

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Part 6

Hebrews 5:1-10

I need you to really listen this morning, and put on your thinking cap, and try to really come to grips with the lesson this morning. If you came here to get a nap, I will apologize in advance, because I hope you won't be able to do that today!

I have been getting a little feedback from some of you that the lessons that I have been bringing for the past number of weeks on "The Mystery of God," have been interesting and helpful to you. I certainly hope that is the case because now that I myself have been awakened to this wonderful revelation from God, I want all of you to see it as well, and to be constantly on the alert for it as you read and study the scriptures. It is something you can find on almost every page of the Bible, and as you find it, I think it serves to strengthen your faith.

We saw a good example of this night before last when at the Friday night Bible study, there in John 3, Jesus himself drew a parallel between the bronze serpent event that is described in the 21st chapter of Numbers, and what he would be doing for the people in the not too distant future by dying on the cross.

Numbers 21:4-9

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. 5) And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." 6) Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7) And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8) And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." 9) So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Now that was truly an unusual event, and would have ever imagined that it, in any way, could have been, or would turn out to be a foreshadowing of God's scheme of redemption that He brought about almost sixteen hundred years later!

But it was, and in **John 3**, in **verses 14 & 15**, right there in the context of Jesus' discussion with a devout Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus, Jesus pointed to both the clue given in the past and to the event the clue pointed towards—his crucifixion that was about to come.

John writes, "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15) that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*"

A little later, in **John 12:32-33**, we find Jesus alluding to this again. He said, *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”* 33) *He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*” The crucifixion was foreshadowed by that event that took place in the wilderness of Sin hundreds of years earlier.

This reminds me of what Jesus said to the apostles as revealed in the last chapter of **Luke’s gospel—chapter 24**, and **beginning in verse 44**. You remember, following Jesus’ death and resurrection, and prior to His ascension back into heaven, he met with the apostles and taught them many things preparing them for the great work they had been and we have been called to do. He said:

“Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45) *Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,* 46) *and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,* 47) *and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*”

So, you see, that story found in **Numbers 21**, written by Moses, as Jesus said, was written about Him. To the apostle Paul, as well as the other apostles, was given a divine understanding of the mystery, and Paul saw how all of those things really had their fulfillment in Christ. Look at what he wrote in **Ephesians 1, beginning in verse 7**,

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8) *which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight* 9) *making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, **which he set forth in Christ*** 10) *as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*”

Last Lord’s Day, I showed you another of those amazing clues, those signs if you will of the coming and offering of Christ. We looked at a piece of furniture in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple called the *ark of the covenant* and the lid on the top of that ark called the *mercy seat*. If you were not here for that lesson, or if you would like to review it, it is available on our website at hartfordchurch.net

This morning, I would like to look at another of those clues given in the form of the institutions that God set up in the Old Testament era. I would like for us to spend some time thinking about the priesthood, and with attention especially drawn to the high priesthood of Christ.

The word Genesis is the English form of the very first word found in the Hebrew Bible, translated “in the beginning.” Genesis is the book of beginnings. Here we find the very first of every thing. The first man and woman. The first sin, the first sacrifice, the first murder, the first promise and first prophecy. We also find the word priest for the first time. And do you know

who the very first priest mentioned is? Dean, you can answer that for us. It is was a man named Melchizedek.

Well, who was Melchizedek? We read about him in the **14th chapter of Genesis**, in a rather mysterious setting. You see, now that doesn't surprise us, does it? The great patriarch Abraham, the one to whom God first makes His promise that He is going to bring about a blessing for the whole world, has had a nephew captured by a federation of five kings. When Abraham received word of this, he quickly three hundred of his best men, and went in pursuit of them. They caught up with them at a place called Dan, and there they began a running fight that lasted almost to Damascus in Syria. Finally, Abraham and his men prevailed and **beginning in verse 16**, we read:

*"Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people. 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). 18) And Melchizedek king of Salem **brought out bread and wine.** (He was priest of God Most High.) 19) And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20) and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

I want you to stop and think about that for a moment. **Verse 18** says, "*And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine.*" Can you think of anyone else who did something very important with bread and wine? People, I'm telling you, all of this is not just coincidental. These clues to the mystery that was to be revealed were to be found everywhere. But of course, even though the prophets themselves, and even the angels longed to look into and to understand what all of these things meant, it really was impossible until God took off the final veil and revealed His Son as the last and only sufficient sacrifice for men's sins. Then and only then would all of those things begin to make sense, and when they are seen, then you begin to see just how amazing this book—the Bible—really is, and even more, God's amazing plan of salvation!

Now there are several things that are very interesting and puzzling about this story involving Melchizedek. First of all, here in the 14th chapter of Genesis is the first and the last time you read about this man. This is his only scene in the entire book of Genesis. Everything you know about Him, you learn in this one passage. You might call him a "mystery" figure, and not just a few Bible students and scholars have thought that in some way he was really the Son of God. I don't think so, but that's a question for another time.

The priesthood of Melchizedek is mentioned again in scripture; once in the book of Psalms, (110:4) and then eight times in the book of Hebrews, mostly in chapter 7. We will get to those passages in just a few moments. At any rate, this was the first priest mentioned in the Bible, and he is described as being both a priest and a king, the king of Salem, which means peace,

and which later becomes Jerusalem, which means the city of peace, or the city of the God of peace.

