

## **"Getting A Hug When You Deserve A Slap"**

**Genesis 14:17-24**

**25 February 2024**

### **GRACE FLOWS DOWNHILL.**

I love that sentence! I've shared it with you before. I got it from Jack Miller, a man who has had a very significant impact on my life and my understanding of the Gospel. He's the guy who popularized the phrase, *"Preach the Gospel to yourself."*

In his book *The Heart of a Servant Leader*, Jack said, *"Grace flows downhill. It runs down from the heights of God to the humble at the foot of the mountain. Grace also takes away fear and reveals the mighty, tender, compassionate securities of God. As you humble yourself, you will find fears fading away like the morning mist. Believe, only believe."* (The Heart of a Servant Leader: Letters From Jack Miller, p.267)

So, grace flows downhill. It comes down from the glorious heights of God. And that is what we will see in our passage today. When we look at the mysterious figure named "Melchizedek" we'll be reminded that God's grace flows downhill. It moves south. It goes down. Like water, grace flows to the lowest point. Grace flows downhill to humble sinners. Grace resides at the bottom. Grace lives at the bottom.

Okay. Genesis 14. Remember what we saw last week. 4 thug-kings captured Lot, Abram's nephew, so Abram lead a 318-man army to rescue Lot. And, Abram, the 75-year-old *old man* was successful. And, then word began to spread. Abram's victory was all over social media. People were talking. And, news travelled uphill, all the way to the city of Salem, where a king-priest with a weird name heard about Abram's rescue of Lot.

So, this king-priest, this mysterious man named Melchizedek, hopped in his Jeep and rode down the mountain to congratulate Abram. That's where we are in the story. Genesis 14.

#### **LOOK AT VERSE 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). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, 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.' 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."*

So, after the defeat of Chedorlaomer and Co., two kings come out to pay Abram a visit. One king, we expect: the king of Sodom. Afterall, Abram just beat up the bully who was bullying the king of Sodom, so of course he's gonna show up. But then we have this other king, Melchizedek, who shows up. And, he comes bearing wine and bread! Why would he show up with bread and wine? Well, there is a parenthetical note about Melchizedek in verse 18:

*(He was priest of God Most High.)*

Melchizedek was the king of Salem, which is the shortened name for Jerusalem. But, he was also a priest of God Most High. In fact, in Hebrew, there is no direct object "the." It's not that Melchizedek is "the" priest of God, he is "a" priest of God, which implies that there were other priests as well. Of course, this brings up a lot of questions like, *"Where are all these other priests at? And, where did Melchizedek come from? Why is he a priest? How did he become a priest? What seminary did he go to?"*

Inquiring minds want to know! But, the text does not tell us. All that we know is that he is 1) a *king* and 2) a *priest* and 3) I would say a *prophet*, too, because he pronounces a word of blessing over Abram:

*"Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"*

As a priest, Melchizedek blesses Abram and mediates God's power and protection to him. Mel is praying that God's power rest on Abe and protect him. Notice that 2x Melchizedek uses the name "God Most High." He is praying for the Sovereign God, the Creator of heaven and earth to protect and bless Abram. But, not just that, one Old Testament scholar argues that the title "Possessor of heaven and earth" is a metonymy, or substitute name, for Yahweh as the source of life, buoyancy, help, and joy in the midst of trials, not just the fact that He is the powerful Creator (Norman Habel, *"Yahweh, Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study in Tradition Criticism"* JBL 91, (1972), p. 321-37)

So, this idea that God is Possessor of heaven and earth and the source of "life, buoyancy, help, and joy in the midst of trials" is significant because after this blessing, the king of Sodom will seek to link arms with Abram. This blessing from God as Abram's protector and the source of his life, buoyancy, help, and joy gets answered in real time a few verses later as Abram wants nothing to do with the worldly king of Sodom. This blessing is answered moments later when the king of Sodom asks Abram if he wants to be business partners! And, Abram will decline this partnership because he knows that life and joy come from God Most High, and not the worldly things represented by the king of Sodom.

