

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: God Most High

Dr. Scott Dudley

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Scripture: Genesis 14:17-20

¹⁷ 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).

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. ²⁰ And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Transcript:

Well, thank you choir, that was wonderful. I want to say hello to all of you. My name is Scott Dudley, I'm the lead pastor here, and just want to welcome you to worship, thank you for joining us this morning, we are so glad that you are here.

The scripture this morning comes from Genesis chapter 14, and it says, "After Abram returned from defeating Chedorlaomer, and the Kings allied with him, the King of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh, that is the Kings Valley. Then Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God most high, and he blessed Abraham saying 'Blessed be Abram, by God most high, creator of heaven and earth, and praise be to God most high who delivered your enemies into your hand.'"

One of the things that always amazes me is how we choose the scripture passages for these sermons weeks and weeks in advance, and often then when we get to the week that, we didn't know what the future would hold, but when we get to that week, it turns out to have been the exact right scripture for that particular week, and this week is an example. All of us were horrified by what we saw at the US Capitol, the riots there. I love this country, and I was heartbroken, I was angry. I had a lot of emotions, I'm sure you all did too, it was terrible. And then listening to Black people in our church and how painful it is for them to see a Confederate flag and nooses inside and outside the Capitol, with all the historical associations

of slavery and violence against black people. And then to see how black protesters in some cities this summer were met with more force than the white people on Wednesday, the whole thing is just painful and horrible and terrible. Difficult week.

But way back in November, we picked the passage that I just read, which refers to God most high, and that is a name that brings us hope and courage and strength, for what we saw on Wednesday as well as for what we face in our own personal lives. So let's pray. Holy spirit, as we come to your word, we ask that you would please help us to see in it what you want us to know. Teach us. We ask this in your name, Jesus, amen.

We're starting a new sermon series on the names of God in the Bible, because names are very significant, especially in biblical times. Back then names weren't just what you called someone, they were thought to reflect your character, your essence, who you were. Names mattered, which is why parents, even today, why parents think carefully about what they named their kids. Back before COVID, I preached a sermon on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and if you've been around churches you always hear those three names together, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and afterwards, a woman told me that she had a friend who had three sons, and she named them Shadrach, Meshach, and Richard. Like, why? Why do Shadrach and Meshach in the first place, but having gone two thirds of the way, why not finish it off? Imagine introducing them, "These are my son's, Shadrach, Meshach, and Richard." It just leaves you hanging there.

Because we have a sense that names matter, they mean something. And there are a lot of different names for God in the Bible, and each one tells us something about his character, who he is, what he cares about, and what he does. And the name used in today's scripture. It gives us some courage and hope. And in Hebrew it's El Elyon, which means God most high. And what that means is what it sounds like, God is greater than everything, greater than false gods we follow of money and politics and sex and popularity, greater than that scary diagnosis or that school problem, work problem, relationship problem. And yes, greater than rioters in the US capital.

And the background for this story is that there's a war between these nine different Kings of various city states, and a King named Chedorlaomer is dominating the region, and he wins and he takes a bunch of people captive. One of whom is a man named Lot, who is the nephew of a man named Abram, who in a couple of chapters later, God's going to change his name to Abraham, which means father of many, because he's going to be the founder of the nation of Israel. So Abram rounds up 318 men to go fight against Chedorlaomer and get Lot back, and Abram wins. And when he does, this is where our scripture picks up, when he does a King named Melchizedek, who wasn't part of the war, comes out to meet him. And the text says, "Melchizedek was a priest of God most high, and he blessed Abram saying, 'Blessed be Abraham by God most high, creator of the heaven and earth, and praise be to God most high who delivered your enemies into your hand.'"

And the name of God most high is said three times and just two verses, and this name gives us hope and courage for what we face in our nation and in our personal lives, in a couple of ways. First, as Dr. Tony Evans says, the name God most high reminds us that there is a difference between source and resource. And if we confuse source and resource, our lives get filled with anxiety, anger, broken relationships, and our culture starts to fall apart, because we have placed our ultimate hope in the wrong thing.

Melchizedek said, "Blessed be Abram by God most high, creator of heaven and earth." That is a source resource statement. God is the creator of everything, he's the source of everything. Everything else has just resource, everything else has just created stuff. And by definition resource, created stuff, is less powerful than the creator. And if we look to a resource to be our source of security, we get all screwed up.

