

SUNDAY, MAY 23, 2010

## Sunday, May 23, 2010: Honor Your King

Honor Your King  
Genesis 14: 17 – 24.

### I. Introduction.

What is most important in life? On one hand, this is a very philosophical question. It is one of the most talked about, most debated subjects in history. On the other hand, we are in church on a Sunday morning...I am a pastor, standing before a congregation with an open Bible...Perhaps, you will not be surprised by my answer to this question.

However, we can change the question entirely by adding only one word. What is most important in YOUR life? Ahh. This is no longer a philosophical question. This is a practical question...Perhaps even an ethical question.

While I do not want to suggest that truth is relative or that truth can be changed to apply differently to different circumstances, I do believe that we will find many different answers to this question among the different people in this room. What is most important in YOUR life?

A popular way to answer this question is to imagine how you would live your life if you knew you were dying. What if you only had 30 days remaining? 30 days to work...30 days to spend time with your children...30 days to reconcile broken relationships...30 days to serve God and minister to others.

I don't believe this answers the question. No. Imagining how I would spend my last 30 days of life does not tell me what is most important to me. It tells me what I WISH was most important to me. It is fantasy, not reality.

For some reason, we think we would be different if we had only 30 days left to live. We think imminent death would change our priorities and give us more control over life. This is simply not true. You and I make choices every day that determine how we use both time and money.

Reality is found by looking at our check ledger and our calendar! The most important things in life are the things that take up our time and money. This is the real answer to the question. The ways you spend time every day, and the ways you spend your monthly income are the most important things in your life.

Practically speaking, what is most important in your life? I'm not talking about philosophy or fantasy. I'm talking about reality. Where do you spend your time? How do you spend your money?

Practically speaking, the most important thing in your life is what you worship. Either God is most important in your life, or you are worshipping a false god.

A couple of years ago, I ate lunch with a group of guys from Houston. They were in town to sell something to our church. These guys didn't like to refer to their work as a business. They said they thought of what they do as a ministry...a way to help churches. As we ate, we talked about God,

ministry, evangelism, missions... Then, I asked a question about church. I said, “Where do you go to church in Houston?” He answered, “I don’t go to church anywhere. My daughter plays on a select softball team, and we have games every Sunday.”

I wonder how his check ledger and calendar would answer the question. I suppose it would tell him that softball is the most important thing in his life. Softball is his god. (This is probably not the way he would interpret his time and money. He would probably say that he spends his time and his money on his daughter. But, is that any better? Is it better to say you worship your children?)

In the story of Abram in Genesis, we find an example of faith. Sometimes, Abram looks like a saint. Sometimes, Abram looks like a sinner. But, throughout the story, Abram is a man who demonstrates for us how faith in God ought to be lived out in the real world. It’s not always easy for us to be faithful...But it wasn’t always easy for Abram either.

Read Genesis 14: 17 – 24.

This is an unusual story for a couple of reasons. First, it is difficult to understand. Second, it seems to stand alone in the context of Abram’s story. There is only one thing in this story connecting it with what comes before and after. It helps us to understand what has happened to Abram’s nephew, Lot.

In Genesis 13, Abram and Lot divided up the land. Lot chose to take the well-watered plains and to live in the city of Sodom. Abram left his future in God’s hands. In the end, Abram’s choice was blessed by God, while Lot’s choice fell under God’s judgment. Abram received the fulfillment of all God promised him. Lot separated from Abram and found himself outside of God’s protection.

In Genesis 14: 1 – 16, we read about an international war. The king of Elam demanded tribute taxes from five other nations. These nations paid their taxes faithfully for 12 years. But, in the thirteenth year, they rebelled.

The king of Elam formed a coalition with three other kings and went to war against the rebels. The four kings defeated the five kings and took some of the people as their slaves. Lot and his family were taken as slaves.

When Abram heard that Lot had been captured, he formed his own army of 318 fighting men. He divided his men into two groups and ambushed the army of the four kings at night. Thus, four kings defeated five kings and Abram alone defeated the four kings.

The story shows us that Abram was an effective political leader, who could rally people around his cause. It also shows us that he was an effective military leader, who could outwit his enemies and win a battle that seemed like a “lost cause.” But, the most important thing it shows us is how Abram handled his victory.

## II. Two Kings.

Notice that after the battle was won, two kings came to greet Abram. The first king was Bera, the King of Sodom. The second king was Melchizedek, the King of Salem and priest of God Most High.

Abram was now “playing in the big leagues.” He was no longer a simple shepherd, wandering around the country side. Abram is now an international leader, one who is invited to a state dinner with two kings.

Also notice that these two kings want different things from Abram. This is apparent in the first words they speak to Abram. Bera, the King of Sodom, said, **“Give me...(Genesis 14: 21).”** Melchizedek, the King of Salem, said, **“Blessed be Abram... (Genesis 14: 19).”** There is a big difference between “Give me” and “Blessed be.”

