

Identity Wars Study 11 – Opening the Gates of Heaven

Abraham's story Genesis 12:1-3

How is it possible that God would bless all the families of the earth in Abraham?

Genesis 13 – the dividing of the land; Genesis 14 – Lot gets caught up in war, Abraham mounts a rescue mission. The slaughter at Chedorloamer.

How were all these kings and their people blessed as a result of the slaughter by Abraham?

- How do you think Abraham felt after leading his men against his neighbours and slaughtering them?

Gen 15:1 Why did Jesus come to Abraham and say, 'Fear not ...'

Gen 15:2-7 Abraham questioned the legitimacy of God's promise to bless all nations in him because he didn't have a son to carry on his name.

- God assured him he will have a son one day.

Eventually, after failed attempts to help God, the promised son is born. Gen 21:1-5

- Age: Abraham – 100 and Sarah – 90. How do you think Abraham feels now?
- Gen 22:1, 2 God asks Abraham to offer up his son for a burnt offering.

It had been 25 years of waiting from the original promise by God to his arrival, and now when Isaac is 20 years old, God asked Abraham to give him up. It just doesn't make sense.

- Can you remember the first time you held your child ... first steps, first words, teaching him/her the practical duties of life around the home and out in the fields.
- How do you think Abraham's love was developing for his precious son, Isaac?

Abraham had always obeyed God's voice – even if, at times, he got it wrong, he did try to do what God wanted. But now, what a request: to offer up his son? No explanation. No reason given. Just the command.

- What would Abraham do? Imagine the struggle, the emotion, the pain of the thought.

They go to the place in the land of Moriah. Isaac questions his father, we've got the fire and the wood, but where's the lamb?

- Good question. God will provide himself a lamb! Perhaps the most profound piece of wisdom found in the Bible. The implications of that statement were and still are immense.

With shaking hands he binds his son, who doesn't resist. He takes the knife in his hand, raises it above his head and then, a voice calls out from heaven, echoing through the land:

"Abraham! Lay not your hand upon the lad ..." Gen 22:12

The thought that a man would sacrifice a child for his god is unimaginable. But thousands of men have done just that, down through time. The scene beggars belief. Whether blood or fire sacrifices, heathen nations have performed these deeds for Millenia.

- But the God of Abraham says, "No! I will provide a lamb."

To correctly understand the horror and sacrifice of Jesus,
we need to glimpse the depth of the relationship between the Father and the Son.

Their relationship is the foundation of the kingdom of God.

- All other relationships find their fulfillment or failure in their conformity to or rejection of that Divine Pattern.
- Their love for each other is the pattern and revelation of life itself.
- Their separation, caused by the death of Jesus on the cross, will not be comprehended nor appreciated unless viewed through the lens of the Father-Son relationship.

John 3:16 means nothing unless it means what it says.

When we understand the pain of a severed relationship, then we will understand the true value of reconciliation. The love and mercy, and abundance of forgiveness attached to the saving of our lives, is a science we will look into for eternity.

Rejected and yet desperate to be reconciled, it took the severing of the longest relationship ever known, when Christ died and was placed in a grave for three days, to bind our hearts back with God's heart.

- Only when God is seen as a non-retaliating, non-vengeful Father, can our hearts be truly won back to him without the potential that we might be serving Him through fear of retribution and death at His hands.
- The wrong motive removed from our thinking, we can then love Him, serve Him, and worship Him with a clear conscience.

Have you ever been separated from a family member longer than you wanted, or have they told you they didn't want to see you any more? What pain this evokes in our hearts?

- Imagine the pain in the heart of God because of our rejection of Him.
- Imagine also the pain of watching His Son rejected, abused, and crucified by those He loved, and yet not stepping in and stopping the suffering, because doing so would cause the loss of the very ones He was trying to save.
- This should give us an appreciation of God's love for us.

Would the fact that Jesus would rise again soften the pain of enduring the rejection, the beating, and the crucifixion? Would His future resurrection ease the pain in the Father's heart for His Son while going through all that?

Remember Jesus' words while on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

- Were these the words of an actor, a role player? Were these words the cry of a broken heart or just a performance? Why was Christ forsaken by His Father? Or was He?

