



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Ignite Your Faith: Genesis 12-25 wk. 1

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Message Title: Abram to the Rescue

Release Date: Thursday, 8/01/19

Let me ask you a question, what would you risk to rescue someone you love? And then take that and put it in a spiritual context. Someone from your spiritual family that you care about has gone astray and they lie wounded on the battlefield. What would you risk to go out and rescue them?

That's part of our calling as the people of God. It's to go out into the trenches, out into the battlefield and to find those who have somehow gotten lost in the war and to bring them home. Galatians chapter six verse one Paul reminds us of this. He says, "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourselves lest you too be tempted." It's interesting when Paul wrote that he talked about our responsibility, but he made it very clear with a warning that if you're going to get involved in that kind of ministry, you better be spiritual.

Because if you're going to go out there and rescue the perishing, you need to understand you will be neck deep in a culture of deceit, and if you're not a person of faith, you will find yourself deceived and then we'll have two casualties instead of one. So, Paul says, yes, it is our responsibility and there are those heroes of faith that God has called to go out into the trenches and bring home the wounded. But don't do it unless you believe that God tells the truth and you're going to stand on that to be a person of faith.

If I could take Galatians chapter six verse one and teach the same theology through the telling of a story, it would go like this. Once upon a time there were four kings in the north that had formed this coalition. To the south down in the valley of the Dead Sea, there were five kings including the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and they, they had formed their own coalition. But for years these kings in the south had paid a tax or a tribute to the kings in the north. It's a matter of fact year after year for 12 years, these five kings in the south paid this tribute to these four kings in the north. On the 13th year, they decided we've paid enough, and they just didn't pay. So, on the 14th year, these four kings in the north rallied their armies and they headed south. They were going to get their money.

They went down to the east side of the Sea of Galilee, of the Jordan River, of the Dead Sea, and they conquered one city state after another, basically destroying everything in their path, in route to the real enemy down in the Dead Sea Valley. Well, those five kings rallied their troops, but they were no match for the strength of the kings of the north and they were quickly destroyed. The people were captured. There were some people that fled. As these people fled in the night, they fell into these tar pits. It's in there they perished. The people that were left were rounded up as prisoners of war and the king's rallied them, took all their livestock, took all the plunder and headed back home to the north. Among the captives in that campaign was Lot the nephew of Abram. You remember Lot. The last time we saw him, he had bought into the value system of Egypt and he wanted the things of this world and so we were told that he pitched his tent right outside of Sodom because that now represented his value

system. But somewhere along the way he moved into the city of Sodom and that's where we find him in this story. He was part of the city and he was captured with the others and hauled off.

You know, it's interesting when you think about it Lot made his choice to go down by the city of Sodom and eventually into the city of Sodom because he wanted to be happy, because he wanted what he saw in Egypt, because he believed that would fulfill his life. He had gone for the gusto, but what happened is the same thing that happens to everyone who chooses that path. He was enslaved now because of his choice and he would be hauled back to his home country where he left with uncle Abram so many years before, only now he was a prisoner of war and he would go back a slave for the rest of his life unless someone set him free.

Well, in the meantime, Abram had settled by the Oaks of Mamre, and God had poured out his blessing on Abram year after year after year. As a matter of fact, everything that Lot really wanted Abram was experiencing. His life was full, it was blessed. He was exceedingly wealthy. I mean, God was pouring out his blessing on Abram. But word spread, as a matter of fact, a person from one of those cities had escaped and made his way up to where Abram lived and told him that a member of his family had been captured and hauled off into captivity.

You know, at that point, Abram could have come up with a hundred excuses why it was Lot's fault. And that's just the way it is. Lot made his choice to go that way and to live that way, and that's the consequence. He made his bed. Now. Now let him lie in it. It's not my fault. I mean, he could've come up with all those lines, but he didn't. It was Abram to the rescue.

Abram, by faith, rallied his own people, a little over 300 soldiers. He rallied a few of the allies there and together they put together an army. But it was no match for the kings of the north. As a matter of fact, it was kind of Gideon-like it was his little army against this powerful army from the kings of the north. But Abram believed by faith that God would give him a victory. So, with his little army, he took off to the north.

Now, one can only imagine that the kings of the north basically thought they had nothing to fear. They'd conquered everybody in their way. They were enjoying the spoils of victory. It was nighttime. They apparently had no real defense set up. Abram gets to Dan and he splits his army into two separate armies, and they attack from two different directions. And he routes the kings of the north, he completely defeats them. He took all of the plunder, all of the livestock, all of the people, everything including his nephew Lot, and he took him back home. He took him back to a place called The Valley of the Kings. Abram had experienced the great victory by faith.