Abram refused any connection with the king of Sodom. He returned all the spoils of war that belonged to the king of Sodom. He didn't want to take any gifts and then have people say, *"Well, Abe got rich 'cause he went into business with Sodom."* Abram knew what was happening in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abram wanted nothing to do with that. Abram wants nothing to do with the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah because he is a servant of Yahweh, the Most High God.

Abram will decline this partnership because he knows that life and joy come from God Most High, and not the worldly things represented by the king of Sodom. This is something to think about. We have a tendency to look to the things of the world to find satisfaction. We look to the world and all its pleasures, and to social media for our identity. We long for "likes" and "hearts" and "re-tweets" and "views" to find our joy, to find our satisfaction. But, these will 1) only satisfy us for a season and then leave us empty, and 2) they will pull our hearts away from Jesus. The 4<sup>th</sup> century bishop Augustine of Hippo was right when he said,

*"You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You."*

Melchizedek is praying that Abram would be satisfied in Yahweh, find rest in God Most High, and find in Him all life, buoyancy, and joy in the midst of trials. You know, that's not a bad prayer to pray for you, your spouse, your kids, your church:

*"Help me to find my rest in you, Jesus. Help me to be satisfied in you alone as the source of all life, buoyancy, and joy in the trials that I am facing."*

Well, because Abram's God is the kind of God who not only hears, but also answers prayers, we should not be surprised that this prayer is almost immediately answered. The king of Sodom comes out to Abram, wanting to be buddies, and Abram gives him the stiff-arm. Melchizedek's prayer that Abram be protected from his enemies gets answered as soon as it leaves Mel's lips!

This is simply Yahweh keeping His promise to Abram! Once more, God is proving to be faithful to His word, faithful to His promises. You have to love a God like that, right? Isn't this what you're looking for in God? A God who keeps His promises? Well, that's the kind of God Abram served. And, I can tell you now that Jesus will do the same thing for you, Christian.

So, the covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God immediately answers Melchizedek's prayer of blessing on Abram. Then, after the blessing, Abram gives a tithe, a tenth of the spoils of war, to Melchizedek. Why? Why does Abram offer 10% to Melchizedek? Well, not because Melchizedek asked for it, but because Abram recognized him as the priest and king of his God. Abram gives as an act of worship.

But, who was this guy Melchizedek? He's mentioned a few times in the book of Hebrews, as well as in Psalm 110. But, we really don't know much about him. Some people believe that Melchizedek is the pre-incarnate Christ- that Melchizedek was actually Jesus who appeared to Abram in Genesis 14. But, I don't think that's true because:

1) If Melchizedek *is* Jesus, then Psalm 110 and the book of Hebrews wouldn't just say this about Jesus, *"You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,"*- they would have just come out and said that Jesus *was* Melchizedek. In fact, it would be very easy for Christians reading the book of Hebrews, if the preacher of Hebrews just said, *"Remember that guy Melchizedek in Genesis 14? That was actually Jesus! A pre-incarnate Christ. Jesus appeared to Abram. And that's why Jesus is better than the old covenant!"*

But, he doesn't say that.

2) The preacher of the book of Hebrews actually says in Hebrews 7:3 that Melchizedek resembles Jesus: *"He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever."*

Melchizedek was not the pre-incarnate Christ because the preacher of Hebrews tells us that Melchizedek resembles Jesus. He doesn't have a genealogy in Genesis, a book heavy on genealogies. He just comes out of nowhere and then disappears from the pages of Scripture until Psalm 110. Melchizedek resembles Jesus, but he is not Jesus.

So, who was Melchizedek then? If he wasn't the pre-incarnate Christ, who was he? Answer: He was a man, a

human being, a sinner, just like you and me. But, he was unique in that he was a *priest* and he was a *king*- the king of Salem. And he met Abraham in the Valley of Shaveh and blessed him. And, that's about all we can say about him.

I think sometimes our tendency is to think that it was just Abram and his family who were walking with Yahweh as disciples at this time, but that's not true. The Lord was working in and through other people- like Job (probably)- and Melchizedek was one of them.

