

Week 3: CASKET EMPTY Handout

Abraham

Overview: Out of a messy crescendo of a story in Genesis 1-11 a new character arises. It is Abraham. He is a new spark of hope in the Biblical story. He is kind of like a second Adam. We hear the hope of blessing for the world in the opening verses of chapter 12. Abraham becomes a model for the people of God of both the Old and New Testaments.

Timeline: c. 2100-1450 B.C.

Key Verse: Gen 12:2-3

Biblical books: Gen 12-50, Job

Characters: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph

Meditation Points:

God's purpose for His people. Gen 12:2-3

God's blessing to and through His people.

God's blessing to you and through you.

The needs of people that you know of in your circles.

Prayer Prompts:

Pray through Psalm 23

Give thanks for the ways God has blessed you

Give thanks for how he has blessed others through you

Pray that he might open doors for you to bless others

Resources: Videos (Online) www.the-shelter.org/new-view

Video: [Overview: Genesis Ch. 12-50](#) [The Bible Project]

Video: [Covenants](#) [The Bible Project]

Video: [Justice](#) [The Bible Project]

Video: [The Social Justice Tradition](#) [Renovare - 3 of 7]

Response Questions: How has God impressed something from the material on you this week? Has a word been significant? A passage? A thought? A question? A prayer?

The Lord's Prayer says: "Your will be done." How does the Abraham story help us know what God's will is? How might we participate in His "will" in light of the Abraham story?

How does the Abraham story speak to your value as a human?

Week 3 - Optional Further Study:

Watch Video: Overview: Genesis Ch. 12-50 [The Bible Project]

Watch Video: Covenants [The Bible Project]

Watch Video: Justice [The Bible Project]

Watch Video: The Social Justice Tradition [Renovare - 3 of 7]

What catches your attention in these videos?

Texts:

Key passages: Gen 12:1-5, 15:1-6, 17:1-8; Rom 4:22-24, 10:9-10; Gal 3:6-9; Eph 2:8-10; Heb 11:8-22; Rev 7:9-10. Abraham basics: Gen 12-18, 21-22. Isaac's story: Gen 24-26. Jacob's story: Gen 27-36, and Joseph's story: Gen 37-50.

Study Questions

Faith

Read Gen 12:1-4 & Heb 11:8-10

Abe shows faith and goes where he does not know. How have you walked away from your comforts to follow God? What are some comforts that you may need to walk away from in order to follow God more fully? Why do you think Abe does it?

Read Gen 15:1-6; Heb 11:8-12; Rom 4:22-24, 10:9-10

Abe did not deserve, did not earn... He believed... Often the view from the Church or even of the Church has been we all should "be good." When these passages say, instead, that we should "believe!" How have you experienced the difference? If you have not experienced the difference, how might you take a step in faith and "believe?"

Furthermore, many of us who understand that walking with God is all about "believing" rather than about "being good." Yet, there is often an inner voice that condemns us telling us that we are not accepted because we have not "been good enough" or that we need to "do more." How do you relate to this? What can you do to combat those kinds of thoughts?

Faith & Works/Grace & Works

Read Gen 12:2-3 and Eph 2:8-10.

In both of these passages, where does the blessing come from? What must we do to receive the blessing?

In both of these passages, what is the end result of a person having been blessed? What are we supposed to do?

We are saved for good works. Eph 2:10. (Bless the nations. Purpose!)

Think about your own sense of inner affirmation. Deep down, do you rely on your works to be on God's "good side" or do you rely on your faith? What are you looking toward for acceptance or value?

What do you expect of others? Do you "just want them to behave" or do you want them to have a life-giving relationship with God rooted in grace and faith?

With the proper view of "faith" in view. How should we think of works? (Eph 2:10 and "bless the nations"). What can we do to get the horse in front of the cart... What can we do to let our works be a product of an overflowing heart rather than something we "have" to or "should" do.

Here is a difficult but very important question on this theme: How do you explain Paul's view of Abe's obedience in Gal 3:1-14 in contrast to James view of Abe's obedience in James 2:14-26? They both quote Gen 15:6 specifically and seemingly come to different conclusions.

Flesh & Faith

Read Gen 15:1-6

Concerning Abe and his descendants: Notice Abe & Sarah are old Gen 18:11-12 & Rom 4:19. Why should Abe expect that he would ever have children? What is it going to take for this to become a reality?

Consider the reality of Abe "blessing the nations." How could one man actually do this? The reality is that one man cannot. It will take many. It will take a nation, a group, a family, a team. (Gen 12:1-3 & 17:1-8) God confirmed it with a son 26:3-4, 24 and grandson 28:13-15, 35:11-12, 46:3-4. What does it take for one person to influence their family to follow Jesus in this great mission? (Gen 17:9, 18:19; Heb 11:8-22)

Read Gen 16:1-4, 15-16; 17:15-19

Not Ishmael: Our tendency is to turn to natural solutions rather than to God. The promise vs the flesh. Abraham's actions prove he is not a spiritual rock star. He is a mess. God saves and uses people because He wants to, not because they have earned it. He also makes use of very messy people. How can this affect the way you think about yourself? How can this affect the way you think about others?

One of the common problems surrounding the word "faith" is that we define it as some mysterious force within us that makes things happen because we believe that they will happen. I call this "wishful thinking." Biblical faith is simply believing in what God has promised. (Heb 11:11) So, what promises from God are you resting in? What things are you hoping for that are merely "wishful thinking?" How can we trade our "wishful thinking" for the promises of God? (This is not easy and may be a troubling thing to consider. That's okay. He is with you and He loves you.)

Purpose/Blessing

Read Gen 12:1-3

The "nations/families/peoples" will be blessed: Abe and we are designed to be a blessing. This is who we are. Do you think of yourself this way? How can we engage in this work? More specifically, how can you engage in this work?

Some of us in the "evangelical tradition" think of our role as the people who are supposed to "inform" the world about Jesus. Or that we are supposed to "convince" the world of Jesus. I have found that this slight adjustment, to "bless" the world, has been very helpful. Certainly, we need to inform and convince, but what if we started with the attitude of "bless?" How does this thought sit with you?

Read Heb 11:8-22

How does this passage interact with the Abraham story? What does the Lord impress on your heart having read the Abraham story and then this evaluation in Hebrews?

Thoughts

Good behavior: There are two ways we can end up with good behavior. One way is through careful training and coaching. The second way is out of the overflow of our hearts. The first way can be called behaviorism. This is typically how we were taught by parents or some other authority figure from youth. The second way is birthed out of a deep experience of faith through a relationship with God. It is when we respond to God's blessings by overflowing with blessings to others.

Gluttony is considered one of the seven deadly sins. It is usually talked about in reference to the overconsumption of food. Food is fuel to power our bodies so that we can do practical things. It is also to be enjoyed and is not merely for fuel. The problem is when we forget the purpose of food. The same thing can happen with blessings. We can forget that the purpose of "blessing" is that we turn around and bless others. We can develop a selfish attitude and forget that we are involved in a mission. This can be very tricky because it has much to do with the attitude of our hearts. We can quickly turn from being needy, receiving grace, and then hoarding grace. Or we can be so "works" oriented that we constantly feel that we need to do for others and fail to joyfully receive gifts from God and then forget to give him thanks.

Bored? A Massively overwhelming assignment

If you've been bored so far here's an assignment that may be more engaging.

Write a one-page, double spaced paper that addresses faith and works and the mission of God rooted in the Abraham story. It should answer the question, "What has God called you to do in this world and how might you do it?" Send it to Jamie if you would like some feedback.