

# Calvin Speaks



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## THE SECOND SERMON ON THE HISTORY OF MELCHIZEDEK (Part 2)

### Summary of the **First** Half of the Sermon

*The text is Genesis 14:18-20. Calvin argues that Christ, to be our Savior, must be both king and priest. Were He priest only, we would be declared righteous but not given power for righteous living; and were He king only, we would be given such power, but would be damned as guilty in the end.*

*Calvin argues that the Roman Catholic interpretation of Melchizedek's offering bread and wine is absurd. It is absurd because the bread and wine were "offered" to Abram, which would make Abram God! It is absurd because it is only after the sacrifice that the sacrifice becomes food for us; it is not offered as food to God.*

*Melchizedek is king of righteousness; that is, insofar as he pictures Christ, it is not that he was a good man, but that Christ makes us righteous. His righteousness is passed to others. King of Salem is king of peace, and Christ it is who has given us peace with God. Melchizedek is introduced with no genealogy, no record of birth, and no record of death; just so, the Greater Melchizedek was the Eternal Son of God; and His undying life is our guarantee of eventual full salvation.*

### Benediction

Next he says that Melchizedek blessed Abram, because he was the priest of the most high God. This blessing demonstrates a superiority, as the apostle tells us when he says (Heb. 7:7) that the greater blesses the lesser. And therefore in the quality of a priest, Abram must be inferior to Melchizedek. And yet it is said that Abram was the father and head of the church, and therefore we must conclude that Melchizedek represented a greater person than any mortal man could be.

This caused many of the fathers to imagine him to be an angel, but such are very foolish and mere toyish inventions. For when he is called priest of the living God, doubtless he was known to be a man in the country, and also king of the city of Salem. Moreover, such an idea is

a great mockery; for put the case that he was an angel, and then he could not have been greater than Abram in this general paternity of the whole church. And therefore we must come back to this, that although Melchizedek was a mortal man, yet he surpassed the dignity of the angels of heaven by reason of his priesthood, not in himself but by reason of Him whose figure he bore; just as David was far greater than the angels when it was said of him, "Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee" (Ps. 2:7; Heb. 2:3). This was not spoken, says the apostle, of any angel; and yet David was a wretched sinner, a son of Adam just as any of the rest. And how then does it say here that he is so highly exalted that the angels are made inferior to him? It is because this figure represented the majesty of the Son of God, and not the person of David alone.

We must then come to the point, that Melchizedek could not be above Abram except with regard to the truth which he figured. And therefore we must conclude that Jesus Christ was at that point revealed so that the belief of the faithful might be altogether grounded on Him, because there was no other salvation given under heaven from the beginning but the same which is at this day revealed to us in the gospel.

Now, it is true that there is a common kind of blessing. For, to bless often in Scripture simply means to pray, as we shall see later on. One common man blesses another, saying "God bless you," as when they greet one another. These are blessings, and this is a common phrase of the Holy Scriptures. But there is a singular blessing which is reserved for the priests. And therefore mark why it is so often said in the law, "the priests who bless the people in the name of God," which is to say, those who have authority given them to do so. And the same form has been delivered to us in the sixth chapter of Numbers (w. 23-26), where it is said, "Thus shall the priests bless My people: 'The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you . . . ' " And again, "The Lord be favorable to you, and

grant you His peace" (Luke 1:24, 50). Thus we see what form the Lord has set down in His church. And for this reason also it is said, when Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, that He lifted up His hands over His apostles, as the priests did, so that He accomplished the figures in the Law in blessing the disciples. This then is the blessing which is here spoken of.

And mark why the apostle reasons, not without cause, that it must be the case that Melchizedek was far more excellent than Abram in this respect, because he blessed him (Heb. 7:7). And yet it is Abram who is the father of the whole church. We are therefore to conclude that our Savior Christ has a far greater majesty than any earthly majesty has or can have, and that in the person of the Mediator. For this reason all power and dignity must be subject to Him and respect Him, and both great and small must acknowledge and confess that God His Father has given to Him the chief authority even in this human nature of His, and every knee must bow and kneel to him. Thus we see how these words of St. Paul in his epistle to the Philippians (2:9, 10) are to be understood. And this is what we are to remember.