We don't know much about how Melchizedek became a priest, or how Abram knew that he was a priest. But, the text says that he was, so we have to go with that. And what do priests do? Well, that we do know. Priests in the Old Testament represent sinners before God. So, Melchizedek was this priest, who was also the powerful king of Salem, and he represented sinners before the Lord. And that's about all that we can say about him. We don't know how he became a priest, or what seminary he went to, or how Abraham knew he was one, but he was one.

Melchizedek is a *prophet*, and a *priest*, and he is also a *king* who comes down from on high and gives bread and wine to Abram. Who does that remind you of? Who do you know that comes down from a great height and gives bread and wine to sinners and sustains their faith? I don't want to give away the answer, but you do know it's Jesus, right?

Melchizedek was a type of Christ. He was pointing to Jesus. And every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, Jesus comes down to us in the bread and the cup and we share a covenant meal with Him and He sustains our faith! Do you see here how Melchizedek is a type of Christ? Melchizedek shows us that-

### **GRACE FLOWS DOWNHILL.**

God in His grace met Abram in the valley that day. God blessed Abram through Melchizedek the priest. This is how God deals with sinners in the Gospel. God comes down to us. He condescends to us. His grace flows down to sinners like us.

When you read about the covenant meal shared by Melchizedek and Abraham, when you read that they ate bread and drank wine, you're supposed to think of Jesus and how, in His grace, He meets our spiritual needs. When Melchizedek shares a covenant meal with Abraham and speaks a blessing over him, he is prefiguring Jesus, our prophet, priest, and king.

By the way, Melchizedek's name in Hebrew means "king of righteousness." It comes from the Hebrew word for king- *melek* - and the Hebrew word for righteousness- *tsedeq*. And, Melchizedek was the king of *Salem*, which comes from the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means "peace."

So, Melchizedek is "the king of righteousness" and "the king of peace." He's a type that is obviously pointing to Jesus, our prophet, priest, and king. And what does Jesus bestow upon us? Righteousness and peace!

Jesus perfectly obeyed the law for us and therefore He credits us with His righteous life so that we can stand in God's presence. We are justified. We are blameless. We have been given the righteousness that we need to be made right with God.

And because we have Jesus' righteousness credited to us, we have peace with God. Sinners like us who could never stand in God's presence now have access because of Jesus. That's grace! And it's proof that-

### **GRACE FLOWS DOWNHILL.**

Grace is God lovingly giving us what we need instead of what we deserve. It's God lavishly giving us free gifts. Really, it's just God hugging us! As Steve Brown said, "*Grace isn't a doctrine to be defended. It's a hug that needs to be experienced. Frankly, if we got that, we would lighten up and laugh more.*"

Grace is a hug to be experienced. Grace is getting a hug when you deserve to be slapped. Grace flows down to sinners. So, please understand that this passage is about Jesus, not Melchizedek. The fundamental point here is not that we would come away knowing more about Melchizedek and solving the mystery of this man. The fundamental point is that we would come away more in awe of Jesus and more trusting of Him. The point is not to know Melchizedek, but to know Jesus! Christian, you have a forever great, forever faithful, and forever merciful high priest!

And that's why Jesus is a great high priest. Because He is the holy Son of God and He offers mercy and grace to sinners like us. You would expect Him to offer lightning bolts. You would expect Him offer a sword and strike us down. You would expect Him to obliterate us with His white-hot holiness and glory, but instead what does He offer us? Mercy and grace. Mercy and grace. Imagine that!

The good news of the Gospel is that there's mercy when you blow it; there's grace when you need it most. There's mercy when you've sinned for the umpteenth time; there's grace when you feel like you just can't go on. There's mercy when you break your promises; there's grace when you are at your worst. Mercy and grace are what Jesus offers to sinners. Mercy is when God doesn't give us what we deserve. And grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve.

The staggering thing about God's mercy is that it comes, and it doesn't exact vengeance. Mercy says, *"It's okay. I forgive you. I won't give you what you clearly deserve."* Mercy does not work like karma.

