

Genesis 4: An Acceptable Sacrifice

By Spencer and Mya Schulz

Introduction

Though this scripture portrayed a sibling relationship, the bigger focus was on the two brothers and their relationship with God. What we ultimately find in this scripture is that Abel had a reverent heart for God which showed in the way he followed God's commands. How we view God, greatly impacts how we respond to His commands. Through this quiet time, we will dig into the importance of our heart's posture when responding to God's commands, and the kind of sacrifice that He truly desires.

Scripture

Read Genesis 4 in its entirety. Then focus on verses 3-10.

Explanation

Verses 4b-5a say that God looked with favor on Abel's offering, but with Cain and his offering, he did not look with favor. In verse 7a, God said to Cain, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"

These scriptures were reiterated in Hebrews 11:4, clarifying that Cain and Abel both knew what God expected from them. Abel responded by doing *exactly* what God said and Cain didn't. It was very likely that Cain did partially what God said, but it wasn't exactly what he said. As stated in Psalm 40, 1 Samuel 15:22, and other places throughout the Bible, it is not the sacrifices and offerings that God desires, it is our whole hearts -- our full trust and obedience. He wanted us to sacrifice our will for his.

Cain's response to God's initial asks, as well as his response after being confronted with his disobedience, was such a mirror of our human hearts. Like him, we are prone to obey God only partially, and then, we become upset when God finds out. We then immediately place the blame on someone else and misplace our anger. Truth be told, our sinful hearts are naturally disposed to be more like Cain's than Abel's.

Illustration

I have observed this Cain-like heart so often at work in schools and in sports settings. Kids who tried their best all the time, did what the coach asked, and behaved themselves in class were often looked down upon. They were made fun of and called a "teacher's pet" or a "try hard" for their efforts. In our fallen state, we tend to get angry at someone who did it exactly right and didn't cut corners, rather than be mad at ourselves and admit our wrongdoings.

Reference Scriptures

- Hebrews 11:4
- Romans 12:1
- Luke 9:23-24
- Psalm 40:4-8
- 1 Samuel 15:22
- James 4:17

Application to Jesus

Jesus was the perfect example of fully giving his heart to the Father's will. We see Jesus' example throughout his life and in the grandest fashion in Luke 22:42. Jesus was the ultimate and final sacrifice. Thanks to Him -- the spotless Lamb who was slain for all our sins -- we no longer need to bring a sacrifice to the temple because our sins have been washed by his blood. The proper response to the cross is a life of discipleship to Jesus (Luke 9:23-24), denying ourselves and carrying our crosses daily; losing our lives in order to save our true lives with God. The Bible calls us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices in response to God's mercy (Romans 12:1).

Questions

- In what ways am I just *sort* of obedient to God?

- What does God say in his word about a disobedient heart posture? (List scripture)
- How can I be a better steward of what God has given me?
- What does it look like to be a living sacrifice for God?

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for what you humbly did on the cross for me. Please reveal to me ways in which my pride gets in the way of being fully obedient to you and your word. Give me the courage to follow your commands wholeheartedly. Most importantly, help me to live in response to the cross, and please show me one way that I can be more of a living sacrifice for you. Amen.

Genesis 9: God's Covenant with Us

By Kalban Singh

Introduction

Genesis 9 conveys God's covenant to mankind. The flood had previously destroyed every living being and creature that was not in the ark. This covenant is often referred to as the Noahic covenant. This covenant is unconditional. God uses the rainbow as a reminder of the covenant.

Scripture

Read Chapter 9: 1- 17. Verses 8 thru 11 spells out the covenant.

Explanation:

God's covenant is that He will never again destroy the earth and all living creatures by a flood.

In a covenant, contract, or agreement there are generally two or more parties involved. All parties involved have a stake or "skin" in the game". Here we see God making an agreement and nothing is required from Noah or his descendants. This is a demonstration of God's unconditional Love, Grace, and Mercy towards mankind. God is not asking much from us, but He's bestowing us with an abundance of blessings. This is the caring nature of God.