It remains for us to apply these words to our own use and benefit. We must keep in mind that Melchizedek blessed Abram in a figure, even as at this day our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the everlasting priest, blesses us in the name of God His Father. For this prayer of His must be effectual, because we know that it could not be otherwise than that He must be heard. Let us therefore conclude that as long as we put our trust in Jesus Christ we have Him for our advocate towards God His Father, and although we are cursed in Adam and do daily bring a new curse upon our heads through our sins and transgressions; yet notwithstanding, these shall be blotted out and dealt with, in that our Lord Jesus Christ vouchsafes in deed and in truth to take upon Him the office to bless us.

We see also the prayer which He once made in the gospel of St. John in this manner: Holy Father I do not only pray here to You for these (to wit, for the eleven apostles and disciples which He had chosen to Himself), but I pray also for all those which shall believe in My name through their preaching, that they may all be one in Me as I am one in You, and that we may all be one. In this way did our Savior Jesus Christ pronounce these words out of His own mouth, saying that He prayed not only for His disciples, who were of His own company, but also for as many as believe in Him through their preaching. Let us here then learn that whenever we shall embrace the doctrine of the gospel in true obedience, we are surely persuaded that the Son of God is given to us for our sovereign and sole good. Thus we see how powerful His prayer will always be, for it is needless for Him to begin the same at evening, at morn, and every day, for it is sufficient that He has sealed it with His blood, and by that sole and everlasting sacrifice which He offered up once and for all.

For we are assured that our prayers are heard when we pray to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. For

our prayers should stink, yea and infect the air, if we considered what God is and afterward considered what we ourselves are. Howbeit, our prayers are made holy through the priestly blessing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to Whom we must look that we might be partakers of all His benefits. Thus we see in sum how we are to apply this saying of Moses to our benefit, and this building up of our faith, where it is said that Abram the father of the faithful was blessed.

We see in this that Abram of himself was accursed, since he needed the priestly blessing. And Melchizedek also knew right well that there is nothing in us but misery and wretchedness, and that it is God Who must bless us, and that we must embrace it with all humility if we will enjoy the benefit that is brought to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, and which He daily offers to us by the preaching of the gospel. Now hereupon Moses recites the blessing of Melchizedek: "Blessed are you, Abram," says he, "of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be the Most High God that has delivered your enemies into your hands." He blessed Abram in the name of God, as we have already seen from the Law.

We must not here understand that the priests' office to bless proceeds from their own authority, and that God has resigned His office over to them, and His honor and praise to be so much lessened thereby. For when God works by His ministers, yet He does not lose thereby any part of His dignity, nor is His power thereby the least bit obscured, nor is anything of that which He gives taken away from Him. But it pleases Him to use these means with this condition, that men should always come again to Him, and not draw any one drop of any good from any other fountain than from Him.

Here we see why it is said, "Blessed are you, Abram, of God Most High," as if Melchizedek had said that he was nothing of himself, nor could do anything of himself, but that since God had called him to serve Him he would call on Him and likewise testify His name to Abram. We see then that it is the office of Jesus Christ to bless, that is to say, to make us agreeable to God, to blot out all the iniquity that is in us. But this must lead us to God, to the inestimable love of God the Father, Who spared not His only Son, but delivered Him up to death for us (Rom. 8:32). When the principle cause of our salvation is showed to us, the Scripture sets before us the love of God: God so loved the world that He spared not His only Son (John 3:16). Thus we see how we are blessed by the priestly power of this Son of God. Howbeit, the Father calls us to Himself that we might honor Him and acknowledge the great benefit that it has pleased Him to bestow upon us, through that Springhead [that is, His Son].