And, grace doesn't work like karma either. Grace doesn't do "an eye for an eye." Grace comes to you when you are at your lowest, when you've got bed-head, when you've got morning breath, when you've got crust in your eyes, and slobber running down your chin, and grace loves you in that moment. As Bono sings in the U2 song "Grace"-  
*"Grace finds beauty in ugly things. Grace makes ugly things beautiful."*

Grace doesn't just sit on the mountaintop and tell sinners to climb up and get it because grace can't be earned. Grace doesn't just beckon sinners, grace moves down to broken sinners who can't move. Grace seeks out the down and out and lifts them up. Jesus comes down to broken people who cannot lift themselves up. He leaves His holy mountain, like Melchizedek, and comes down to rescue us, to redeem us, to do for us what we could not do on our own.

Grace is Jesus. Mercy is Jesus. Grace and mercy are not abstract theological concepts. Jesus is grace, Jesus is mercy. That's the Gospel that we proclaim here at Grace.

So, the wine and the bread offered to Abram are the Gospel in Old Testament form. It's the Lord's Supper in the Valley of Shaveh. And, that same Gospel, some 4,000+ years later says the same thing to you, Christian, that it did to Abram:

You are free. You are forgiven. You are redeemed. God is not mad at you. He will never ever be mad at you again. Jesus already took care of all of that. You sit, you live, you abide under His love and devotion. God sees you as blameless. God sees you as if you've never sinned and as if you have always obeyed. Nothing, nothing can change that. And when you sin, He will forgive you. Always. You are His child. Forever. Jesus paid it all. It is finished. That's the grace that Melchizedek shared with Abram in the Valley of Shaveh.

Paul Zahl said,

*Grace is love that seeks you out when you have nothing to give in return. Grace is love coming at you that has nothing to do with you. Grace is being loved when you are unlovable.... The cliché definition of grace is "unconditional love." It is a true cliché, for it is a good description of the thing.... Let's go a little further, though. Grace is a love that has nothing to do with you, the beloved. It has everything and only to do with the lover. Grace is irrational in the sense that it has nothing to do with weights and measures. It has nothing to do with my intrinsic qualities or so-called "gifts" (whatever they may be). It reflects a decision on the part of the giver, the one who loves, in relation to the receiver, the one who is loved, that negates any qualifications the receiver may personally hold.... Grace is one-way love. (Grace in Practice, p.36)*

Grace always goes to the wrong people. People who don't deserve it and have nothing to give in return. God, in His grace, can redeem our past, whatever it includes. Maybe your past involves immorality of some sort. God can redeem that. God's grace is bigger than one night. Bigger than one mess up. Bigger than one failure. Bigger than how foolish we might have been in one moment that now still haunts us to this day. God's grace is bigger than that one decision that changed your life forever. God's grace is bigger than any of our sin. Even the most horrendous and embarrassing thing that you could do, whatever that is, whatever that is that you have done, it can be forgiven.

Maybe you drug yourself in here this morning and you've been feasting on the world. Maybe you've drifted from Jesus. Maybe you've been caught in the tentacles of some sin, and you just want to be free. Maybe you've partnered with Sodom, partnered with this world system, and you're ready to come back home to Jesus. Good. Come on home. He's been expecting you. He has a place setting with your name on it. Just humble yourself.

The question is: Will we humble ourselves? Will you humble yourself?

Steve Brown said, *"It's easier to hug a dirty kid than a stiff kid. Stiffness is the worst sin... and we thought that dirt was the problem."* Jesus wants you to come to Him dirty. Dirt's not the problem. Sin's not the problem. Stiffness is. Self-righteousness is. Pride is. What Jesus doesn't want is a stiff, self-righteous person who won't acknowledge that they need a Savior. The Pharisees that we read about in the Gospels were stiff. Their self-righteous, prideful, rigid ways were the worst sin. They thought they had their act together. They weren't "dirty" like other sinners. And that's why it's easier for Jesus to hug a dirty kid than a stiff one.

