

The King who blesses

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, Church, and it's a great pleasure and indeed a privilege to be able to bring God's Word to you again. Now, Christina was really worried about pronouncing all those names, but I think we can agree that she did a fantastic job.

I think she probably will pronounce all those names better than I will in a moment. As always, there should be a sermon outline that has been WhatsApped to you or it will be available for download on our website.

You might find that useful. The most useful thing, of course, is to keep your Bible open. And even more useful than that is asking God for his help. So let's ask God to open our hearts and our minds. Praise be to you, Lord. Teach us your decrees. Help us to meditate on your precepts and to consider your ways. We want to rejoice in your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. And so, Father, please help us to seek you with all our hearts. Don't let us stray from your commands. Hide your Word in our hearts that we might not sin against you.

[1 : 08] All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Uzziah was 16 years old when he was king of Judah. And I know that we're in Genesis 14.

But just flip your paper or your phone Bibles over to 2 Chronicles 26 for a moment. Where the account of his 52-year reign is recorded for us.

So 2 Chronicles 26. And what a start this king makes. Verse 4 tells us that he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Now that's not true of many of the kings in Judah's history.

And what did that look like? Well, verse 5 tells us. He sought God during the days of Zechariah who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success.

And what success he found. In verses 6-8, he won victories over his arch-enemies, the Philistines. Ammonites paid tribute to him. He engaged in great rebuilding projects.

[2 : 11] Restoring the port city of Elah in verse 2. And putting into place infrastructure for economic and security purposes in verses 9 and 10. The agricultural achievements of his administration were likely the most accomplished since Solomon, his legendary predecessor.

Verses 11 to 15 also details his savvy in military matters. As he equipped and maintained a well-trained army. And as verses 8 and 15 make clear, he became famous and powerful.

But fame and power can be a deadly recipe. Verse 16 tells us that his pride led to his downfall. Spurred on by his God-given success, Uzziah overreaches.

He decides he can take even what is not rightfully his. He decides he can take the special role reserved only for the temple priests.

He enters the temple and he burns incense. All which are out of bounds to him. He became unfaithful. And so Proverbs 11 verse 2 came true.

[3 : 24] When pride comes, then comes disgrace. He is afflicted with leprosy for the rest of his days. And dies like a COVID-19 patient in isolated quarantine.

It's a sad story. He's strong in power. Filled with experience. Experienced with success. Surrounded by good counsel. But he falls.

In short, he failed to reflect on and learn the lessons of Genesis chapter 14. He failed to consider his forefather Abraham.

You see, at first glance, Genesis 14 looks like a pretty unpromising passage, doesn't it? It's full of unpronounceable names and unpronounceable places, detailing a series of seemingly unconnected events, to present us with an unnecessary piece of irrelevant history.

Doesn't the church have better stories to tell, especially during a pandemic? But if Genesis 14 is the word of God, then it will be able to grow us, make us wise, and help us taste the goodness of the Lord.

[4 : 36] If we have ears to hear. For faith comes by hearing. And if we hear and take Genesis 14 to heart today, we can avoid the error of Uzziah.

And so let me take you through the story today, get to its heart, and then draw out some implications. And this story begins by giving us the setting of a world at war.

A world at war. Genesis 14 doesn't begin with Abraham. In fact, he doesn't make an appearance until halfway through. Instead, we're in the arena of international politics.

And there are four big players on the international stage. Am Raphael, Ariok, Kedolalmer, and Tidal, all named in verse 1. And so in today's terms, they're probably the USA, the UK, France, and Germany.

Except that, while all those countries I just named are in the west, these kings are from the east, or northeast, in what is today Iraq, and Iran, and probably Turkey too.

[5 : 43] And verse 3, they're in coalition with one another to maintain their hold on power. Think of the G7 grouping today, and you get the idea.

And in verse 2, we find another five kings. They're the small guys, kings of individual cities likely located in the south. We already know two of them, Sodom and Gomorrah.

