

RECOGNIZING TRUE GREATNESS (Hebrews 7:4-10)

A group of tourists were walking through a picturesque village. They passed by an old man sitting on a bench. One of the tourists stopped, and in a rather patronizing way, he asked, “Were any great men born in this village?”

Without looking up, the old man replied, “Nope, only babies.”

No one is born great. A person can be born into a great title, a great position, great wealth, or a great family, but no one is born great.

What does it truly mean to be great? **Greatness involves more than being talented.** Tiger Woods is arguably the greatest golfer to ever play the game. He has enormous talent, but that doesn’t mean he is a great person.

Greatness is not the equivalent of being famous. The Chancellor of the German Reich, Adolph Hitler was famous, but no one is going to say that he was a great man.

There is not a one-to-one ratio between success and greatness. Hollywood, professional sports, and Fortune 500 companies are filled with successful individuals, but that does not mean that they are necessarily great people.

So, if being great is something other than being uber talented, world-famous, or incredibly successful, what does it mean to be great?

John Stott claimed, “Greatness in the kingdom of God is measured in terms of obedience.” It is those who are quickly, completely, and consistently obedient to God who are great in heaven’s eyes.

If obedience to God is the standard of greatness, that means it is possible for the average person, for the moderately talented, the non-famous, and the unsuccessful person to be great in the eyes of God. By the way, if someone is great in the eyes of God, we should look upon them as being great, too.

But how do we know whether or not someone is great according to God’s standards of greatness? We are going to consider, “Recognizing True Greatness.” Our text is Hebrews 7:4-10. Last week we touched on the character Melchizedek. We will learn more about him today.

Look at how the text began: “See how great this man was.” According to the Bible, Melchizedek was a great man. As we move through our text, I want to point out five qualities that belong to those who are great.

Those Who Are Truly Great Remind Us of Jesus

We learned last week that Jesus was likened to a man who shows up only twice in the OT record—Melchizedek. We read of him in Genesis 14 and not again until Psalm 110. His name is found in only two verses of the entire OT.

It is clear that Melchizedek was a type of Christ, and there are several ways in which he foreshadowed Christ. First, he was both a king and a priest. Likewise, Jesus is both our King and our Priest. Second, like Jesus, Melchizedek did not receive his priesthood on the basis of ancestry. He did not become a priest because his dad was a priest. Both were

given their priesthood directly by God. Finally, because we are not told when Melchizedek was born nor when he died, it gives us the sense that he was a priest forever. We observed that what was true of Melchizedek figuratively was true of Jesus literally. Jesus is our forever priest.

When making a major, motion picture, there is usually someone who has the role of casting director. That person is in charge of finding actors or actresses to assume the roles or characters that are in the story. Often, they are spot-on in casting those roles.

- For instance, can you imagine anyone else other than Charlton Heston as Moses in Cecille B. DeMille's epic, 1956 production *The Ten Commandments*.
- I thought Jim Caviezel portrayed Jesus amazingly well in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* back in 2004.
- In 2013, Daniel Day-Lewis won an Academy Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role for his portrayal of Abraham Lincoln in Steven Spielberg's blockbuster entitled simply *Lincoln*.

It is one thing for a talent scout or casting director to choose someone to portray an historical figure. What is far more amazing is that God chose a man to portray Jesus 2,000 years before Jesus was born. Only God can do that.

Also, if our God has the power to make a man look like Jesus 2,000 before Jesus was born, He can cause you to look like Jesus 2,000 after Jesus was raised. Not only can God do that, that is exactly what God intends to do. Listen to Romans 8:29, "For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."

God wants you to look like Jesus, and He has determined that is going to happen. He has predestined it. Those who are great are those who are working with God instead of against God to become more and more like Jesus.

When you meet someone who reminds you of Jesus, you have met a great person. What kind of people remind us of Jesus? Kind people. Compassionate people. Gracious people. People who love sacrificially to meet the real needs of others are those who remind us of Jesus.

Tony Campolo tells the story of Joe. He said that Joe was a drunk. When people looked at Joe, they saw a wino for whom there was no hope. Everyone figured he would die in the ghetto where he lived. One day, Joe was converted at the mission when the gospel was preached. Everything began to change in Joe's life, especially in Joe himself. He became the most caring person that anyone associated with the mission had even known. He donated his time to work at the mission. He did whatever needed to be done. Nothing was beneath him as far as he was concerned. He cleaned up after men who had gotten sick. He scrubbed toilets. He fed men who were too feeble to feed themselves.

One evening, after the director of the mission delivered an evangelistic message, a man came forward. He knelt to pray. He cried out to God asked God to help him change. Again and again, he prayed, "O God! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!" With tears streaming down his face he prayed, "Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!"

The director of the mission walked over to him, leaned down and said, "Son, I think it

would be better if you prayed, “Make me like Jesus.”