The good news is that even when you need a bath, even when you are dirty with sin, Jesus hugs you anyway. Do you feel the freedom to run into His arms reeking of sin, hung over, and looking your worst? No matter how clever you are, or how good you are, or how rich you are, or how nice you are, or how important you are — none of it makes any difference. Because God's love is a gift and, as anyone will tell you, the whole thing about a gift is, it's free. All you have to do is reach out your hands and take it. Will you reach out with the empty hands of faith today and take it?

Grace only flows downhill. It finds you at the bottom. At your worst. Grace only works for losers. Grace only works for the down-and-out.

So, to all who are running away from God this morning, and to all who need peace, and to all who are running on empty this morning, or who have been feeding on the junk food of this world, or you've been rummaging for scraps, or, you've linked up with Sodom, or you've totally made a mess of your life and you're having to deal with the consequences, or, you're simply pretending you're fine, and you know deep down that you're not okay- to you Jesus says simply, *"Come. Come to the Gospel feast and eat and drink and be merry and be satisfied."*

Come to Fountain this morning and drink and drink and drink and drink and drink and come up for air and say, *"Ahhhhhhh!"* That's worship. That glorifies Jesus. That's how you enjoy Jesus. That's what you were made for. Eternal joy. Pleasures forevermore at His right hand.

Will you come today? You can be forgiven. You can be restored. You can come to Jesus right now. He welcomes you with open arms. God wants us- *people like us!*- to enjoy sweet fellowship with Him. He's actually inviting you to join Him at this feast. Will you come?

Rondi Lauterbach explains this sweet invitation from God in her book *Hungry: Learning To Feed Your Soul With Christ-*

*God's invitation comes to us through the prophet Isaiah: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1). God is insistent, almost pushy. Come, come, come, come! Four times we are invited. He must really mean it. Apparently there's no cover charge either, which is good because it's the end of the month and I'm out of money. It sounds like he's got both the food and drink covered. Maybe I should offer to bring something?*

*But this is not a potluck. It's a feast put on by the Lord himself. He has spread his table, and now he invites us to come and eat. This is the free invitation of the gospel, coming right on the heels of a prophecy about the Suffering Servant who will atone for our sins (Isa. 52:13-53:12).*

*It's gospel. Do you hear the good news in it? God is saying, "Come. This meal is free because I've already paid. It's ready because I've already done all the work. You don't need to bring anything. Just come and eat!"*

*This is the "come to Jesus" invitation offered freely to all. It's an invitation to believe the gospel, not just for the first time but for every day after. It's an invitation to hear his words and feed our souls. "Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in rich food" (Isa. 55:2).*

*The guest list for this feast is unbelievably long. And you and I are on it. (p. 142-143)*

God is insistent, almost pushy. Come, come, come, come and be forgiven. Find life. Be at peace with God. Enjoy Him forever!

What are you waiting for? Come!

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"Getting A Hug When You Deserve A Slap"

Genesis 14:17-24

Sermon Study Questions

1. READ Genesis 14:17-20. Where do we see God's grace here in the person of Melchizedek?

2. Discuss this idea from the sermon:

*Melchizedek is praying that Abram would be satisfied in Yahweh, find rest in God Most High, and find in Him all life, buoyancy, and joy in the midst of trials. You know, that's not a bad prayer to pray for you, your spouse, your kids, your church: "Help me to find my rest in you, Jesus. Help me to be satisfied in you alone as the source of all life, buoyancy, and joy in the trials that I am facing."*

3. How was Abram being tempted by the world? In what ways are you experiencing temptation by the world? How can you fight it?

4. Discuss these quotes:

Jack Miller

*"Grace flows downhill. It runs down from the heights of God to the humble at the foot of the mountain. Grace also takes away fear and reveals the mighty, tender, compassionate securities of God. As you humble yourself, you will find fears fading away like the morning mist. Believe, only believe."*

Steve Brown

*"Grace isn't a doctrine to be defended. It's a hug that needs to be experienced. Frankly, if we got that, we would lighten up and laugh more."*

Augustine of Hippo

*"You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You."*

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