I suppose think Hong Kong or Chechnya today. And what's happening, verse 2, is war. It's the first time we've seen war on an international scale in the Bible.

Nation against nation, city against city. All remind us that the effects of sin, the consequences of the curse, are now long in operation.

And according to verse 4, the eastern kings have long held these cities under their thumb. But after 12 years of being colonized, these cities have had enough.

[6 : 42] In the 13th year, they rebelled. And so what happens next? Kedol Lama and his allies take their time, and one year later, verse 5, they begin an ominous march.

They slowly make their way southwards, swatting aside all those who are in their way, verses 5 and 6. If you're interested in the geography, I've put a map from the ESV study Bible on your outline.

And who have they conquered? Well, let's take a sample. There's the Rephaites, who are renowned for their height and strength. There's the Ibaites, who are just as big and strong, so much so that they're later equated with the Rephaites.

But here, they're all on the losing side. The point is clear. Don't mess with Kedol Lama and his gang. They're bigger than even the Rephaites, stronger than even the Emites, ready to overwhelm you at a moment's notice.

The king of Sodom and his group should be quaking in their boots. Any potential allies have been neutralized. And so when they finally meet in battle, 4 against 5, in verses 8 and 9, the outcome is inevitable, even if the eastern kings are one shot.

[8 : 07] If you were watching a movie with the good guys against the bad, normally the big battle is what would take up a lot of the screen time. But here, we don't even get to see it.

By verse 10, the king of Sodom and Gomorrah are fleeing. There's no mystery as to who wins, no unexpected twists, no underdog rising to the occasion.

And I think that gives us a clue as to how we should read this story. Normally when we watch a war movie, or maybe a Marvel movie, the battle is the climax.

It's what everything has been building up to. But not here. But not here. Which tells us that this big battle between the nations is not what we should be interested in.

It's not the climax of this story. In fact, it's only the setup, the window dressing, the elements of which will help us understand better the significance of what's really going on later.

[9 : 10] And as a side note, it's interesting, isn't it, that what we often think of as significant and what God thinks as significant can be quite different, can't it?

What we see as momentous events might not be in God's eyes. Just something to ponder on. But back to the story, and now we come to the problem.

Lot gets into trouble. You see, the big four have won. They're the powerful ones. They're the victors. And what do powerful victors like to do? They like to take and take.

And that's what they do in verses 11 and 12. And so let me read from the NASB on the screen, which translates these verses a little more literally than the NIV, so that you can see this really clearly.

Verse 11. Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all the food supply and departed. That's pretty standard fare for winners of war in ancient times.

[10:19] But they couldn't help themselves. And notice what else they take. Verse 12. They also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed.

For he was living in Sodom. Let's pause here and just ponder on that for a second. If you were here last week, do you remember where Lot was?

He had chosen the fertile land, right on the edge of Canaan, next to Sodom. He chose that which was good to his eyes, just like Eve back in the Garden of Eden.

And we saw that the narrator gave us plenty of hints that that was not a wise choice. Not least in the fact that he's drifting eastwards away from the Lord.

And now, hardly one chapter later, he's already drifted outside Canaan, into Sodom. And so really, what's happening here is the culmination of what started back in Genesis 13.

[11:25] Lot was already in trouble even before 14 verse 12. He thought this location would give him earthly success. He chose to take what God said was not a good idea to take.

He saw with the eyes of the world. And now the Sodomite king he's trusted in has lost the battle.

When you slowly move away from God, step by step, it's always a bad idea.

Perhaps it won't be immediately apparent. Perhaps moving away from God might even look good for a while. The psalmist in Psalm 73 notices that as he laments to God that the wicked seem to have a problem-free, prosperous life.

But even the psalmist comes to realise that they will eventually be cast down to ruin, if not now, then later. And Genesis 14 is already sounding that warning.

Taking those steps eastwards will always end in tears. Lot now discovers that. And if that's you today, time to take those steps back to the Lord before you discover the same thing as Lot.

