

outreach

genesis 14.1-2,8-17, 21-24 & 1 corinthians 14.4-8a

This morning we're going to be looking at another important aspect of the Christian life: the activity of outreach. Because what we've found is that a man who is devoted by God is going to be full of God and full of the faith that God supplies and because of that our God is going to want to *use* that man to accomplish seemingly impossible spiritual work, as God sends that man out into the world to impact lives and places and generations. And of course we *want* to be used by God in that way. We want our lives to have the kind of spiritual gravity that we see all over the pages of Scripture, in the book of Acts and elsewhere. But, of course, we understand that this kind of life can't just happen without our involvement or our own participation. We're called to outreach. To reach out into the world and get working for the Kingdom. That's what we're talking about this morning. And we're going to be looking at outreach in the context of Genesis chapter 14, where Abraham rescues Lot and his family and the people of Sodom from captivity.

Bible commentator W.H. Thomas has an interesting quote concerning this passage and topic. He says:

"We generally associate godliness with the passive rather than the active virtues, but...we must not forget the two sides of the Christian life. In Genesis 13 Abraham is seen manifesting the passive virtues of unselfishness, humility and the willingness to yield his rights. In chapter 14, however, there is all the decision and initiative of the brave and fearless man. Courage is as real a Christian virtue as humility."

{ W.H. Thomas *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary* }

The Christian life is not just devotion and worship, but it is also being sent out on mission to do God's work. So, let's get into our chapter. It's Genesis 14 but we're going to skip a couple portions for time's sake and because we're going to look in depth at this section of Scripture pretty soon on Sunday mornings.

Starting in verse 1 we read:

Genesis 14.1-2 - And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations, that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).

Genesis 14.8-17 - And the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out and joined together in battle in the Valley of Siddim against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of nations, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. Now the Valley of Siddim was full of asphalt pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; some fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains. Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way.

They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they were allies with Abram. Now when Abram heard that this brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.

So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the tKing's Valley), after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him.

Genesis 14.21-24 - Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself." But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich' — except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion."

This is a great chapter for understanding not only our place in the world, but also how we are to do ministry. How we're to reach out and do the Lord's work.

The picture we're given here is that of a war zone. All of these kings and these armies were gathering together for battle and all of the people in the region, Lot included, were caught in between. We see people taken captive and carried off.

But then we see the man of God going out on this rescue mission. We see a picture of how we can not only reach out to our struggling brothers in Christ, exemplified by Lot, but also we can outreach to the unbelievers who are also collateral damage in this world, exemplified by the other people who were rescued.

Now, this situation was very serious. A misstep along the way would've been catastrophic not only for the captives, but for Abraham and his men as well who were laying down their own lives for these people. And we have to understand how high the stakes are when we're talking about spiritual, eternal destinies. When we're talking about peoples lives and their struggles and the adversary that we face. The battle before us is one we're called to, one we're equipped for, but one that can be catastrophic if we're not doing what we need to do.

But the good news is that when we look at the Bible, when we look at a chapter like this or other passages which explain or example outreach, we find the secret of God's success is love. God's unique, agape love is the method and the mission that we're to undertake. In the 'love chapter,' 1 Corinthians 13, we see how we do this agape thing. How our lives can be governed by this unique heavenly principle. Best of all, we see that verse 8 says, "Love never fails." So, if

we're loving the Lord and we're following God's plan for this mission He's sending us on, then His strength will be with us, even when the odds or the situations seem impossible.

And in Genesis 14, Abraham embodies what it means to do outreach and he embodies Romans 8.31 which says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" And it's because of the love of God that was within him.

In fact, if you compare Genesis 14 with 1 Corinthians 13 we see exactly how we can be men who can be used for outreach and rescue on behalf of the Lord.

First, we learn in 1 Corinthians 13.4, love is patient. We see that in Abraham. He was living there by the terebinth trees of Mamre. We learned this past Sunday how that location signified that Abraham was rich in communion with God. He undoubtedly knew that there was tension between the empires in Canaan. I'm sure he knew that Lot had placed himself in a position where there would be many enemies and adversaries. But instead of going out and trying to conquer all of those kingdoms, or force people into doing what he thought was better, Abraham waited and worshipped.