For instance, money isn't the source of our security, it's a resource. The source is God. Everything we have comes from God. He gives us our ability to earn a living and even helps us in our career. But if you think money is the source of your security, you're going to be worried, stressed out, because you think it's the source instead of God being the source of your security. Grades are not the source of your future, God is. Grades are just a resource. There's no president or Congress that is the ultimate source of our hope. God is the source of our hope. And if you think that unless the right person wins an election, then all hope is lost, you have confused source and resource in a really destructive way, as though God can only work for good if the right people get elected, I'm sorry, my God is not nearly that small.

Yes, elections are important, money is important, good health is important, those are good things, but they are not ultimate things, because only God most high, who comes to us in Jesus, has the power to bring creation out of nothing, to bring good out of bad. Only the God most high can do that. When Melchizedek says to Abram, "Praise be to God most high who delivered your enemies into your hand," he's making very clear who won the battle, and it wasn't Abram. Abram was involved, abram was a resource that God used to win the battle, but the battle belonged to God. And when we understand that we have more hope and more courage, because God is the source of everything, which means he can find another resource to use if our resources dry up.

Again, Dr. Tony Evans uses the example of being stuck on a freeway in traffic, which happens all the time. And I've lived here so long that if I'm stuck, I can usually think of how to use side streets to get around the blockage on the freeway and move ahead. In other words, the freeway isn't my only resource, I have other resources. God is the source of every resource, which means when one of your resources dries up, he has other ways to get you where he's taking you. You lose your job, that's a resource. God is the source of many more. Feeling rejected by someone, that's a resource. God has multiple options to get you to where he's taking you.

Now, we have to play a part. We do play a role, right? We don't ignore what happened on Wednesday and say, "Well, I guess God's going to fix it, because he's the source, after all." No, that's not it. I do believe God wants to bring healing and reconciliation, and I believe we're one of the resources he wants to use to do that. But if we think we're the source, not the resource, we're going to try to do that in our own way, and it's going to be destructive. If we think we're the source, not the resource, that creates all kinds of stress and anxiety. "If it's going to be, it's up to me, because I'm the source, and if I don't do it, then it's not going to happen." That's a lot of pressure.

As I was finishing my PhD, I applied for a professor job at Baylor University that was actually pretty much tailor made for me, in fact, they were very interested in me. So I sent them a bunch of my stuff, some of which though could only be sent by Stanford University, my transcript, my student evaluations, stuff like that. So I filled out the right form and ask them to

send all that stuff to Baylor, and I didn't hear back from them, Baylor, so I thought that was odd, because they were interested. So I called and they said, "Oh, well we never got your transcript and we never got your student evaluations, so we just figured you weren't interested and hired someone else." What?

So I went to the Stanford office and they said, "Ooh, sorry, we didn't send them. I guess we screwed up." Yeah, you did, you screwed up my life. Oh, I was so mad. And hiring of professors is an annual thing, so I had to wait another nine months before all the jobs opened up again and I could try again. And in those nine months, the church I attended asked me to step in to be interim for one year, interim college pastor until the hiring cycle came around again, and then I could start all over. What harm, I thought, what harm could that do? One year, one tiny little year, 24 years ago, and here I am still in ministry, and glad of it, because this is what I was supposed to do. Besides, otherwise I might still be in Waco, Texas. My resource dried up, the Baylor job. But my source didn't, God didn't. God had other resources. God had other ways to get me where he was taking me. He will make a way where there seems to be no way, he is the source.

Which brings me to the second encouraging truth about God most high, and that is it puts the chaos in our lives back in order, because it puts our priorities right. God most high means what it sounds like, there's nothing more important in our lives. He is the highest there is. And when God occupies the highest spot in your life, everything else falls into place. I've used before the analogy of buttoning a button-down shirt. If you get that top button right, everything just falls into place, you can do it in the dark, you don't need to look at it. But if you get that first button wrong, put the top button in the second button hole, or put the second button and the top button hole, well then from then on out, the shirt is going to be a chaotic, jumbled, wrinkled, ugly mess, just like your life, and mine, if we put the wrong thing in the top spot. And you know you've gotten the buttons wrong when you feel worry, fear, excessive anger, rage.