[12:42] But it's not just Lot who gets into trouble. Because in one sense, the kings who take also land themselves in trouble. You see, if they had just taken the possessions, they might have gotten away with it.

But they overreach. They take Lot as well. And what this story never fails to remind us is that Lot is Abraham's nephew.

Just look at verse 12, verse 14, and verse 16. And you can see his family ties to Abraham are stressed again and again.

And it is this very fact that brings Abraham into the picture. You see, if Lot was not Abraham's nephew, Abraham and these kings would probably never cross paths.

After all, if you look through the eyes of the world, Abraham is just a lowly, random sojourner, while these kings are those that have influence on world events. They should have nothing to do with one another.

[13:46] But our sovereign God is always orchestrating things behind the scenes. As Proverbs 16, verse 9 puts it, In their hearts, humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.

And here he directs the steps such that Abraham and these kings will encounter one another. God is working still. And that can be of great comfort to us.

You see, we still live in Abraham's world. We still live in a world that is very much at war. I don't know about you, but in recent weeks, I've been feeling that no matter which corner of the world you live in, it's all bad news.

Whether you're in Myanmar, or Haiti, or South Africa, or Ethiopia, everything seems a mess. Even Malaysia feels like a war zone sometimes, metaphorically speaking.

Perhaps even our own homes sometimes feel that way. We're all very far east of Eden at the moment. And we're all messed up ourselves in different ways.

[14:54] We know the battles that rage within ourselves, the steps eastwards we sometimes continue to take. And no one on the world stage seems to be able to resolve things.

Not Joe Biden, or Xi Jinping, not the UN or WHO, not Mark Zuckerberg, or Pope Francis. But God is working through his people, perhaps through people unknown to us, people who don't seem to have any platform on the world stage to further his purposes.

of that, we can be sure. For we come next in this story to the turning point. Abraham to the rescue.

In verse 13, we find Abraham still in the place where we last saw him in chapter 13, near the great trees of Mamre. He has not moved. He's still in the place where he has built an altar to the Lord.

He's still in the place of faith. And we're told a man who had escaped came and reported what had happened to Abraham, the Hebrew.

[16:06] Is that not God's providence too? And so Abraham acts, verse 18, he gathers together 318 trained men, those who are born in his household, and therefore his most trustworthy and reliable lieutenants.

He has resources. And in verses 14 to 15, he pursues these four kings. He catches them. He attacks them. He routes them.

He wins. The king had taken the goods and taken Lot. But now, verse 16, he recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions together with the women and the other people.

Think about that for a second. How incredible is that? Abraham managed to do successfully in one night what five kings couldn't do in 14 years.

Don't forget, half of Genesis 13 has been devoted to showing how powerful these eastern kings are. but Abraham overcomes them.

[17:17] It's a bit like Hong Kong beating China in one day. Such a victory could only come from the hand of the Lord. For the Lord's hand is on the Lord's man.

Think about what a great reversal this is from Genesis 12 verse 10 to 20 when Abraham was in Egypt. I wonder if you notice the parallels here.

In each episode we have an encounter with a world power. Pharaoh in Egypt back in Genesis 12 and these eastern kings in Genesis 14.

There is a threat in each case to Abraham himself as he knows that there's a real risk Pharaoh could have him killed to get Sarah and then in Genesis 14 to Abraham's extended family.

as Lord is now in great danger. And who knows possibly Abraham himself could find himself in danger too in the future if the kings decide to enlarge their territory.

[18:23] And in both cases there is a taking as his wife in Genesis 12 and his nephew in Genesis 14 are taken. It's the same word used in each case.

But that's where the similarities end. because in Genesis 14 Abraham now acts differently to how he acted back in Genesis 12.

In Genesis 12 Abraham was merely interested in rescuing himself. He's ready to save his own life at the cost of his wife. But in Genesis 14 Abraham now risks his life for his wayward nephew.