Recently I was involved in a business contract. Both parties had stakes in the contract, which resulted in negotiations. Both parties were going back and forth to gain as much as possible.

God's agreement with Noah and his descendants was unilateral; God had all the stakes and he asked nothing of us. Twice in this passage God mentioned that the rainbow will be a reminder to **Him** of this covenant.

V15 - **I will** remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. V16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, **I will** see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

God not only made this covenant, but He followed through using the rainbow as a reminder.

Illustration:

Over the years, I have made plans with people. I have said: "Let's get together sometime" or "we should get together" or "lets hang out sometime". Generally, when I do this, it rarely happens. I have come to realize that I need to follow up with the commitment. I need to be reminded about what I have said to people.

If I want to emulate God's character, I need to fulfill the commitments I make with people. Not merely saying it; but following up with it. I need to make sure it happens.

It is convicting that God uses the rainbow as a reminder. God is all knowing yet there is a mention of reminder. Unless there is a reminder for me to follow up with a commitment, that plan generally falls thru the cracks and nothing happens. Unless I have it on my calendar, my commitment never happens.

Application to Jesus:

God, over time, made another covenant with mankind, when Jesus broke bread and ate with his disciples.

Matt 26:26-29

Here again the covenant is unconditional where the fulfillment of the covenant will be with Jesus giving up his body and shedding his blood so we can be redeemed and have eternal life.

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." ²⁷Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you." ²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Application to life

Our God is a full of Love, Grace, and Mercy. He wants mankind to prosper and have eternity. This is evident in the Noahic covenant and the New covenant. Both these covenants have a symbolic element attached, the rainbow and the cross respectively.

Challenge

Take a few moments daily, away from the busyness of our life, to reflect on what God has and continues doing for us. We need to appreciate and adore our magnificent God.

Pray

Thank you, Lord, for your unconditional covenants. You have blessed us abundantly and have shown us Love, Grace and Mercy. You gave everything to us and want us to spend eternity with you in Heaven.

Genesis 12: The Call of Abram

By Laura Doherty

Introduction

"As we read about Abram's call, it is important to note that God initiates the relationship with Abram. "

(Quote from Oak Point Church)

Scripture

Read all of Genesis 12, then focus on verses 1-7.

Explanation

"The Lord said..." Genesis 12:1

"The Lord appeared..." Genesis 12:7

"Very early in history, we see that God reveals Himself as the God who speaks and the One who reveals Himself to His creation. God desires to have an intimate relationship with each one of us. Abrams's response to God's revelation of Himself was obedience and worship. See verses & 7." (Quotes from Oak Point Church)

"When God calls us, He always requires faith. God's calling for us to move is never the most logical decision, it is the faithful one. It is a decision based on the power of God, the calling of God, and the understanding that this world is not our home, we are just passing through, journeying on our way to our true home in heaven. This week, spend time praying about trusting God's calling into the unknown.

(Quotes from Lehigh Valley Church)

Illustration

Before becoming a disciple of Jesus, I was seeking God in ways familiar to me: visiting different churches, trying to go back to my old religious belief, and looking for answers regarding my failed relationships. Somehow, I knew that the "traditions" I grew up with were falling so short of the biblical truth that God was calling me to. Yet, it was all I had.

One day, while I was standing on bus duty for work, I thought about a co-worker who had been reaching out to me for years. She was a disciple of Jesus! As she was driving to work that same day, she was praying to have the opportunity to open the Scriptures with someone. Sure enough, when she got out of her car, I walked up to her and said "Marie, I think it's time that I start studying the Bible."

I realized that I had never really given Jesus a chance. When I did, He showed up, and He turned my world around.

What is your earliest recollection of God's revelation of Himself to you?

Name a time when God has called you to take a radical call of faith.

Application to Jesus

"It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going." Hebrews 11:8-16

Application to our lives

Moving here to Kalamazoo was an exercise of trusting God with the details of my life. Prior to my decision, I had accepted an early retirement incentive from my job. The next steps of my journey were in God's hands as I asked, "How can I serve and glorify you, Lord?"