To be short, we see here that all the good which we are to desire and hope for comes from God alone, from Whom alone we must look to receive and have the same. Every man desires to live easily and pleasantly, and to have whatever he thinks fit for himself. And this is a wish which is common both with the good and the bad. But few there are who seek for their felicity in God.

They all desire to be happy and blessed, and yet they make no account of Him from Whom all blessedness and felicity proceeds. And this kind of dealing is like a man who is incredibly thirsty and feels that he is ready to give up the ghost, and another man comes to him and says, "Behold, here is a very fine spring of water;" but the dying man will not drink from it; indeed, even if there were water and wine, still he will not come near and taste of it. Thus it fares with those who desire and covet to understand whatever comes into their brains, and which they also know to be fitting and requisite for them, and yet notwithstanding they treat God with contempt and will in no wise come near Him. Let us then learn that as often as we desire to have what we wish either for our souls or for our bodies, we must begin with the fact that God is merciful to us and so receives us of His mercy that we may approach and have entrance to Him, and may be so satisfied with His benefits as may be profitable for our salvation. Thus we see what it is that we are to observe from this text, that Abram is blessed, even of the Most High God.

#### Praise

After this, Melchizedek adds a blessing, in that God had given victory to our father Abram. "And blessed," says he, "be the Living God Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." By this we are admonished always to join praise and thanksgiving to God, with the petitions and supplications which we make to Him, as St. Paul also shows us in his epistle to the Philippians (4:6), when he says, "Let your desires and petitions be manifest before God." That is to say, don't bite upon the bit<sup>5</sup> like the infidels when they think something is good for themselves. They complain; but why? because their hearts are closed up and they never come to God to crave at His hands the things which they want. And therefore the apostle says in that place, pour out your petitions, thoughts, desires before God; which is to say, when you know you want something or other, seek for the benefit where it is, and there you may find it. Where? in God. Let your prayers, supplications, and thanksgivings show that you are before God, and when you have prayed as I have taught you before, let your thanksgiving be conjoined with your petitions.

For if we pray murmuringly, and with a grievous and discontented mind, this blasphemes His holy name. And therefore our prayers must be a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savor. For we do Him great wrong and injury when we try to make Him submit Himself and be subject to our appetites, and not be contented with His favor and grace. We see then why we ought to be roundly admonished, as often as we pray to God, to render to Him also praise and thanks, and yield ourselves wholly to His will, and acknowledge and confess all the benefits which we have received at His hands. In the Psalm it says, "Call upon Me in the day of your trouble, and I will hear you, and you shall praise and glorify Me" (Ps. 50). So, we see Melchizedek doing just this concerning Abram.

5. That is, don't act like an angry, rebellious horse.

Now, that we may become better acquainted with this matter, let us note that our prayers are to have regard to things past as well as things to come. Concerning things past, we are to confess to God the benefits we have already received from Him. Concerning the time to come, we are to crave of His majesty that it would please Him to continue and persevere His majesty to us, as He has already begun, even to the end.

Now there is one thing we are especially to note, which is that although Abram was so mightily advantaged as to be made the father of the faithful, to be blessed by God with all virtues, and to have a most excellent spirit of faith, yet Melchizedek nevertheless told him that he was continually to go forward and increase from grace to grace unto the end, and daily have recourse to God, to call on Him. For when Melchizedek blessed Abram, he was also reading him a lesson, which he was to consider well, and to practice the same all the days of his life. If it was necessary for Abram continually to call upon God, considering the graces he had received and how honorable he was, yet notwithstanding he was always to be exercised in prayer and supplications; what then shall become of us that are so far inferior to him in all these things? Thus we see why I have said that our prayers should have respect to the time to come, seeing we have always need of God's help, to have mercy on us and heal us, and more and more to increase His graces in us.

And besides, these prayers of ours must have regard to the times past, concerning our giving of thanks and praises to Him for His grace. We must protest that whatever good we have comes from Him, and be so contented that although we might be greatly vexed and grieved, yet we will still rejoice, since we have known and proved Him to be a father to us, and since He has showed Himself to be one indeed by reason of the benefits which He has bestowed on us up to this point. And this is what we are here to observe.