In Genesis 12 his actions leads to plagues and curses for Pharaoh. But in Genesis 14 as we'll also see in a moment his actions actually lead to blessing for the king of Sodom.

As he rescues he blesses and God's purposes in Genesis 12 of blessings extending to the nations are beginning to come to life.

[19:34] He is acting as the Lord's man. This is the turning point and what a turning point it is. For just like back in Genesis 12 verse 10 to 20 what we see is God establishing a pattern.

God rescues wayward people through the man he has appointed. In Judges 6 to 8 God similarly calls on a man named Gideon and he's going to use this man to save wayward Israel for at that time Israel had wandered away from the Lord and as a result were oppressed by the Midianites. And once again God used a small army similar in size to Abraham's army here to overcome the odds. And then centuries after Gideon once again God will rescue wayward people through the man he has appointed Jesus.

And Jesus comes and as Mark 3 verse 27 tells us he will be the one who binds the strong man that's Satan and plunder his house which is Mark's way of saying that he will set the captives free. He takes back what the enemy has taken for himself. And as Jesus rises victorious he does what Abraham and Gideon can't.

[21:02] He loses the grip sin has on us. And as we were reminded two weeks ago from Galatians it is through Jesus that blessings comes to the Gentiles to the nations as they receive the gospel.

God And so that brings us assurance. My friends do you see that even in Genesis 14 God is showing us what he's like?

Lord goes wayward God rescues him by Abraham's hand. We have gone wayward God rescues us by the hand of the son of Abraham.

Do you see that the God of Genesis 14 and the God of the New Testament is the one and the same? He never changes. He's always looking to redeem.

He's always sought to remove or reverse the curse of sin. And he always wins. For though we are east of Eden, just like Lot, through Christ, God recovers us to bring us home.

[22 : 12] And today, if we know that we are going wayward again, well, let him bring you home. And if you have wayward family members today, don't give up.

Don't stop praying. God longs to bring the wayward back to him. But let's come back to Genesis 14. And you would have thought, this has to be the climax of the story, right? Lot gets captured, Abraham rescues him. This must be it. Except it can't be.

Notice once again that this battle gets just about no screen time. It's a significant turning point to be sure, and yet we still have yet to reach the main point.

And so that means we have yet to reach the main application. Genesis 14 is not in the Bible simply to show us God wins. Now we still need to read to the end.

[23 : 16] And so we reach the climax, glorifying the king who blesses. I wonder if you've noticed that all throughout this passage, we've been talking about nothing but kings and more kings.

And in verse 17, we now zoom in on two kings in particular. And the first king to appear on the scene is the king of Sodom. We've met him in the story already.

And he's about to speak a significant word to Abraham. But just before he does, all of a sudden, another king appears, verse 18.

And this is a king we haven't met before. And he too will speak a significant word. So who is this guy? Where does he come from?

We don't know. But the book of Hebrews tells us that this is a guy to whom we should pay attention. In Hebrews chapter 7 verse 2, we're told what his name Melchizedek means.

[24 : 18] It means king of righteousness. And he is the king of Salem. In other words, the king of peace. But he's not just a king.

Verse 1 tells us he's the priest of God most high. Up to this point in the Bible, because Israel as a nation hasn't come into existence yet, there is no priesthood to speak of.

The only one doing priest-like things is Abraham himself, building altars, offering sacrifices, calling on the name of the Lord. But now, here comes Melchizedek, a real priest who is also a king.

And that's also unique in the Old Testament, since the two officers were usually kept apart. You get priests, you get kings, but you don't get them in combination.

But here we have a priest- king. And so the picture we're getting is that whoever this guy is, he's someone special. He's superior to even Abraham, as Hebrews 7 verse 4 and verse 7 will make clear.

[25 : 30] And as Hebrews chapter 7 verse 1 on the screen observes, he blesses Abraham, not the other way around. And so here, on the one hand, we have a righteous king, the king of peace, about to speak.