God made things clear when I watched Jaren, Bianca, and Jordan share their mission call during a worship service. God was calling me to Kalamazoo. His answer came a little less than one month before I retired. Praise God for revealing His will for my life!

Challenge

Share a time in the past month when God was calling you to trust him.

Listen to Jeremy Camp's "Walk by Faith."

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for revealing yourself to Abram. Please continue to reveal yourself to all of us each and every day. Please help us to have faith and trust in your Son whom you sent to this earth.

Genesis 13: Abram brings his shame before God

By Alec and Grace Krause

Introduction

This chapter displays Abram's repentance from his sin (Genesis 12:10-20) and God's gracious character to those who return to Him. In Bethel, Abram recommits himself to God after sinning greatly against God and against his wife. This helps him to overcome his shame and disappointment and allows him to act faithfully, even when faced with the consequences of his sin.

Main Scripture

Chapter 13 (pay close attention to verses 1-4)

Explanation

Bethel was a special place for Abram. It was where he built an altar to God. After Egypt, his journey back to the altar indicated that he was aware of his sin and was recommitting himself to God. His repentance was evident in his faithful response to the conflict between his men and Lot's men.

In this story, we see a man, who, not only recognized that he had sinned but also accepted that there were consequences to his sin. Abram gained great wealth through deception in Egypt, and it came with a cost-- strife within his family. The land that Abram and Lot had chosen to settle in did not have enough resources to support them both. They needed to part ways.

Abram responded faithfully. Instead of securing his future by choosing the well-watered land, He selflessly conceded that choice to his nephew, Lot. He had faith that God would take care of him in the present AND would also provide for his future by giving him an heir, his own son. Lot, his nephew, was his only legal heir at that time.

God's gracious and faithful character also shone through in this story. While he allowed Abram to experience the consequence of his sin, he didn't retract his promise to Abram. Instead, He reaffirmed it. Abram knew that God's faithfulness was far superior to the greatness of his sin.

Illustration

"Shame is a deep sense that you are unacceptable because of something you did."

- Edward T. Welch (Shame Interrupted)

As professing followers of God, when we act in ungodly or sinful ways, our instinct is to feel shame.

As a young Christian, I (Alec), felt untouchable and unstoppable. As I grew up, I became aware that I was not as close to Christlikeness as I wanted to be. The older I got, the more I realized that I was far from being like Jesus—not even close! Pretty soon, shame, left unchecked, even affected how I approached God in prayer, with fear and anxiety, instead of confidence.

Shame could creep in anywhere and has a sinister way of crippling our relationship with God and others. We could feel shame in losing our temper on our spouses or children, failing to reach out to the grocery store clerk, missing quiet times, having impure motives, etc. When we get bogged down by shame, let's remember how Abram went back to the basics. In Abram's case, he went back to Bethel and recommitted himself to God. In our case, oftentimes, it's as simple as an honest prayer to God and a refreshing openness to our brothers and sisters.

Application to Jesus

We can approach God's throne of grace with confidence in prayer (Hebrews 4:15-16). Even after we've sinned, we need not be ashamed. God tells us that we can surrender our shame to Jesus and He will replace it with mercy and grace.

In John 21, the resurrected Jesus appeared to Peter, who was wallowing in shame after his denial of the Lord. Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to re-affirm his love three times, and then called him once again, saying, "Follow me!" Talk about a second chance! Jesus reinstated Peter's relationship with him because he did not run **away** in shame and humiliation. Instead, he swam (literally!) **toward** Jesus.

Application to our lives

When we let shame rule our lives, we can so easily be discouraged, and become ineffective. When we present our shame to God, He clears our minds and heart, and enables us to act faithfully. Abram was strengthened to trust in God's promise to give him a son, and Peter's confidence in Jesus' ability to use him as an apostle was restored. If we are going to be useful to our powerful God, we need to give our shame over to Him and let Him cleanse us.

Like Abram and Peter, let's not get tired of recommitting ourselves to God even when...no, *especially* when, we know we've fallen short.

Challenge

Pray thru Psalm 51.