The man looked up and asked, “Is he like Joe?”

Our prayer is that we would be like Jesus.

Those Who Are Truly Great Focus on What They Have

As great and as important a man as Melchizedek was, there were certain things he did not have. What did he not have? Look at the beginning of v. 6. Who is the *them* in that verse? It is the Levites. The Levites were the priestly tribe. They were descended from Abraham. Abraham was the great patriarch of the Jewish people.

Moses was from the tribe of Levi. He received the Law from God. The Law revealed that his tribe was to be the priestly tribe. His older brother Aaron became the first High Priest. The Law stipulated that tithes were to be collected, and those tithes would help support the priests and the work they did. The Scriptures taught that the Jewish people were God’s chosen people, and the Savior would come through them. Melchizedek did not have that heritage. He did not possess any of those spiritual blessings or promises.

So, what did Melchizedek have? He had the call of God upon his life to be a king and to be a priest, and he had the presence of God to guide him. What more do you need?

A great missionary once said, “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply.”

Don’t focus on what you don’t have. Focus on what you do have. We have this Book. We have the presence of God in our life—the Holy Spirit. We have things money cannot begin to purchase.

A Christian businessman traveled quite a bit. He would go out of town to buy clothes for his clothing store. When he returned home from his trip, he routinely brought back gifts to his three sons. As soon as his car turned into the driveway, his boys would rush outside to greet their father, and they would ask him what he had in his suitcase.

One day upon his return, his boys asked what he had gotten them, and he replied, “I brought you me.” They were disappointed. He asked, “Aren’t you glad to see me?”

The answered, “Sure, we’re glad to see you, but what do you have in your suitcase?”

We display immaturity when we value the gifts over the Giver. Don’t make the mistake of being so interested in what God has in His hand that you fail to gaze upon His face.

The greatest thing we have is not a thing. Our greatest possession is our relationship with God.

Those Who Are Truly Great Work at Blessing Others

The latter part of v. 6 tells us the Melchizedek “blessed him who had the promises.” Of course, the him the verse refers to is Abraham. Abraham had the promises. What promises did Abraham have?

In the opening verses of Genesis 12 we find the call of Abraham. At that time, his name was Abram. God told Abram to go to the land I will show you. God didn’t give

Abram a map showing him the route he was to take with an X marking the spot of his final destination. God didn't tell him how long the journey would take. He just said, "Go, and I will show you."

Along with that call came a promise: "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing . . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (12:2-3). In that short passage, we find the words bless, blessing, and blessed. The man we know as Abraham was promised that God would bless him, so much so that Abraham would be a blessing. In fact, God told him that through him, the whole world would be blessed.

How would the whole world be blessed through Abraham. It was through him the eventually Jesus was born, and Jesus has blessed the whole world.

One day, a King/Priest came along and blessed the man who was destined to bless the whole world. I want you to notice that when Melchizedek came along and told Abraham, "Bow your head, I'm going to bless you," Abraham didn't say, "Nah, I'm good. Thanks anyway." He didn't stiff arm Melchizedek and say, "That's not necessary. I'm just fine."

Instead, he humbly allowed this man whom he had never met to bless him in the name of the God of heaven.

In our pride, we often rob people of the blessing of blessing us. People want to assist us, and we say, "No, I've got it." They want to come alongside and lighten our load, and we insist on shouldering the burden by ourselves. That is nothing but pride. All too often, we allow our pride to rob ourselves of the blessings we would otherwise receive, and we rob others of the blessing that would be theirs of blessing someone else. That is wrong; we need to get over ourselves.

Hebrews 7:1 tells us of the occasion when Melchizedek blessed Abraham. Let's look at that story in a little more detail. In the opening verses of Genesis 14, we are told that four kings banded together and went to battle with five kings. Verse 4 tells us why there was a battle. For 12 years, these five kings had been paying tribute to one of the four kings. Finally, they said, "Enough is enough. We are done paying you. You can go fly a kite."

That one king said, "Oh, yeah? We'll just see about that." He went to three of his buddies who were kings and said, "Let's go teach these upstarts a lesson."

Things did not fare so well for the five kings who had rebelled. Look at 14:11-12.

Lot was the nephew of the man of whom God said, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." In short order, Abraham became a blessing to Lot and his family, as well as to many other families. Look at vv. 14-16.

When I read this story, I am reminded of a true story involving the modern nation of Israel. In late June of 1976, a terrorist organization hijacked an Air France jetliner that had originated out of Tel Aviv. The hijackers diverted the plane to the African nation of Uganda where the ruthless Idi Amin ruled as the self-appointed president. The hijackers let all of the non-Israeli passengers go free, but the 103 Israeli passengers remained under guard inside the airport at Entebbe, Uganda. The hijacker demanded the release of 53 prisoners in exchange for the lives of the hostages.