I was talking to a guy this week about a woman, he's single and he's getting to know this woman, and he kind of likes her, but he was getting stressed out because it took her longer to return his texts than he wanted her to, which made him wonder, "Is she into me, does she want me around anymore?" So I gave him the shirt button analogy, and I said, "If you're obsessing because she hasn't texted you back, that's because you've put that text, that person, in the top buttonhole. And so now your life is a wrinkly, chaotic, stressed out mess." When you're worried about finances it's because you put the finance button in the top spot where God belongs. If you put your politics above God most high, you do things like riot in the US Capitol. As I said this summer, riots are not the way of Jesus, obviously. And I love this country, yes, I love this country, but I love Jesus more, because that is the right order for the people of God.

And just to state what I know we all believe, white supremacy and white nationalism is sin. And this matters because the way we actually know that we have put God in the top spot is we obey him, we do what he says to do. The name God most high raises the question, who has ultimate authority in your life? We all like to think we're self-directed people, right? But we're not. Someone or something is forming our worldview, telling us what is right and what is wrong? The news, culture, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok. to put God most high is to give him ultimate authority over how we spend our money, over our sex lives when he says to keep sex inside of marriage, over how we handle our anger, over how we treat each other.

Which brings me to my last point, the good news about the name God most high means that God can overrule every power, problem, and principality in our life, and in our world, because

there's nothing above him. This story that we are looking at it, it's all about power. It's a bunch of Kings, they go to war, it's all about who's in charge, who's boss. And Abram isn't nearly as powerful as any of these Kings. He doesn't command a vast army, he's outnumbered, he's outmanned, he's outgunned, but he goes to rescue his nephew anyway, because he knows that him plus God most high is always a majority.

So what are the kings that are sitting kind of high in your life? Maybe it's a relationship, or a financial problem, or school, or a job problem. Maybe it's a boss that you can't get along with. They may outrank you, they may have more money than you, they may have more social clout than you, they may be higher than you, but they are not higher than God most high. And when we put God most high first, it helps us never to elevate people or problems above their proper place. We are called to respect our boss, our parents, our leaders, our children, but not worship them.

The name God most high calls all of us to do a deep dive into ourselves and say, who are the kings that I'm obeying? Who are the kings that I'm obeying, is it my politics? Is it my lusts? Is it my rage? Who's telling me what's right and what's wrong? Is it the news? Is it social media? All to do a deep dive. Who is our King? Because if our King doesn't require us to honor each other, and see each other as made in the image of God, then we're following the wrong king. When we're worried about grades, finances, social status, career, relationship, don't let those things rule you because God can overrule them, and God can overrule all the problems in our country, because they are no match for God most high. As big as they are, he is bigger still.

And this text points to just how powerful God is. After the battle it says, then Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought out bread and wine. Bread and wine, remind you of anything? Communion, right, where we eat bread and drink juice as a reminder of Jesus' death to pay the penalty for our sins, and then his resurrection from the dead. And the New Testament picks up on this in the New Testament, and it says this about this priest, Melchizedek, "God said to Jesus, you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, and the name Melchizedek means King of righteousness, then also King of Salem means King of peace. Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, just like Jesus, resembling the son of man, he remains a priest forever." In other words, the New Testament says that Melchizedek is a type, a foreshadowing of Jesus, God most high in the flesh who was raised from the dead to show that he can overrule even death.

One of the people I got to know when I was in Athens last year was an Iranian man who used to travel to Cyprus on business. And one day he was there, and he was invited to a Bible study and he went, Christian Bible study, and he went to argue against Christianity, to prove it all wrong. Well at the end of it they gave him a New Testament, and he started to read it later that day, got no further than chapter five of Matthew, where Jesus says to love your enemies. And he thought, "This is not like any God I've heard of in any other religion ever." And he just thought it was revolutionary and filled with so much courageous love. And he thought, if Jesus was just a prophet, then his teachings are superior to everyone else's in every other religion.

Well after that he puts the New Testament in his luggage and forgot about it, but when he got back to Iran, they discovered it and put them in jail for a couple of weeks until he signed a paper saying that he would never have a New Testament again. And then he got out. Well, sometime later he went to Istanbul on business, and he was going to be there for a couple of

months, got invited to another Bible study. So Jesus seemed to be pursuing him. And he said no at first, but eventually he started going all the time. Eventually became convinced that Jesus is God most high in human form, gave his life to Christ, became a follower of Jesus, which is very dangerous for him. In fact, a little while later, he went to a church Christmas party and he noticed there were some men there taking pictures of him, and he could tell by their demeanor that they were the Iranian Secret Police. And so he knew that that New Testament incident, and now the photos meant that he could never go back to Iran.

