

Theme: Righteousness Passes the Test

- 1) In the blessings we receive from God
- 2) In the gifts we give to Him

Genesis 14:14-20 Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. 16 So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people. 17 And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley), after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him. 18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. 19 And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.

The eye test. I'm not talking about getting a pair of glasses. I'm talking about knowing something when you see it. We talk about certain qualities that we can see in people, even if we don't know them personally. The eye test is a big thing in evaluating talent. Oftentimes when someone can't express exactly what they believe about someone else, they will revert to the eye test as proof. They say things like: "I don't know what it is, but I can just tell they have what it takes."

The eye test is the ultimate culmination of those who say, "seeing is believing." A person's gut reaction to seeing something can get them to ignore reality, or loads of other evidence. It becomes a problem when trust comes into play. It's one thing for a person to believe something because they see something; but when they want me to believe it based on their evidence, it's becomes a bigger issue. I may have a completely different set of criteria for what constitutes a successful eye test.

The eye test also doesn't tell the whole story. If you were evaluating Olympic talent for a track team, the eye test of a sprinter may seem good. For one test run they might wow you by flying down the track. But, when you do your homework, if you find out that they are into performance enhancing drugs, or if they have a volatile temperament off the track, the eye test doesn't mean as much. At least, in theory. There are many who are willing to ignore the facts because they are so compelled by their gut reaction.

What is your faith more like? Do you believe because it passes your personal "eye test?" Is seeing believing when it comes to God? Or is faith more of a gut reaction that ignores clear evidence? There are many opinions out there. God helps us focus in on the most important thing – righteousness. In reality, true faith is not all about the eyes, nor is it just a gut reaction. If you want faith, that is, the kind of faith that means anything before God, you need righteousness. You cannot be hampered by sin. You cannot be imperfect. You have to measure up to God Himself – never once going astray.

Well, that's clearly not us, and yet we continue to talk about it because we do have hope. Christ gives us the proper righteousness. But, He doesn't do away with the important difference that righteousness makes. We are not allowed to forget and ignore God's Word simply because Christ redeems us. In contrast, Jesus reinforces the need of righteousness even more by His act of grace and forgiveness. Our text today gives us an example of that from the Old Testament in the life of Abram.

Part 1: In the blessings we receive from God

God taught Abram that Righteousness Passes the Test. First of all, in what we receive from God.

This text centers not so much on Abram, but on this mysterious individual named Melchizedek. We actually know more about Melchizedek from the New Testament. The writer of Hebrews takes this obscure story from the Old Testament, coupled with a reference to Melchizedek in Psalm 110, and expands on it for the New Testament believer. Much has been said about Melchizedek, most of which is purely speculation. But, what we can say for certain is that he was a picture of Christ in the Old Testament. How this man was both a king and a priest at the same time is a mystery. How he practiced an order of the priesthood before Aaron initiated the official line of the Levites is a mystery. In fact, how Melchizedek even knew the true God at this time of great spiritual ignorance around the world is a mystery.

But, one need look no further than to the man's name to see his connection to Christ. Melchizedek is actually more of a title than a proper name. It is a combination of two Hebrew words – meaning King and Righteousness. It's unlikely that a child was given this literal name, "King of Righteousness." It's more likely this particular king took this title, whatever his name may have been. Regardless, in addition to this title, there are some pretty interesting connections between Melchizedek and Jesus.

- Melchizedek was king of Salem, meaning "Peace". Jesus was called the "Prince of Peace" by Isaiah.
- Salem would later become Jerusalem, the center of God's people and place where Jesus was crucified.
- Melchizedek was also a priest. Jesus was the greatest priest, both as the offering and offeror.
- In our text, Melchizedek blesses Abram, and God, and Abram returns thanks with an offering. This mirrors the believer's life with Christ.

All of these connections flow from our text and are fleshed out in the rest of Scripture. But as we look at Hebrews we see things that are even more direct. In chapter 7, the writer speaks, **Now consider how great Melchizedek was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils ... And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life (Hebrews 7:4,15-16).**

Jesus and Melchizedek shared many similarities. Psalm 110 even tells us that Melchizedek was an Old Testament picture of Christ. But, ultimately, in the blessings that they gave, Jesus was much greater. Jesus was able to give an eternal blessing that removed sin forever. Melchizedek was simply another preacher and earthly intercessor of God. He could only work if the promise of Christ was in view. Jesus was a better Melchizedek, or more appropriately, a better King of Righteousness.

