

Text: Heb. 7:4-25

Title: "Have you measured how great this one was?"

Time: 5/17/2015 pm

Place: NBBC

Introduction: You have heard of the importance of measuring twice and cutting once. Our author wants us to measure twice when it comes to the greatness of our Savior as displayed in the person and description of Melchizedek in Genesis 14. I would like us to notice four things we must not underestimate about Him.

I. Do not underestimate His blessing (vv. 4-11).

Illustration: My wife tells me that I pack too much when we go on trips together. She certainly has a point. When I go on a trip, I do not want to be short on clothes, so I always bring more than I need. This often means that, when I pack my bag, I have to stuff and push and press together to get everything to fit.

That is the picture that the Lord Jesus painted when He spoke of what happens when we are generous givers (Luke 6:38, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."). That sounds a bit like my suitcase.

In the Old Testament, giving in the work of the Lord was an Israelite tax called the *tithe*, which equaled 10% of a family's income. The tithe of the people funded the support of the tribe of Levi, and the tithe of the Levites funded the support of the priesthood. Yet the tithe was never viewed merely as a gift to a tribe or to a priesthood. It was always

seen as holy to the Lord (Lev. 27:30, 32). In fact, it was not really the people who gave their tithes to the Levites and priests, but the Lord who did (Num. 18:24, 26).

And the tithe was always tied closely to the Lord's blessing, just as the Lord ties together New Testament giving and the Lord's blessing in our lives. Mal. 3:8-10, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Well, that sounds very much like what we read just read from Luke about NT giving.

With that background understood, our author refers to the fact that Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek, and Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and he does not want us, his readers, to underrate the importance of that. This blessing from Melchizedek is more than just a thank-you. It is important in two ways:

1. Melchizedek's blessing is evidence of Christ's greatness (vv. 4-10). That Melchizedek blessed Abraham teaches us that Christ is greater than Abraham. *Better than Abraham* was about as easy to swallow for these Jews as was *better than Moses* in Heb. 3:3.

As much as we hope for the blessing of an Abraham or a Moses, what we really need is the blessing of the One who is better than they. Do we rely on mere man, even great men; or are we looking for the blessing and approval of the One who is greater than any mere man, our Lord Jesus

Christ? Whether it is our giving or anything else we are called to do for the Lord, may we do it for Him and seek always His blessing and approval in return.

2. Melchizedek's blessing is God's promise fulfilled (v. 11). The word translated *perfection* here is used here and in Luke 1:45, where Elizabeth says of Mary, "there shall be a *performance* of those things which were told her from the Lord." Elizabeth meant that all that God had promised Mary would be fulfilled.

That is what our author refers to here when he says that perfection came not through the Levitical priesthood but through the priesthood of Christ. He is echoing back to v. 6, where Abraham is called the one who received promises. He is saying that the Levitical priesthood and its law failed to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant and that the priesthood of Christ would do what it failed to do. The power of Jesus Christ to bless is the power to perfectly fulfill the promises made to Abraham – that he would be the father of many nations and that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

The promises of God are the drivers of history. Fulfillment of those promises in Christ is where the future is going. Are you ready for that future? Have you been blessed personally by the One who can make you a part of that great future? Have you seen how great His blessing is, that it can fulfill the ancient promise to Abraham with a glorious future, and it can make your future a part of that future? Do not underestimate His ability to bless.

II. Do not underestimate His new plan (vv. 12-14).

Illustration: The first martyr of the Christian church was Stephen. Do you remember what Stephen died for? He was accused of something very specific (Acts 6:13-14, "And set up false witnesses, which said, 'This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words *against this holy place, and the law*: for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall *destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.*")

Application: The Jews stoned Stephen because Stephen believed that God had a new plan that did not involve the temple or the Aaronic/Jewish priesthood anymore. This is the point our author is making in this paragraph, and he finds support for that truth from the fact that Christ, the Melchizedekian priest, descended from Judah, not Levi.

These Hebrew Christians should have recognized this from their Old Testaments too: Gen. 49:10, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be"; Num. 24:17, "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth."

So what did God's change of plan entail? It meant that the visible program for God's people was now the local church, not the temple in Jerusalem at the center of the nation of Israel. Jewish believers really struggled with adopting that new change in plan (Acts 21:20-21). It is amazing how many believers say they love the Lord who want little or nothing to do with this change of plan. Just like Jewish believers wanted hang on to the old program of the temple, today's believers want to hang on to the old program of doing whatever I want to do on Sunday. Do not underestimate the

importance of the change of plan. Commit yourself to the assembly times and ministry needs of your local church.