Every time we step out and experience these great victories by faith, there's always a great reward. But there's also always a great risk. That reward and that risk was represented by two kings that met Abram in the Valley of the Kings. One was from Salem, which is modern day Jerusalem and one was from the city of Sodom. One represented the godly people and one represented the people of the world. Turn to Genesis chapter 14 verse 17 as we meet these two kings and see what they represent. *"Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer. and the kings who were with him, the King of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh. That is the king's valley and Melchizedek, King of Salem brought out bread and wine. Now he was a priest of God most high."* That's our introduction to the two kings. One is Bera, the King of Sodom, and we'll get to him and just a minute, but the other is a very interesting king by the name of Melchizedek. Melchizedek's name means righteous one, and we're told not only was he

a king, but he was a priest of God Most High. El Elyon in Hebrew. It's a significant title for God that establishes God as the God of the universe, the God that is over every god.

Melchizedek was king over Salem, which would become what we would know as Jerusalem, but at this time it was inhabited by either the Canaanites or the Jebusites. Both would have been a very pagan people. So how this righteous king came to rule over these, these pagan, godless people we don't know. How Melchizedek even knew about the God of Abram and cultivated such a high view of Him and basically worshipped Him, we don't know that. How he even came to fulfill this role of priest. This is before the Levitical priesthood. This is before the priesthood of Aaron; this is before any of that. He just kind of comes out of nowhere and he kind of goes into nowhere. What we do know as a thousand years later in Psalm 110 David referred to Melchizedek the priest and king. We go another thousand years after that in the book of Hebrews and Melchizedek shows up nine times in the book of Hebrews. And we find out that he is a type of Christ. That means he is an Old Testament picture of what Jesus Christ would be as king and priest.

Melchizedek represents, I think, the righteous people of God, that when we step out by faith and we experience a great victory, it offers an opportunity for the people of God to come together and to worship because we have seen the greatness of our God and that's exactly what happens. Verse 19, *"And he [meaning Melchizedek] blessed him and said, blessed be Abram of God most high possessor of heaven and earth."*

Again, a statement of the greatness of God, also the great sovereignty of God. That was the view of God that Melchizedek had. Now, how he cultivated that and how understood that we don't know. But a great statement of worship in Verse 19.

Verse 20, *"And blessed be God most high who has delivered your enemies into your hand and he, meaning Abram, gave him Melchizedek, a 10th of all."* Abram gave Melchizedek back a tithe, the 10% as a way of celebrating Melchizedek's view of God. But when Melchizedek came to Abram, he had it right. He didn't come to worship Abram. He came to worship Abram's God, because it wasn't Abram that ultimately won the victory. It was Abram's God. And he knew that. And that's what he celebrated.

I think what you see in this story is the reality that whenever we as the people of God choose to step out by faith and we go out in the trenches and we trust God to do what we could not do ourselves, and God brings a great victory, it offers us an opportunity to worship the greatness of God. But not just we ourselves, but it offers an opportunity for the people of God to come together and to worship the power and the greatness of God. God longs to display his power. He longs to display his greatness. He just waits for his people to trust him and step out by faith so he can demonstrate who he is. He can demonstrate what he can do so the people of God can rally and can celebrate and can worship that the world might know that he is the all-powerful God. That's our responsibility as the people of God. That's the reward when we step out by faith.

I think that's our responsibility collectively as the church. As a matter of fact, we live in a culture that has a very low view of God. God is a source of humor and mockery and people certainly don't fear God and maybe that's because that's how the people of God have portrayed him. Maybe we need to get back out there on the edge of faith and get out in the trenches and trust God to do what only God could do so that people will be amazed at the greatness of the power of God. That's what Melchizedek represents in this story.

But anytime we do that, there's not only a great reward, there's also a great risk and we better understand the risk if we're going to be out in the trenches. We pick that up in verse 21, *"And the King of Sodom said to Abram, give the people to me and take the goods for yourself. And Abram said to the King of Sodom, I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich. I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share."*

I believe that Bera, the King of Sodom, represents the world in this story. And anytime we experience a great victory by faith, not only do we attract the attention of the people of God as they worship God, we attract the attention of the world. Only the world doesn't come along and worship God. The world comes along and worships us because that's their value system and therein lies the risk.

It's subtle in this story, but what the King of Sodom offered Abram is the wealth of the world. I think that's what he represents. Abram, you can keep everything that you've taken, just give me back the people. And what Abram had a chance for in this story is through the power of God, not only to win this great victory, but to use it for personal gain, to have his cake and eat it too. He could be great not only in the Kingdom of God, but great in the eyes of the world. But Abram had decided ahead of time that he would take nothing from them lest they say they made Abram rich. In other words, what he said to Bera, I don't need your value system. I don't need anything you have to offer me; God will give me everything I need, and I want to make sure that people know that God has given me everything I need. So, he refused. He turned it down.