And on the other, we have the king of Sodom, the king of sin and wickedness, ready also to speak. And it's Abraham who will have the last word of response in verses 22 to 24.

And so it feels like a crucial moment. Let's think again about where we are in the story. Abraham has just won a decisive victory. He has faced fearsome opponents.

He has won the battle. But now he has to choose for the king of Salem and the king of Sodom are offering him two very different paths to proceed from here.

Who will he listen to? Let's take the kings in reverse order. Let's hear from the king of Sodom first. Verse 21. The king of Sodom said to Abram, give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.

[26 : 53] Now don't forget, this king has just indirectly benefited from Abraham's rescue of Lot. His enemies are vanquished. But notice there is no gratitude in his words.

He just wants to take. Give me the people, he says. Earlier we noticed in verses 11 to 12 that the eastern kings led by Kedol Lauma were all about taking.

They took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah. They took Lot. And Sodom is no different. He has nothing to give to Abraham.

He simply wants to take. And notice that he also encourages Abraham to take. Keep the goods for yourself, he says.

In other words, why not take all the plundered booty and keep it for yourself? Why not grab some additional glory? This is the path Sodom represents.

[27 : 54] It's the path I'll call opportunistic taking. It's all about taking and taking and taking just like the eastern kings, just like Sodom, just like Uzziah did at the beginning of this sermon when he took the role of the priest, which he wasn't supposed to do.

And actually, just like Satan. For isn't that what Satan is all about? Taking what is not his. And isn't that what Satan is always encouraging us to do?

Take what doesn't belong to us. Take what is pleasing to the eye, even when God said not to. Take the glory for ourselves.

And he must have been tempting for Abraham to accept Sodom's offer. After all, could he not assume that since he won the victory, God will surely be with him in whatever he does?

And with those riches and the famous victory in hand, could he now not actually begin setting up his own kingdom? In verse 17, we're told they're in the king's valley.

[29 : 09] Well, why not make this king Abraham's valley? Even if it's outside the land of Canaan, why not seek glory? But what is the alternative?

To answer that, let's now consider Melchizedek. What path does he represent? Well, let's look at what he says in verse 20. Praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hands.

You see, how did Abraham win? What does Melchizedek say? Answer, it was a gift from God.

Abraham's victory, Abraham's riches, Abraham's strength, it was all given by God.

It had nothing to do with how great Abraham was. And in fact, all blessings come from God, as seen in verse 19. When Melchizedek blesses Abraham, there's no other source, no other origin.

Why? Because God alone is the creator of the heaven and the earth. Indeed, that word creator can also be translated possessor, which is how some of our English versions translate that word here.

[30 : 26] He possesses everything. And so he alone has the right to give and take. All we can do is gratefully receive. And so we could call the path of Melchizedek the path of grateful glorifying.

For if all we do is receive, then the glory doesn't go to ourselves. It goes to God. And so here lies the true battle of Genesis 14.

Which path will Abraham go? Which word will he accept? Which king will he trust? Will he take glory for oneself? Or will he give glory to God?

Abraham makes his choice. Verse 20, he brings Melchizedek an offering. He acknowledges Melchizedek as the rightful priest king.

And he firmly rejects Sodom's offer. In verse 22, he pledges an oath to the God Most High. He says, you indeed are the king who blesses me.

[31 : 36] And in verses 23 to 24, he makes clear that he will not give glory to another. Sodom will have no right to claim that they are the ones who bless Abraham.

He will not let Sodom take him to continue with that metaphor. And he indirectly reaffirms his trust in God's promises back in Genesis 12.

Remember, he still hasn't come into possession of the land God promised him. He's yet to see that blessing, but he's willing to wait. He wouldn't accept anything that will rob God of his glory.

He would not take any glory for himself. And so here's the main implication of Genesis 14. When you're in battle and you're on the winning side, where does the glory go?

When you've been blessed, do you remember the source of that blessing? Will you try to take more blessing for yourself prematurely? Or will you gratefully receive what God has given without overreaching?

