

Pastor:

Mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Audience:

Amen.

Pastor:

All right, so we have here in the reading of Hebrews, I imagine one of the first questions that a lot of you have is who in the world is Melchizedek? I mean, as we read, Melchizedek is not really in scripture that much. You've got a couple of mentions of him here. You've got one brief mention of him in the psalms, and then he's got a short little paragraph or two in the Book of Genesis and that's it. That's all we know. We don't know much about Melchizedek at all, really. He shows up after Abraham had just won a battle against some city state, and Abraham goes to Melchizedek, who is the priest of the most high God in Salem. And Abraham gives a 10th of the spoils to Melchizedek, and that's all we know. Oh, they also sat down to bread and wine, but that's it. That's what we know about Melchizedek. We don't know where he came from. We don't know who he was born to. We don't know how old he was. We don't know what happened to him afterwards. He just appears for a time and then disappears.

And Abraham honors him by giving a 10th of the spoils to him. So who is Melchizedek, especially since it says Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek? Well, we know about the priesthood of Aaron. He's the one that was called by God to offer sacrifices in the temple and to bring the sacrifices on that day of atonement into the Holy of Holies. We know what priests do in the Old Testament, but again, remember Melchizedek and Abraham were several hundred years before Moses, so the whole Old Testament system had not yet been set up. And yet here we have a high priest of the most high God.

Well, we'll get into a couple of ideas about who he is. First off, where he's from. He is a priest of the most high God from Salem or Salem. If you look at a map of Israel, an Old Testament or New Testament or modern day map, you're not going to see Salem. Not there. However, you will see Jerusalem. See, Salem is the precursor to what will eventually become Jerusalem. Abraham came to the high priest of God who was in the area which we now know as Jerusalem, and he offered sacrifices to that priest. He gave an offering of respect and honor. In other words, Melchizedek was considered higher and of greater authority than Abraham. And yet we're all supposed to be children of Abraham, and it is through Abraham that the salvation of the world is to come through Jesus Christ. So what are we talking about?

Well, the clue is in how Melchizedek shows up. He has no beginning and he has no end just like Jesus Christ has no beginning and no ends. And Melchizedek offered bread and wine to Abraham. If you think of the Lord's Supper and the bread and wine that God gives to us, His body and blood, you are making a good connection there. And then the fact that Abraham offered his tithes to Melchizedek. In other words, Melchizedek, his order is greater than the order of Aaron. The order of Melchizedek is the order of the gospel because Jesus is that high priest who offers Himself as a sacrifice, who is the priest of the most high God because he is God. Whereas Abram had to offer sacrifice for himself before he could offer sacrifice for anybody else or Aaron, I mean. Sorry, Aaron.

Aaron was the priest of the law, the law that was established in the Old Testament in the hopes that eventually the sacrifice that was done in the order of Melchizedek would take place, Christ who would wipe out and eliminate all the need for the Old Testament sacrifices and for the guilt of the law. So this is what it means, this is what the Book of Hebrews means when Jesus Christ is a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. He is not under the law. He is over the law. He is not dependent upon Moses and the 10 Commandments and Aaron and the sacrificial system. He is the reason that they are done to be

fulfilled in him. And he did not choose that, just like Aaron did not choose that, but it was given to him by the Father.

It's interesting, it says that, "Jesus in his human form when he was in flesh, prayed to the Father that He might be delivered from death." And it says that, "God heard him." That doesn't mean that Jesus avoided death. We know that He died on the cross, and yet it says that God heard Him. See, Jesus understood that in spite of the fact that as a human, He didn't want to die. He wasn't some guy that said, "You know what? I want to suffer. Please, how much pain can I bear for the sake of the gospel?" He wasn't enthusiastic about it, but He was willing to suffer it for our sake. He was willing to submit his will to the will of the Father because he knew that if he avoided death, we would still be stuck in our sin. And so because He loves us, he submitted His will and suffered so that we might be free.