III. Do not underestimate His power (vv. 15-19).

Illustration: The third book of the Bible is called *Leviticus* for a reason. It is the center of the Old Testament law, and it can be summarized as a command for the tribe of Levi. That is why the book is called *Levi-ticus*.

Application: Our author calls that material in our Old Testaments “the law of a carnal commandment” (v. 16). What does he mean when he says that the Book of Leviticus and other portions of the Old Testament that give instructions for the Jewish priesthood are a carnal commandment? Well, he does not mean to say that they are sinful. Paul makes it clear for us that it is we who are sinful, not God’s law (Rom. 7:14).

So if the law is spiritual and not carnal, when *carnal* means *sold under sin*, what does the author of Hebrews mean when he calls these instructions about OT priests *the law of a carnal commandment*? The answer is simply this – the law is a carnal commandment in the sense that it defined a priest in terms of physical descent. In order to be a priest, according to this law, you had to be descended from the flesh or body of Levi. In order to be high priest, you had to be descended from Aaron. It was carnal in the sense that its membership restriction was strictly physical.

By way of contrast, the priesthood that brings a better hope and that allows each of us as God’s people to draw nigh unto God is not based on whether we have the right father or mother, but on whether or not we have been made alive by Christ’s indestructible and eternal life (v. 16, 18-19). The commandment that stipulated that the tribe of Levi would

be priests never saved anyone. The power that brought Christ out of the tomb certainly has. In that power we draw nigh unto God.

This power has been available to both OT and NT saints. Ps. 73:23, "But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works"; Ps. 119:51, "Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth"; Ps. 148:14, "He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the Lord." Whereas the visible plan has changed, the invisible power of the spiritual priesthood has remained the same.

Do we see the importance of the power we have to live an indestructible eternal life with hope and to draw nigh to our God? Or have we underestimated this privilege?

IV. Do not underestimate His salvation (vv. 20-25).

Illustration: Sometimes coaches underrate players to the detriment of their team's performance. If I have someone really good on my bench, but I cannot see how good he really is, the team is going to suffer for that.

Application: Jesus is an underrated Savior. We keep Him on the bench because we do not recognize his enormous talent to play the game of salvation, which is actually no game at all, but rather a fearsome spiritual war. Note some things we must recognize about our Savior's work of salvation in the midst of this war.

1. Our Savior's salvation is not only mediated, it is guaranteed (vv. 20-22, *surety* = *guarantee*). The old covenant was mediated (Gal. 3:19), but it came with a faulty guarantee.

That guarantee was the promise that the children of Israel made after they received the law at Sinai (Exod. 24:7, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.") That was the only guarantee that the old covenant would work as a blessing to God's people. No wonder things did not work out.

Jesus is both the mediator and the guarantee of the new covenant. We will be saved, not because we obey, but because He obeyed unto death, even death on a cross. In the spiritual war we face, we do not need to become more committed and obedient to guarantee a victory. We need to rest by faith in the truth that this victory is already guaranteed. Do not underestimate this salvation.

2. Our Savior's salvation comes not from a temporal priesthood, but from an eternal priest (vv. 23-24). Josephus wrote that from Aaron to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A. D. 70, there were 83 high-priests. That was a mixed bag of priests. You have the great Phineas of old, and the wicked Caiaphas who crucified Christ. Every human priesthood is at best a mixed bag, and at worst completely unbiblical. The Roman Catholic priesthood is like that. Salvation is not in a priesthood, but in a priest. We are not learning about a religion, we are learning about a person who is unequalled, who loved us, and who died for us. Salvation is in Him alone, not in the endless succession of human priests and religions.

3. Our Savior's salvation is not partial, but to the uttermost (v. 25). My favorite hymn is "Arise, My Soul, Arise" by Charles Wesley (*Living Hymns*, #14). It is a hymn about the intercession of our Savior for us. This is the reason Christ is able to save those who come to God by Him as their priest. He ever lives to intercede. Verse 4 speaks of the Father's

response to that intercession. He could easily turn from me a thousand times a day. But He cannot turn away the presence of His Son.

Conclusion: What must we answer to the question posed to us this evening, "Have you measured how great this One was?" His blessing, His new plan, the power of His life, His work of salvation are worthy of our careful measurements.

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*