It should be no surprise that Abram first gave his attention to Melchizedek. Melchizedek came to Abram offering the blessings of God, Most High. The other king came to Abram trying to recover the money and the people stolen in battle.

I believe this is an indication of what was most important to Abram. He was not seeking political fame. He was not interested in holding onto the accumulated wealth. He was most interested in doing what was pleasing to God. God’s blessing was more important than fame or fortune.

Abram’s choice is one that we also face in the twenty-first century. Will we bow down to God or the world? Sometimes the world takes the form of the political state (or even the political party). Most of the time, the world takes the form of worldly wealth. The person who chooses political favor over God’s blessing worships a false god. The person who chooses wealth over God’s blessing also worships a false god. The way we spend our time and money demonstrates which god we worship.

### III. The Tithe.

Abram’s choice was to worship God Most High. He did this by instituting the tithe—giving ten percent of his resources to God.

There are several things about Abram’s tithe that are remarkable. First, this was the first recorded tithe in the Bible. None of the biblical characters before Abram gave a tithe. This is something Abram began.

Second, at this point in biblical history, there was no such thing as the Law. The Law was first given to Moses in the form of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, then it was interpreted and added to in the Old Testament books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. In fact, tithing shows up as a part of the Law in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. **Leviticus 27: 30 says, “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.”** The Law required all of God’s people to give a tithe of their income to God. But, this is not why Abram gave a tithe...Remember, there was no such thing as the Law at this point. In fact, the Apostle Paul tells us in the New Testament book of Galatians that Abram lived 430 years before the Law (Galatians 3: 17).

So, why did Abram give one-tenth of his wealth? It was because of his gratitude. We see this in the blessing from Melchizedek in **verses 19 and 20, “and he 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.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”**

We also see Abram’s gratitude in Abram’s words about God. Look at what Abram said when he finally got around to speaking to the king of Sodom, **“But Abram said to the king of Sodom,**

**"I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me-- to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share." (Genesis 14: 22 – 24)."**

The God Abram worshipped was not a regional God. He was not confined to the land of Canaan. Abram's God is an international God, who was in control of international affairs. God gave Abram the strength, the wisdom and the ability to defeat the four kings. Therefore, this newfound wealth did not belong to Abram. The wealth belonged to God. Abram was so grateful for what God had done, he first gave a tithe to God before he decided what to do with the loot. (It's interesting at this point to note that Abram didn't actually keep any of the loot. He gave the first ten percent to God, then gave the rest of the loot to the king of Sodom. He kept nothing for himself.)

#### IV. LORD, God Most High, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

In Abram's speech to the king of Sodom, he picked up on the words Melchizedek used in his blessing. Both Melchizedek and Abram referred to God as the "Creator of heaven and earth." It is significant that Abram chose to address God as the Creator. This is more than an affirmation about the origins of the universe. This is the foundation of Abram's faith and worship.

In terms of Abram's faith, God is the personal Creator of everything we see. It would be nonsensical for us to talk about the creation without also affirming a personal Creator. Nothing in the universe is self-created. No human being is a "self-made" person. God is our Creator.

In terms of Abram's worship, God is both the Creator and Sustainer of everything we see. God not only gave us life, God also gave us our livelihood. All financial resources come from God. We would have nothing without God's provision. Some people trust in the government to provide for their needs. Some people trust in free market enterprise to provide for their needs. God's people trust in the personal Creator and Sustainer to provide for our needs.

#### V. Conclusion.

There is a program on the A & E Network called "Hoarders." Have you ever seen "Hoarders?" (It is one of those shows that just sucks you in after a few minutes.) The show tells the story of people with a compulsive hoarding disorder. They keep everything they have ever owned. They cannot bring themselves to let go of anything. Their houses are filled with things you and I would call "junk." They can't even move around in their houses, because of the piles and piles of junk.

These people receive psychological counseling and help from personal organizers to get some control back in their lives.

Apparently, this is a diagnosable condition. So, I don't want to make fun of people who are struggling with this. Yet, there are many of us who are hoarders in God's eyes. We accumulate "junk" and organize our lives around things that should not be the most important things in life.

Perhaps we don't have a psychological disorder...But we do have a theological problem. We hold

onto “junk” because we think it is important. We hold onto “junk,” because we think we have earned it through our own abilities.

If someone has a compulsive hoarding disorder, that person needs to get help through psychological counseling. If a person has a theological hoarding disorder, that person needs to develop a faith in God as the Creator and Sustainer.

When God is both your Creator and Sustainer, nothing else can take his place as the most important thing in your life. When God is both Creator and Sustainer, worship becomes the opposite of hoarding...It is letting go of resources which came from God in the first place.