When it came to the blessings Jesus gave, righteousness was the difference maker. The eye test with Jesus certainly failed. Isaiah wrote, **He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.**

If people aren't careful, they will miss Jesus if they're looking for the wrong thing. Those who want a Savior who sits on the sidelines of life and lets them live how they want don't have Jesus. Those who want a Savior to help them stay comfortable in their sins, in pride, greed, lust, anger, hypocrisy; they don't have Jesus. Those who want to confine Jesus to modern day stereotypes about heroes and social justice warriors, don't have Jesus.

Jesus is all about righteousness, because that's what passes the true test. It's not pretty to the eyes. It's not even observable to the human heart. But, it's the very blessing that sinners need. We need a complete measure of God's righteousness. Abram was blessed this way by Melchizedek, when he was reminded of the covenant promise God had already given. This was reaffirmed in Genesis 15 by a familiar passage - **Genesis 15:6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.** Abram's faith opened the blessing of God's righteousness – his future Messiah's payment for sin on the cross. Don't miss the importance of recognizing that this verse is quoted three times in the New Testament to confirm salvation by faith. That's what Abram's covenant from God was all about.

Part 2: In our gifts to God

I could see how one might think that Abram was just desperate for any gift from anyone at this point in his life. He was called by God to leave his homeland and travel across what must have seemed like the entire world. But, God had blessed him materially too, and Abram responded with a genuine thankfulness. And he wasn't gullible for any gift either. Our text comes right after Abram's great victory over the kings who kidnapped Lot. When the king of Sodom comes to Abram and wants Abram to take all the treasures of the victory, Abram says no. He would rather have Melchizedek's spoken blessing from God than treasures at the request of a heathen king.

Abram chose the right path because he chose it by faith in Christ. He didn't want to be aligned with a king who was responsible for the great wickedness and immorality of Sodom. Lot was free to choose his own path and he certainly chose poorly. This wouldn't be the last time he relied upon Abram's protection because he had chosen worldly priorities over Godliness. A few chapters later, Sodom and Gomorrah would be on the receiving end of God's judgment and once again, Abram would come to Lot's rescue.

Again, the eye test failed and righteousness held the day. From the strictly physical perspective Abram was a fool for turning down the treasures and accepting a verbal blessing instead. The world looks at that and says what good will that do? What effect do words really have. I'd rather something I can hold. In his heart, Abram knew by faith what His Savior would later say, **"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul (Matthew 16:26.)"** **"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses (Luke 12:15)."**

Think it's unlikely that anyone would ignore the truth for the sake of their own eye test? You shouldn't, it happens all the time, and especially with the greatest matters of life. People are more willing to stake their eternity on their own feelings, on what they deem as good enough, rather than trust God's simple Word. Just as there is no beauty to the eyes in a crucified Savior on the cross, so also there is no beauty to blessings that are simply spoken and accepted by faith.

Melchizedek's lasting lesson to the world is that the blessing of God is most important because it passes the test of *righteousness*. The righteousness we need to be declared innocent of our transgressions and the righteousness we need to serve God in our lives. Would you give that up for treasures of this world? Would you forsake that to follow your own feelings? Don't be too quick to answer either way, for the solution is far more complicated than you might think, and many have failed both by unwillingness to accept the truth and by arrogance to ignore the danger.

Abram resisted the allure of the king of Sodom. Instead of immediate gratification, he chose the long-lasting and long-suffering spiritual reward through God's Word. Recognize the ways in which your heart might try to "buy" its way into God's favor, as the king tried to buy his way into Abram's favor. Treasures involve more than silver and gold. Treasures can be time and talents too; motivations and beliefs. Remember Jesus, "**where your treasure is, your heart will be also.**" We could confess it in reverse too, "**where your heart is, there your treasure is also.**" If you seek God on your own accord, your treasure will be worldly, even if doesn't come with a price tag. If you think you're close to God, but you could care less about His Word, your treasure is not what you think it is.

Righteousness passes the test. It reveals the rotten hollowness of all the false treasures we create for ourselves, by showing us the glaring law of God. But, it also fills in the great need by lifting us up in the forgiveness of Christ. Abram followed the blessing by God's Word, from Melchizedek, and it was credited to his heart as saving righteousness by God, through Christ. Let us follow the same path in our lives, not being hindered by the false blessings of treasures, whether in the world or in the heart, but heeding the Gospel word of our Savior, Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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