On July 3rd, Israel conducted a surprise raid. Under the cover of darkness, they landed

four C-130 transport planes that carried somewhere between 100 and 200 Israeli commandos. In less than an hour after landing, the soldiers killed all 7 hijackers, and rescued the hostages. Only 3 of the 103 failed to survive, and only one their men died in the short battle. Before departing, the commandos destroyed 11 MiG fighter planes that had been given to Uganda by the Soviet Union. On July 4, 1974, our country's bicentennial, Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister of Israel announced to the world the successful rescue of the hostages.

There are a number of parallels between the two rescues. Both involved night-time raids conducted by trained soldiers. Both were successful, but as far as we can tell from the Genesis account, Abraham rescued everyone without losing anyone.

Following that successful rescue, Melchizedek went out to meet Abraham. He provided bread and wine and blessed Abraham by God Most High. We noted several ways that Melchizedek was a type of Christ. Here, we see another way. Melchizedek provided Abraham bread and wine. That is what Jesus did with His disciples, and we, too, come to the Lord's table to partake of the bread and the wine that symbolize Jesus' body and His blood.

Not only does Melchizedek serve as a type of Christ, he also serves as type of the Church. We are to be priests, and we are to bless others. Both Melchizedek and Abraham blessed one another. Melchizedek blessed Abraham with a prayer. Abraham blessed Melchizedek with a sizeable offering. He tithed. He gave 10% right off the top of all the booty, the spoils that Abraham had recovered from the kings he had had defeated. Later in the chapter we are told that Abraham kept nothing for himself so that no one could say, "That is how Abram became rich" (v. 23).

Who are you allowing to bless you, and to whom are you being a blessing? Great people do both.

Those Who Are Truly Great Speak Even When They Are Gone

Notice v. 8. The NLT makes the meaning of this verse clearer: "In the case of Jewish priests, tithes are paid to men who will die. But Melchizedek is greater than they are, because we are told that he lives on."

We said earlier that Melchizedek is figuratively a forever priest. Because his death is not recorded, and we are not told of anyone following after him, it is as if he never died and has remained a priest. But there is another sense in which he lives on. Consider what is written of someone else in this same letter. In Hebrews 11, the author holds up various men and women of the OT as examples of faith. We see their faith by the thing they did. Hebrews 11:4 speaks of Abel. We are told, "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain . . ." Then, at the end of that verse, the author adds, "And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks."

That is true of Melchizedek. It matters not whether he literally continued on as a priest. The truth is that his life still speaks.

What will the testimony of your life say to others when you are gone? Will your life be an encouragement or will it be a cautionary tale warning others not to make the

mistakes you made?

Those Who Are Truly Great Will Be Honored by God

Melchizedek was honored by his inclusion in the OT and then by the greater discussion of his life in Hebrews. Through the centuries, preachers like myself have preached on the life and ministry of Melchizedek. The Bible is the word of God; thus, the individuals that show up in Hebrews 11 are being honored by Him for their faith and what they did because of their faith.

Because the canon of the Bible is closed, it is not possible for anyone to be added to it, but there is another Book that God has, and it is possible for your name to be found there. You can't buy this book on Amazon. No matter how many libraries or book stores you visit, you won't find this book. There is only one copy of it, and that copy is in heaven. Scripture refers to it as "The Lamb's Book of Life." It is an incredibly important book. Consider what this book says about that book. Revelation 21 is all about heaven. We read in Revelation 21:27, "But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life."

How do you know whether or not your name is written in that all important book? Have you believed in Jesus? We don't believe in Jesus so that our name will be written there. We believe in Jesus because our name is written in that book. If you are a follower of Jesus that means your name has already been recorded there.

Last week we looked the meaning of the names of this great man to which we have been giving our attention. Do you remember the meaning of his names? Look back at 7:2. The name Melchizedek means, "King of Righteousness." He was also the King of Salem, and Salem means "peace." He was the King of Peace.

Since Melchizedek was a type of Christ, we know that Jesus is both the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace. The order in which those two names come is very important. Righteousness is first, and peace follows. Before you and I can have peace in our lives, we must first have a relationship with Jesus, the King of Righteousness. Once we have placed our faith in Him, He confers upon us His right standing with God, and His peace follows.

Do you need peace in your life? If so, come to Jesus. Place your faith and trust in Him.

Some years ago, a seminary president was introduced before he stood up to speak. The one who introduced him referred to him as "a great man of God." When he stood to speak, he remarked, "Our brother has placed the adjective in the wrong place. I am not a great man of God; I am a man of a great God."

It matters not whether you or I or others view you as great. What matters is that you commit your life to the One who is supremely great. As you live your life under His guidance and direction, He will mold you and fashion you into His image.