Now, it's interesting. This is also what God calls us to do. You and I may be going through some suffering in our lives at some point. In fact, you may be going through some right now. You may be in a period of life where things aren't going the way you would like. In the gospel lesson, we have James and John who I can't believe their arrogance and their chutzpah, whatever that is called to go before Jesus and said, "Jesus, I want you to give me whatever I ask you." I'm waiting for the lightning to come down and strike them. I mean, I can't imagine just going up to Jesus saying, "You need to give me what I ask." Okay. They were thinking, and it's weird because they asked this question right after Jesus said, "I'm going to go to Jerusalem and I'm going to be handed over to the Gentiles and I'm going to be flogged and suffer and I'm going to die. And then arise from the dead." And immediately following that, they say, "We want to be at your right and your left hand."

Did you hear what was just before that? They just sort of blanked that all out. They weren't even listening. They just understood that Jesus was going to be glorified. He was the Messiah. He was a savior. Something good was going to happen. "And we want to be there. We want to be on the right and the left. "Oh suffering? I'm sorry, I didn't hear that. I don't understand that. I'll just ignore it. Maybe it'll go away way." But Jesus said, "No, I'll grant you that you will suffer what I suffer, that you will be baptized in the baptism I have, and you will drink the cup that I drink." In other words, "Just like I suffered for the sake of all humanity, you also will suffer for the sake of the cross, for the sake of the gospel."

They weren't quite understanding it wasn't their will, but God's that was to be done in their lives. And it's the same for us. In our suffering we would often like to say, "God, take this pain from me, take this suffering, this sorrow from me." And if He doesn't, we might be tempted to think, "Well, God wasn't listening." But no, God has listened. He has heard our prayer and He has answered our prayer. Just not the way we want. He's answered our prayer and said, "Mike, grace is sufficient for you." In suffering, we learn dependence. We learn trust in the Word of God. We learn that we cannot muscle our way through the trials of this world. No matter how hard we try, no matter how much we try and lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps, it's not going to work. The only place that we find peace, the only place that we find comfort is in the Word of God that says, "I am with you always, and I will take away your sin."

We may not have chosen our path of suffering just like any priest did not choose their calling, but it's what God has given to us. In fact, for the pastoral office, it's not much different than the time of Aaron. Nobody chooses the pastoral office. In fact, if anybody raises their hand and says, "Hey, I want to be a pastor," we look at them a little funny because nobody really knows what this job is all about. And if they're trying to take it for themselves, they're like James and John. "I want to sit at the right hand and the left hand of God. I want the glory. I want the praise." What they don't recognize is the struggle and the sorrow and the suffering that goes on with being a pastor, the trials, and the fact that we are to be the servant of all people.

When I was going to seminary or not seminary, college, I was in the middle of my Greek. I was doing fine. I understood Greek. That wasn't the issue. But about halfway through my Greek class, I realized at 26, I was supposed to be a pastor and I was going to go into a congregation and people old enough to be my grandparents and sometimes even my great-grandparents were going to look to me for spiritual guidance. And I thought that was crazy. What did I know as a 26-year-old? How could I lead and all these people? That was nuts. God was gracious, and He finally drew me back in again but it took a few years for me to recognize it's not about me and what I can do. I'm unworthy for the office. I still feel unworthy for the office. I still am unworthy for the office because it is God that is working in and through me to provide the shepherding for you.

And it's the same for all of us. We are unworthy of the salvation that is given to us by God, and yet He counts us as worthy for His sake so that we might be His servants and stewards and share the love of God with those around us. Because we know it's not about us. We're not going to make it through this world alive. There is going to be a hardship in this world. But we know this. God has written His law on our hearts. He has called us by name, not like in the Old Testament, but in New Testament, in our baptisms, He has called all of us. He has placed his word in our hearts, in our minds so that we know God because He knows us. And what we know about God is this. That all of us are forgiven of our sins from the greatest to the least. He will forgive our iniquity. He has forgiven our iniquity, and I love this. "And I will remember their sins no more."

The God of the Universe who is all knowing, who knows everything, doesn't remember our sin because of Christ. What a blessing that is. That is what gives us the strength to carry our own cross, to carry our own suffering. The suffering that we did not choose, but that God gave us to refine our faith, to strengthen us in the hope of His word and His promises that we will be with Him to the very end of the age because He is with us to the very end of the age. And because He has forgiven our iniquity and He remembers our sin no more. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore, onto life everlasting. Amen.

Audience:

Amen.

Pastor:

We confess the faith that God has given to us in the words of the Apostles' Creed. Please rise. Page 207.