On top of that, we learn in verse 14 that he spent time training and arming 318 of his servants. Abraham patiently prepared himself for whatever he may need to do. Even when things were peaceful for him, he dedicated his household to preparation. And because of that preparation, when the moment of emergency arose, he was ready and equipped to be used by God for this incredible mission of mercy.

Love is kind. When the survivor came and told Abraham that Lot had been captured, Abraham didn't respond with, "Good riddance," or, "I told you so." He showed compassion and kindness to his brother, despite the fact that they had previously had some tension. He also displayed kindness in our text by saving people from Sodom who he *didn't* know. He risked his life for strangers and asked nothing in return.

Love does not envy. This war had been started over wealth and possessions. Even when Abraham was in control of that wealth there toward the end of the text, he didn't envy it. He gave it all back. He didn't want to be entangled with it. In fact, we skipped it earlier, but in this chapter he even goes into his own pocket to tithe at one point! He had no envious materialism to speak of. He wasn't spending his life building an empire for himself. He was God-oriented and focused on rescuing people who were perishing.

Love does not boast and is not proud. Abraham does very little speaking in this passage and carries himself with honor and duty and humility. He wasn't looking for accolades or promotion. His activity was altogether selfless, especially considering the fact that he didn't have to make this personal sacrifice at all.

Love does not dishonor others. There's no lecture to Lot. No anger or resentment. Even when Lot moves back to Sodom after this incident, in Abraham there is a care and a compassion for these people who had been caught up in the war of the world. People who were without hope but for this man of God.

And then as we see the other attributes listed in 1 Corinthians, they reinforce what we've already seen. Love is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Then in 1 Corinthians 13.7 we read:

1 Corinthians 13.7-8a (NIV) - [Love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

This is God's plan for our mission in the world. This is God's plan for our outreach and our activity. A moving, compassionate, focused love. A love that protects and brings hope and persists, even when under immense pressure.

Abraham lives this out. And it wasn't a passive thing at all. It was an activity and an action. Abraham reached out to people he didn't know, people who had wronged him, people who didn't deserve his help, and he laid down his own life and his own survival to rescue them.

And that's our example. That's our mission summed up in a few verses. And even though the scenario seemed impossible, the text treats this story as if it was no big deal. Kind of just records it for us like, "here's what Abraham did today."

But this was no small thing. This was something amazing. But it's an example of the kind of spiritual impact God wants you to make in your life and in the lives of the people who are being carried away by this world around you. And if we want to be the man of God that Abraham was, then we need to live the way he lived.

In his personal life, Abraham was daily in communion with God. He prepared himself and his house for the possibility of going out on this kind of mission. He kept himself ready and equipped so that at a moment's notice they could move out. And, when the time came, he lived sacrificially because it was the Godly thing to do. He allowed compassion to influence his decision rather than what would be most convenient or most comfortable or most lucrative for himself. He acted wisely by planning his assault. He met his preparation with planning because his foes were serious. And he persisted until the work was done. Scholars point out that his mission reached as far as 120 miles from home as he pursued those who needed help.

This isn't just a model of how we should do ministry, but it's a model of what our lives are supposed to be like. Because Godliness includes activity. It includes that unique agape love that is always focused on others. Reaching out to them and rescuing them and revealing God to them.

And when all was said and done, Abraham went back to the life he was already leading. Worshiping God. Keeping his house in order. Training his men for the next mission. He didn't maneuver his way to gain something material from the people he was saving. Because the point was the rescue. The point was going out and showing mercy. The point was taking back what the world had carried away. His satisfaction was in the God of heaven, possessor of all things.

Our lives are meant to have the touch of the impossible. Because our God loves to do things that magnify Himself and make the world marvel and He has determined to do them through us. May we be men of devotion, faith and courage toward the God who has been those things for us.