Interestingly, as the story of Abraham's descendants continues—which incidentally is an amazing story in itself. That Abraham would have any descendants is absolutely incredible. Do you remember how old he was when he was finally given a son? He was a hundred years old! And the wife that would give birth to that child, Sarah, she was ninety years old! Was there another situation in which a woman would give birth to a son when it was impossible—from a physical standpoint—to do so? Think of a young Jewish virgin named Mary.

At any rate, as the story of Abraham's descendants continued, they would eventually develop into the Jewish people and the Jewish nation, called Israelites. God would enter into a covenant with them, giving them a set of laws by which they were to live, and also giving them a way to worship Him. That way involved a group of people from the tribe of Levi, who would serve the nation as priests; as the people who would offer the sacrifices and conduct the various rituals required by the law. These were the people who stand between the Israelites and their God. Their job was to teach the people the Law and the will of God. Unfortunately, in far too many instances, the Levites failed to appreciate the special role God had given them, and by the time of Christ, many of them had become corrupt and self-serving.

One of these priests, theoretically in the lineage of Aaron was to be appointed to serve as the high priest. This person had a number of responsibilities, including as we learned last week, the offering of the atonement sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

Well, curiously enough, as the Hebrew writer made clear, in the passage I read at the beginning of the lesson, Christ was appointed as a high priest, but He was not of the tribe of Levi. In **chapter 7 of Hebrews, verse 14**, the writer makes this assertion: *“For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.”*

Undoubtedly, many of the Jews, especially among those who resisted the gospel, were skeptical about the claims made concerning Christ. How could he be a high priest when he wasn't even a descendant from the right tribe? Incidentally, do you see the Hebrew writer's inspired argument from silence there? He said, Moses didn't say anything about people from the tribe of Judah being priests. And that's true. Judah was the tribe from which kings were to come, not priests. Well, did the fact that Moses spoke only about priests from the tribe of Levites mean that people from other tribes were not eligible to serve as priests? Absolutely! We read at the beginning from **5:4**, which says, *“And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.”* The argument from silence means only that which is specified or called for by God's Word is authorized.

Well then, how could Christ be a high priest? That's what the Hebrew writer was attempting to explain. Now, stay with me! **Hebrews 5:5...**

“...Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, (now quoting from Psalm 2:7), “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; as he says also in another place (now quoting from Psalm 110:4) “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

Let’s think a little more about this Melchizedek. Turn to **chapter 7 (Hebrews)**, and let’s read together, **verses 1-3**:

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2) and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. 3) 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.

I suspect it is on the basis of these words, that many people get the idea, or begin to imagine that Melchizedek was really Christ in an earlier, incarnate form. The idea that he was “*without father or mother, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life.*” Well, it could mean that, but my own take on it is that it says these things because everything we know about Melchizedek, we know from those few verses back in Genesis 14. We don’t know who his father or mother were. We don’t have his genealogy anywhere. We don’t know anything about his birth or his death. So, he is like the Son of God. The Hebrew writer did not come out and say that he was the Son of God, but rather that like the Son of God, Melchizedek’s priesthood was one that was ongoing; continuing down to this very day through the work of who?

Through Christ, of course! That’s the point the Hebrew writer was making. Going on down in **chapter 7, to verse 23 [thru verse 28]**, the writer goes on to say:

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, 24) but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 25) Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. 26) For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. 27) He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. 28) For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

I want to go back now to the **5th chapter of Hebrews** where we began the lesson this morning. But I want you to read with me beginning in **verse 11**. After saying again that Christ had been designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, the writer goes on to say:

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13) for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14) But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

If you are like me, that passage is kind of like a slap in the face! I am one of those for whom much of this has been really hard for me to understand, let alone explain to others. And I don't think he is just talking about the mystery of Melchizedek, but He is talking about the whole mystery of God. He is saying, this is not milk. This is meat. Milk is for babies. Meat is for people who are mature.

We see that, and we say, "*Yeh! Give me some more milk!*" But we don't grow stronger on milk. That's why it is so important that we really try to understand what God was doing and what He was telling us. Then, when we see that, when we nourish our faith, not just on the milk of the word, but on the meat, then we will not be unskilled in the word of righteousness, but our powers of discernment will be trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. We will stop being like children, being "*tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.*" We will "*...grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.*"

Can you see it brethren? Can you hear it? Can you see and hear how all of this keeps bringing us back to one place, and it isn't a place, it is a person, and that is Christ!

Christianity is not about just about going to church. It isn't just a bunch of rules to keep us from having a really good time on earth. Christianity is about what God has done for us through Christ. And what has He done? He has made it possible for us to be forgiven of our sins—and we have so many—and He has made it possible for us to live forever! He has made it possible for us to have a relationship—a true relationship—with the Being who made us, and made everything else too. That's what He has been up to, and through the high priesthood of Christ still going on, He is still up to it!

The question is whether or not we believe this and want to be a part of it, or whether we think it is all just a bunch of make believe and nonsense and we don't want to have any part of it.

That's where I will leave it this morning, but the Lord willing, next Lord's Day we will continue to unravel this great mystery, the mystery of God.

Invitation