

Cindy Bassett

The Bible Corner



Melchizedek's blessing

The old beggar crouched in the doorway, a figure of desolation. All day long, he had lifted his cup hopefully toward the multitudes of people who had filed past him on their way to the temple. Today marked the annual tithe observance when all good Hebrews gave back a portion of their possessions to the Lord in gratitude for their blessings.

Vast numbers had come from the surrounding towns to bring their grain, wine, oil and flocks in obedience to the law given to Moses by God long ago. But not one of these devout upholders of the law had seen it fitting to bestow even a small measure of kindness on the old beggar who had stood in their paths.

These people had been far too eager to get to the temple and stand before the high priest. In exchange for the people's tithes, the priest would bless them and present their gifts and just sacrifices to the Lord. No one had wanted to be detained by a wretched beggar. The only thing they had offered to fill his cup with was reproach and disgust.

The beggar was loud in his indignation. "Hypocrites!" he had shouted after them. "How can you declare yourselves holy before the high priest when you care nothing for those who suffer? May you receive a curse instead!"

The beggar's laments had little effect on the crowds, except perhaps to drive them further away in their total rejection

of him. Finally, he gave up and huddled near the doorway with his head hung so low that he took no notice of the man suddenly standing before him.

"What is it that you want?" snarled the beggar in answer to the stranger's question.

"Why do you not go with the others to the temple for the annual sacrifice?"

"With what means? the beggar asked.

"Why do you come before me to mock?"

"Even the very poorest man has much to be grateful for," the stranger replied.

The beggar looked up and studied the man who stood before him. He was neither tall nor short. He was neither old nor young. And he looked neither rich nor poor. But there was something about his eyes that seemed to penetrate the beggar's deepest longings.

"The only thing I possess in this miserable world is this cup," snapped the beggar. "And as you can see, it is quite empty."

"It looks very full to me," the stranger challenged.

"You must be mad! It's as empty as a dried up old well," said the beggar thrusting the cup directly into the stranger's face.

The stranger didn't flinch a bit. Instead, he waited calmly to speak until the beggar had withdrawn the cup.

"To my eyes, your cup is nearly overflowing with bitterness. And that is certainly not a suitable tithe to offer the Lord, now, is it?"

The beggar was dumbstruck for a moment. When he recovered, he demanded, "Just who are you anyway? What business is it of yours what my cup is filled with?"

"My name is Melchizedek, and I have come to give you a blessing," he said, smiling kindly.

How can you give me a blessing when I have nothing to give you in return?" the beggar asked.

"Even you possess many things," Melchizedek replied.

"I don't understand," the beggar complained. "I have nothing at all to give you. I had dreams once, but now I am nothing."

"I once knew a man named Abraham who loved and trusted God so much that he was willing to give up his most prized possession. Abraham would have sacrificed his only son, Isaac, in obedience to God."

"I still don't see what any of this has to do with me," the beggar said.

"Perhaps you are too hungry to see things clearly," Melchizedek replied. "Here is some bread."

The beggar grabbed the food, and without a word of thanks, ate it hungrily.

"May the blessing of the supreme God, Creator of heaven and earth, be upon you," Melchizedek said.

The beggar looked up then, and Melchizedek was gone. The beggar was so stunned that he thought that the stranger had not been there at all. Perhaps the hunger had done something to his mind. But then he noticed the half-eaten bread still in his hand.

The beggar hastened to hide the bread inside his torn coat and made his way toward the temple. His eyes scanned the streets for the stranger. After searching for some time, he decided to go into the temple and see if Melchizedek was to be found there.

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Just before he reached the temple gate, he stumbled and looked down to see an old man huddled in a doorway.

"Can't you watch where you're going?" the old man said gruffly.

"Why do you not go to the temple with the others and make your offering?" the beggar asked.

"And what do you suppose I will use for an offering?" he snapped.

The beggar hesitated for brief moment. Then he reached into his coat and brought out the bread. He offered it to the old man, saying, "Even the very poorest man has much to be grateful for."

For discussion:

- 1) What did the beggar have to give back to the Lord?
- 2) What might you offer to God besides material things?

For further reading:

1) Melchizedek was an ancient priest-king who gave Abraham bread, wine and a blessing as he returned home from battle. In turn, Abraham offered him a tithe of the loot in Genesis 14:17-20.

2) In Paul's Letter to the Hebrews, Chapters 5-7, Melchizedek is described as a supernatural figure who has a miraculous origin. His name means "justice." He foreshadows the eternity of Jesus Christ because he was a priest forever.

3) The Lord first instructed Moses about giving tithes, or one-tenth of the produce of the land, back to Him in Leviticus 27:30-33.

4) The story of Jesus criticizing the Pharisees for strictly upholding the letter of the law while failing in their love for others is told in Matthew 23:1-4. Jesus came to offer something better than the law. He promised to save anyone who believed in Him as God.

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