#### Victory is the Lord's

Now, turning to a consideration of the words of Melchizedek: "Blessed be God Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." This tells us that all victory comes from God. It also tells us that it was not Abram who discomfited the kings of whom mention is made, through his own industry, prowess, and valor, but it was God Who conquered them. It is true that Abram surprised his enemies in the night, as we have noted, though he was not expert in war.<sup>6</sup> But to what end does all this serve except to show that it was God Who gave him that prosperous success?

We see also that though David had a strong and mighty army, and had valiant and renowned soldiers, and was himself an expert man of war, in addition to which God had made him a king, yet for all that he says that it was God Who had given him the feet of a hart,

6. See *Calvin Speaks*, vol. 2, no. 7, where Calvin argues that Abram was ignorant of war. This is most unlikely, however, as we noted in that issue.

that it was He Who had advanced him, and so strengthened him that he broke asunder the bars of brass, and that it was He Who had overthrown his enemy (Ps. 18:32, 33). David, then, protests that there was nothing in him of himself that got him all his victories. Seeing then that David, who in the judgment of men had the means to destroy his enemies, yet confessed without hypocrisy that all was to be attributed to God and not to himself, to the end that His name might be glorified; what shall we say of Abram, who never in all his life learned war, nor how to draw the sword, as men say? Yet notwithstanding this, he vanquished such a multitude of people, who were already puffed up with presumption because they had discomfited their enemies and pillaged and sacked five cities. Therefore, we must conclude that it was the Lord Who did this thing.

Now therefore, however it is, we are to gather from this place that if we lift up but one of our fingers, we must confess it to be God that leads us to do so, so that we might not take upon ourselves anything with a presumptuous arrogance as if we could do anything of ourselves and were men of ability and great power. Let those then who are to take in hand the fighting of wars, or the rule of commonwealths, or any other matters of importance, put themselves in the hands of God, knowing that it is not without cause that He is called the God of Armies.

Moreover, we are to apply this to a second use, which concerns the Spiritual power given to us to overcome Satan and whatever else is against our salvation. We fight not, says Paul, against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers in high places, and against the demons who have fiery darts flying. Thus we see how we must be exercised. Seeing then that the Devil is our principal enemy, and that the darts, swords, and all the means which he has to hurt us, are spiritual in nature, let us learn to call upon our God. For what power have we? What agility? And therefore it is God

Who must fight for us. And let us be quiet and still, and stand as if we had our hands bound behind us; and yet not in such a way that we forget to do our proper tasks, because all the faithful must fight valiantly against the lusts of the flesh; but the power must come from above, and they annihilate all opinion of their freewill and strength, which is the drunkenness of Popery, when they proudly lift themselves up against God. To be short, we must therefore, I say, acknowledge that we can do nothing as of ourselves, not concerning our bodies, and not concerning our souls. But seeing that God has taken charge to Himself to lead us, let us understand and be fully persuaded that He has strength enough for us, and that we can do nothing without Him, and yet are able to do all things by Him and through Him.

#### Prayer

Let us now prostrate ourselves and fall down before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our offenses, beseeching Him to touch us daily more and more with such repentance that we may groan to obtain forgiveness of all our iniquities which make us indebted to Him. Let us pray that He will move us to seek after Him by that means which He has established, that is, by means of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, knowing that since we are reconciled by His death and passion, God will not leave us, but will accept us as His wellbeloved children, even though we are miserable and wretched creatures, full of sin and iniquity. Moreover, let us ask Him that it would please Him by His Holy Spirit to strengthen us, so that we may feel that the principal power and dominion was not given in vain to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, since He has enriched us with Spiritual blessings, of which in our own nature we are altogether bare. Let us pray Him that He will not only show us this favor, but also show it to all people, etc.

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