So he ended up in Athens as a refugee, and he has this huge passion to help other refugees find Jesus. And he started a church that is growing, and lots of Muslim refugees are becoming Christians in that church, coming to Christ. He left his home, his relatives, he left a lucrative career in Iran because he became a follower of Jesus. The cost was very high, but he says it's worth it because he's seen God do miracles constantly. People getting healed, hundreds of Muslim refugees becoming Christians. And he says, "The irony is they made me sign a paper that said I'd never have a new Testament, and now I just give out thousands of them."

So then I asked him what I often ask Christians in other countries. I said, "What would you want me to say to the American Christians in my church?" And he said, "Tell them, don't follow Jesus the way you want to arrange it, just do what Jesus says to do. Don't put your knowledge above God's knowledge, because see, God is most high, not your knowledge. God says in the Bible to love your neighbor and your enemy, do it. God says to care for people in need, do it. God says to forgive, do it. Don't use your own reason over this, don't think you're smarter than God, just do what God says to do. Tell that to your people back in your church." And I know I tell a lot of stories about these refugees, because they are such incredible examples of courage and hope in the middle of the most difficult circumstances because of Jesus.

This man has incredible courage to become a follower of Jesus, give up a lucrative career at the risk of his life. He's not completely safe in Athens, the Iranian Secret Police can find him there, and yet he is filled with hope and joy and courage because he got the top button right. He knows that God most high who comes to us in Jesus is the source of his security and his hope, and no other earthly resource is going to do that for him. And God most high is overruling everything that is coming to harm him, overruling the Iranian Secret Police, overruling his poverty, overruling fear. And if God can do that in his situation, then God can do that in yours, and in mine and in this country.

So here are your training exercises for this week. First, for this week, start all your prayers with God most high. Say God knows time to begin all your prayers this week as a way of getting this name, the meaning of it, deeper into our hearts and minds. And as a way of reminding ourselves that whatever it is we're about to pray for, is not higher than God. Start all your prayers this week with the name God most high. And then second this week, pray God most high, you are the source of all good things, how do you want to use me as a resource to bring healing? Because now's the time for God's people to move into the world and bring healing, and justice, and reconciliation in his name, his way, not our way.

It has been a tough week, and it has been a tough year, but we are not defeated, we are not overcome, we are not helpless, and we do not need to despair because we have placed our hope in Christ alone. And he alone is God most high who can overrule all things. He overruled even death and rose from the grave. I have seen him overrule marriages that I thought it just looked like there was no hope, and he overruled that and brought healing and reconciliation

and restoration. I have seen him overrule hatred and division and bitterness and bring reconciliation in Rwanda, even between perpetrators of the genocide and victims of the genocide. I have seen him overrule health crises, either by healing or giving people a supernatural joy. God most high has the last word over everything.

The battle's not done. God most high has the last word over everything, over that teacher that shamed you, the banker who scares you, the boss who mistreats you, and yes, he can overrule the problems in our country. He overrules every power, vetoes every move the enemy makes, conquers every force that comes against you. He turns every bad thing into good. He outranks every general, president, senator, governor, king. He is the creator of all things, rules all things, can do all things. There is no one above him, no one beside him, no one before him, no one over him. No one controls him, no one owns him, and no one can tell him what to do. He has no rival, he has no equal, there is no power greater, there is no knowledge wiser. No strength is superior to his, there is no one like our God, there is no one like our God, he is God most high.

So God most high, we bring you all of our fears, our worries, our problems. God most high, we bring you our country, divided, angry. God most high we give it to you, and ask that you help us, your people, know how to heal it in your way. God most high, we bring you our victories, because we know you're the author. God most high, we bring you our opportunities, because we know that you have brought them to us. God most high, we bring you our lives, and say do with us what you will. Heal us, transform us. And in the power of Jesus, heal our land. We ask this in your name Jesus, amen.

Discussion Questions: Read Genesis 14

1. What is the point of Abram's victory over the four kings (v. 13-24)?
2. Compare and contrast the King of Sodom and Melchizedek, King of Salem. How are they different or similar? What do we learn from their differences?
3. Abram accepts Melchizedek's blessing then tithes to him -- why?
4. Why does Abram refuse the king of Sodom's offer (v. 21-24)?
5. What does this passage tell us about the meaning of the name God Most High? How do you see the meaning of that name at work in this chapter?