The only place our hopes should truly rest, the absolute grounding point for who we are, cannot be anything other than Jesus. That is what the writer of Hebrews wanted to remind those who were suffering through difficulties about, that their hope is found only in Jesus and not in Abraham or the Romans. For us we too need to remember that in our suffering especially that our hope is found in Jesus and not in politicians or safety measures or anything else. Beloved, if you want to live a peace filled life in the middle of struggle, then you have to rest upon Jesus. Everything else branches out from there. God Bless, let us pray.

### **Closing Prayer**