[32 : 47] Abraham shows us the answer. We gratefully receive what has been given. We give glory to God. We don't try to rob him of his glory or add to our own glory.

We take the path of Melchizedek. And that's the better choice for Melchizedek is the better king. Did you notice how different he is to the king of Sodom?

Sodom's first words to Abraham are give me. Melchizedek's first words to him are blessed be Abram. Sodom is grudging.

Melchizedek is generous. Sodom brought nothing. Melchizedek brought bread and wine. The king of Sodom is the king who takes but Melchizedek is the king who gives.

He is the king who blesses. And here's the thing. He's a pointer to the greater priest king to come.

[33 : 54] He's like a mirror to Jesus. And that's what Hebrew 7 verse 3 on the screen makes clear. Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the son of God, he's talking about Melchizedek here, he remains a priest forever.

For Jesus too is the king who gives. He too is the king who blesses. He too offers bread and wine. Except that the bread he breaks is his very own body given for us. And the cup that he pours out on our behalf is his very own blood.

All so that one day we can eat and drink at his table in his kingdom. All so that his righteousness and his peace can be ours as he acts as our eternal mediator.

Here's the good news of the gospel. Our saviour is not an opportunistic taker. He's the priest king who gives and blesses as he gives his very life for us.

[35 : 11] Giving glory to such a king is never the wrong choice because a king who does what Jesus did is 100% trustworthy.

You see my friends at first glance Sodom's king might offer you what seems like a good deal. If he met you today perhaps he would invite you to take the way of un-generosity.

Don't give your time to that person. Save it for yourself. You have more fun things to do anyway, right? Don't give your love to that person. They're undeserving of it anyway.

Save it for the people who appreciate you. Keep your money and your energy. Save it for your own benefit. Doesn't that sound better? Especially in these COVID times?

Or perhaps he will invite you to take the way of ambition. Why not do all you can to be successful in your studies or in your job or even in your ministry?

[36 : 15] Doesn't matter how you attain your success. Sacrifice a few people, it's alright, as long as you get to the top. After all, if you're successful, God gets the glory, right?

Sodom will always offer you something that looks good. But the way of Sodom, remember, always ends in tears.

They're the defeated party in Genesis 14. And remember what we're told will happen to Sodom last week? It will be destroyed. And don't forget, the king of Sodom can't even offer you salvation in the first place.

Anything he offers is counterfeit. But the real priest king can't. And that's why we can be confident he offers true blessing.

If he gave himself to rescue you, it is unimaginable that he will withhold from you any mercy or any privilege whether spiritual or temporal which is in your best interest.

[37 : 24] He will withhold from you your share in the eternal kingdom even though you don't see it yet. Because our God, the possessor of the heavens and the earth is the king who blesses.

So offer your lives in worship to him. It belongs to him anyway. Your life doesn't belong to you.

So don't take what you don't own. Don't be tempted to heap glory for yourself. Glorify the king who blesses instead.

Here is the main lesson of Genesis 14. Here is the lesson King Uzziah failed to learn. And here is the lesson to take with you as you go live for Jesus this week.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that when we are in Christ, we are always on the winning side.

[38 : 37] we thank you for the Lord Jesus who has triumphed over every authority, every power, every dominion, who is now reigning as the king of kings.

And we thank you that he is the king who came to this earth, who humbled himself to become a man, and even died on the cross for wayward people just like us.

So Father, please may that inspire hope and confidence in those of us who are going wayward today and who know it and who want to return to you.

May you bring them back. May inspire hope and confidence in those who have family members who have gone wayward that they would pray unceasingly for them.

But most of all, Lord, we pray that we would pour our lives as an offering of worship to you. That even during these COVID times, we will still do all we can to follow Jesus, to take the path of Melchizedek, to say praise be God in the good times in the bad because we know no matter what we have a share in his eternal kingdom.

[39 : 52] So will you help us to keep pressing on. In the name of Jesus Christ we