Jesus had experienced rejection since He the beginning of His work, but His Father had always been there for Him (never felt fully forsaken). But now, He is totally given over to the human race without His Father's comfort, and all the pain and hatred directed toward Him from a fallen race confronts Him. *You are a failure and it is all Your fault*, Satan and His demons assault Him through men, echoing the words of Adam who said "the woman who YOU MADE, she gave me the forbidden fruit..." *You failed in your creation, You failed in Your redemption, and Your Father*

has forsaken You. All these people will die because you failed. It was this that caused Christ to sweat blood in Gethsemane, leading to His cross. (Luke 22:53)

- Christ was cut off from His Father by taking on the mind of sin and sees all its evil implications and consequences: the immorality, pain, suffering in this world – without anyone to sympathize with Him.
- He is tempted to the uttermost in a manner similar to Job by his wife: “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” (Job 2:9)

He took on our guilt, showing us its fruit, that we might recognize it and take on His innocence. Our doubts were laid on Him so we might receive His faith. What does that mean? He took on our death so we might take on His life. His feelings, manifested in those excruciating words, were exactly how He felt when loaded down with all our burdens of guilt. He cried out as one of us.

- But hallelujah! His faith and knowledge of His Father lifted Him above the feelings of rejection, and He ultimately died in faith and hope, knowing His Father’s will would prevail in the end.
- This faith and hope He offers to us in place of our doubt and mistrust. Glory to God.

His belief in His Father’s mercy and forgiveness allowed Him to take on all our guilt and present it before the Father in Himself. In Christ we are forgiven.

- In Christ we are set free from our own doubts. Alleluia!

When Abraham was told to cease the act of offering up his son, God was demonstrating the fact that forgiveness did not require a sacrifice. God provided the ram for Abraham because Abraham believed this was the only way to be forgiven.

- Sadly, he was expressing the heathen view of God, practiced by those trying to appease gods who will not forgive without the shedding of blood.
- *Christ’s dying on the cross was not God’s plan to appease Himself.* This makes no sense at all. Christ’s death was to demonstrate our unforgiving human nature and hatred for God’s will and ways, and God’s willingness to allow His Son to suffer, at our hands, and yet still offer us forgiveness. This is the gospel.

The cry, ‘My God, my God ...’ came, not because Jesus faith in His Father had run dry; it was because the utter darkness of our sin and doubt, pressing upon His soul, hung like a thick storm cloud over Him.

- It was this that stopped Jesus from knowing His Father was actually close by, hidden in the darkness. Psalm 18:11.
- God was actually close by throughout all of this agony of the cross. What parent would stay away from His child in such an hour of need?

Just as we thought God wanted Abraham to kill his son, so too we think it was God’s plan that Jesus died for our sin.

- No, it wasn’t God’s plan but a human plan, born in the mind of Satan, and adopted by us, that demanded death as a payment for sins and a bartering price for forgiveness. This is not so! Psalm 40:6

Separation from His children is not God's way. The death of His children is not something He demands because of their sins. *Sin pays its own wages*. It causes separation, and separation from the source of life is death, just as not drinking water causes death.

- Separation is hell: and both Jesus and His Father went to hell that day when Their everlasting relationship was broken. Their willingness to go through that experience should inspire us with courage to hold on to Their love.

Only our choice to refuse God's forgiveness will bring on our eternal separation from our Heavenly Father (Acts 13:46) At the resurrection of the saints, on that great day when Jesus returns in all His glory, these words shall be pronounced, as they rise from their graves, "Death, where is your sting, and grave, where is your victory?" 1 Cor 15:55.

- Our fear of death has led to the death of so many others, at our hands, down through the years. Wars between nations, fights between gangs, quarrels between families, disputes between husbands and wives, and arguments between individuals, have all been the result of a sense of insecurity.
- Someone else must pay when I feel like I'm in trouble. Someone else must pay when my life's on the line. Someone must pay before I will forgive, because I have been hurt. Someone else, it must be someone else!

Christ holds on in faith to His Father. He declares, "Father forgive them..."

Vengeance, separation, and death can never bring about healing. They are never the gate to a better, more fulfilling relationship. That is why they cannot be God's way of resolving the sin problem. Fire only creates more fire. Hatred and bitterness only create more hatred and bitterness.

- Christ's words on the cross clearly show the source of true healing lies in an eternal principle of love, which reaches out to His enemies with mercy and forgiveness.

This is the gate to heaven which was opened on that pivotal day at Calvary 2000 years ago.

Like to Abraham, the Lord cries out to us in desperation, "Put down your knife. Do not lay your hand on another person. And beloved, take not your own life. Rest in my love. Rest in my mercy and forgiveness, and you will find peace in your souls. Then you will discover the gate to heaven was always open, simply through repentance and forgiveness."

The weeping and gnashing of teeth the Bible talks about is the expression of those who find out too late that their sense of justice is not how God operates, and that they have missed out on eternity because of their failure to take hold of God's gift of mercy.

- They hold on to the belief that stern justice is what others deserve, and because we are the same (Rom 2:1), we take our seat on the judgment throne instead of letting God heal.
- As they judge, so they are judged. Matt 7:1 God gives them precisely what they believe is just.