

“Blessed Be God Most High”

400 million dollars. That’s the figure that had many Americans quite excited this past Wednesday. Once again, the Multi-State Powerball Lottery jackpot had grown to one of those figures that gains even more attention. And once the numbers were announced Wednesday, it was determined that one winner from South Carolina had indeed won the jackpot. Did you hear about it? Did you let yourself think about what you might do if you won an amount of money that for many of us is absolutely unimaginable? Did you figure out what you would do?

Abram was not playing the lottery, nor am I encouraging anyone to do so. But Abram did rather suddenly come into possession of a significant amount of wealth. The way that he used it teaches and reminds us how we want to use our money, that is, to honor and glorify God. Abram used his wealth to proclaim in actions what Melchizedek the priest said in these words: “Blessed be God Most High.”

Our sermon text, the account of what is perhaps a less-familiar event in Abram’s life, was read earlier this morning. Allow me to provide a little bit of background as we consider what took place. In this account, we hear about several kings, nine in all. On the one hand are Mesopotamian or eastern kings, led by Kedarlaomer. Along with him were three others, four kings altogether. The other group of kings were Canaanite, living in the Promised Land. These five kings included the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. For some time, the five kings had been subjects of the four. They paid tribute to those kings, and in return, the four kings did not destroy the five that they had previously conquered.

Well, after years of paying this expensive tribute, the five kings decided to stop. Predictably, the four eastern kings were upset and set off to teach the Canaanite kings a lesson. The four kings were very successful. They carried off people and goods, including everything that they found in Sodom and Gomorrah. Though some of the people escaped to the hills, some were captured, including Abram’s nephew, Lot. Someone who had escaped was able to make it back to Abram to report what had happened. When Abram heard, he made an alliance of his own. He took the trained men from his household, along with men who were living near him, and set out. He was confident in God’s promises to him. He was bold to act on behalf of his nephew. And God granted him success. Abram divided the men in his force and attacked and routed the four kings and chased them away. And he recovered everything that had been taken, the people, the goods, no doubt a significant amount.

On his return, Abram met with two kings. The first mentioned is the king of Sodom, who owed a great deal of thanks to Abram. But before Scripture reports their interaction, it tells us about Abram’s meeting with the other king, Melchizedek. Melchizedek, who is mentioned in the Bible only here, in a Psalm, and in the book of Hebrews, was also a priest. He had a celebration meal of bread and wine that he brought out, and he proclaimed: **“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.”**

Melchizedek testified to the truth that it was God who provided this great victory for Abram. God had kept his promise to Abram, to care for him and to bless him. And God, in preserving Abram, was furthering his promise to bless the whole world through Abram. Abram recognized this truth, and because he realized how richly God had blessed him, Abram responded by giving an offering to Melchizedek.

We’ll speak more about that offering in a moment. For now, let us acknowledge that we have been richly blessed by God, just as Abram was. The Creator of heaven and earth made us and still preserves us. And he has brought us through a great battle as well. Our battle was not against kings and armies, but against spiritual forces. In fact, the Bible tells us, **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”** (Ephesians 6:12). We battle against Satan and his evil angels. We participate in a battle that has raged since the time Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when they fell into sin. We, too, were taken captive to sin. We were born as sinners, fighting not for God’s way but against it. We were doomed to the losing side of the battle and to eternal punishment because of it.

But God himself stepped in to fight our battle. Jesus, God's own Son, was born into our world and lived among us. He faced the onslaughts of temptation, just as we do. Only he was without sin. He broke and defeated the power of the devil. He sent the forces of evil fleeing before him. He called us to his side and made us his own. And instead of destruction, he has given us eternal life.

And that shapes and affects everything that we do. Our focus today in our worship service is on how we use our money. Our attitude toward money and the way we use it reflect our heart. Either we selfishly desire our own gain, or we use our money to say, "Blessed be God Most High."

Abram did the latter. In his meeting with Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High, Abram took a tenth of everything, the spoils of war that he had every right to keep, and gave them to Melchizedek. He recognized Melchizedek's position as priest, he agreed with the blessing that Melchizedek had pronounced, and he gave an offering as a testimony to his faith.

Now, there are a few things worth considering in regard to this offering. A tenth of everything was a generous portion. It was significant. But it was not required. Melchizedek didn't demand that Abram give him a tenth, Abram gladly and willingly did so. I mention this in large part because some in reading this passage confuse the history of what happened with a command for Christians to tithe. To tithe is to give ten percent, a tenth, of your income to the church. And God did on some Old Testament occasions tell his people to do exactly that, to offer a tenth of what they owned in his service. But Abram's offering was not based on a specific command; it was made freely and willingly.

That is how God invites us to make our offerings as well. We've heard good reports recently around Grace as our offerings have been in line with our ministry expenses to a great degree. But God's people aren't asked to give enough to fund a particular ministry, nor are they asked to give a specifically mandated percentage of their income. They are invited to give generously as a loving response to what God has done for them. Abram's offering revealed something about Abram's heart. Our offerings reveal something about our hearts.

And the rest of this account shows us something about Abram's heart as well. The king of Sodom approached Abram with an offer. Abram could keep all of the goods that he had taken from the battle, but the king wanted his subjects back. Abram was in a position to do with that offer as he chose. After all, he had won the battle. But Abram didn't take the goods. He gave them back. He made sure that the Canaanites who had assisted him got a share. His men had already eaten some of what they took, but the rest was returned to the king. Why? Let's let Abram tell us: **"I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'"** Abram knew without a doubt where his wealth came from. He knew that everything he had came from God, and he wanted others to know that as well. It wouldn't have been wrong of Abram to take the spoils of war, but it could have given an impression to outsiders that Abram didn't want to give. He would trust God, the Creator of all, to provide for him everything that he needed.

Once again, Abram acted in a way that showed his faith. It would have been natural for him to look out for himself, to say that since God had allowed him to win the victory, the goods were his. He could have seen this as an opportunity to get rich quick, but he didn't. Too often we are so focused on money for money's sake that we forget the important truths, like the fact that God is the Creator of all, and the fact that no matter how they reach us, all our possessions come from him. Keeping these things in mind will help us to use our money as God directs us to use it.

When we don't, or when we haven't used our money to God's glory, we look to Jesus for forgiveness. Though he lived on earth with little to his name in the way of money or possessions, he trusted his heavenly Father to care for him. In this as in all things, he did for us what we could not. He lived perfectly where we did not. He suffered and died so that we would not. And he is the reason why we would use all things, including our earthly possessions to proclaim, "Blessed be God Most High."

Sermon Text: Genesis 14:8–24 (NIV84)

<sup>8</sup> Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim <sup>9</sup> against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. <sup>10</sup> Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills. <sup>11</sup> The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. <sup>12</sup> They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.

<sup>13</sup> One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. <sup>14</sup> When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. <sup>15</sup> During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup> He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.

<sup>17</sup> After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

<sup>18</sup> Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, <sup>19</sup> and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. <sup>20</sup> And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

<sup>21</sup> The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."

<sup>22</sup> But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath <sup>23</sup> that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' <sup>24</sup> I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share."