You know when we step out there on the edge and we trust God and God demonstrates the greatness of his power, it provides an opportunity for the people of God to worship, but it also provides a risk that the world will come along and they'll be impressed by that. Only they won't worship our God. They will worship you. And in a very subtle way, you probably won't have access to material things. They'll just, they'll just mess with your head and they'll start to convince you you're pretty great and all of a sudden you not only are experiencing this great victory in the Kingdom of God, but all of a sudden you can be great in the value system of the world. And there's something alluring about that. There's something attractive about that. And pretty soon it starts to go to our head. And pretty soon we forget that it was God that did it. And we start to think it was the way we did it, and pretty soon we start focusing more on ourselves than on God, and it's just a subtle step, down a dangerous path of destruction.

You need to understand, if you're going to be out there by faith and God's going to demonstrate his power, it's going to attract some attention and you better have your head right. You better have your head right and you better remember it's God that you trust and God that you live, for lest you be lured away by the value system of this world in ever so subtle steps.

You know what we need? We need great heroes of faith that understand that there are people out there lying wounded in the trenches that need somebody to go out and get them to rescue the perishing and to bring them home. And when you do that, God is going to reveal his power in such a way that it will cause you and the people around you to worship God in a new and a fresh way.

Probably every one of us could think of somebody out there that we need to go rescue, but I want to tell you something. If you're not a person of faith, don't do it because instead of one casualty, we'll have two. That job is only a calling for those who are people of faith that can go out there, take the risk by

faith. And when the world comes along and offers it's goods can say, I don't need it, don't want it, and continue to humbly submit to the God of our faith.

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Arnie: Bryan, Lot didn't just fall into this situation.

Bryan: No. You know, the text says he looked towards Sodom, then he pitched his tent towards Sodom and eventually you find out he's living in Sodom. So one step at a time.

Cara: So even though Lot got himself into trouble, Abraham is still called to rescue him.

Bryan: Yeah. So that's exactly right. But stop and think about it. If you were Lot, isn't that what you would want? And that's kind of the grid I think it's helpful to view these things through. That, yeah, we make messes of our lives and get ourselves in trouble. But I would want someone that cared enough to help and be part of the story. I think sometimes the challenge though is what are we supposed to do? So you think about the New Testament, you have the lost sheep. So the shepherd goes out looking, and that's kind of like Abraham, but you also have the father of the prodigal son who waits at home and the son comes back. So both of those take great faith. And I think sometimes that's the challenge. What does rescue mean? And when do I step in and when do I stay out? I think those are difficult questions sometimes.

Cara: Well, I think sometimes too, we get so disappointed in people that we're like, well, forget about you, then go, go sit in it. But I found that if I view people like I view my children, then I'm going to go after them or at least try. Yeah.

Bryan: Yeah. To have a heart to help you and then trust the Holy Spirit.

Arnie: But there are risks we take when we answer God's call to rescue someone and we have to make sure it's God's call and not Satan's call.

Bryan: Yeah, there's lots of risk. There's a risk of trying to figure out when am I helping and when am I enabling, you know, when do I go looking and when do I stay home. But I think there's also a risk of getting pulled into the mud and getting messed up ourselves. That happens all too often. But I think in the Abraham story, one of the big risks is the potential to take credit for what God has done. And I see that in ministry all the time. You trust God, God does something amazing. Then we start taking credit for it. Kind of like the applause, it feels good. And then pretty soon it becomes super Christian to the rescue. And uh, it isn't long until we've got ourselves into a mess.

Cara: I think it's sobering to represent God in the world. And I know I try to do that for my kids, but as we've talked about earlier, it makes me think of how often we portray God is weak or powerless because of our own lack of faith.

Bryan: It is a sobering responsibility. You know, when we're full of fear or when we're full of anger, that's a big problem in our churches today. It's like, well, how does that represent God if we really trust

Him, why are we so fearful? Or why are we so angry? So a real practical way that I've seen this over the years is maybe a Christian goes to college and ends up with a professor that starts to unravel their faith. And what happens is the student goes back home and starts to ask legitimate questions and the parents get all upset and angry and their insecurities start to come out and why are you asking those questions? And then they go talk to the college professor and the college professor is quiet, calm, confident, assured. And that student starts to think, I think my parents don't know what they're talking about. I think the professor's right. And all of that is because of how people are reacting to those questions. And I don't think we stop and think about how that reflects on our view of God.

Bryan: You know, one of the great Old Testament stories is David and Goliath, which is actually the story of David and Saul - and God is illustrating why Saul is out and David will be in. So for 40 days, Goliath basically mocks and makes fun of the God of Israel and no one does anything about it. David's a little shepherd boy. He hears it one time. And basically, what he says is he is so jealous for the glory and reputation of God, he wants to know who's going to stop this giant. And that's what God wants. That's, that was God's point. This is why David will be the new king of Israel. I want someone who's jealous for my glory and my reputation. So it's a big deal to God.

Arnie: So you opened our eyes to the fact that when God acts in a mighty way, it attracts the attention of everyone. And we need to handle that wisely. And that's a hard thing to do.

Bryan: It is. It's so impressive that Abraham understands, if he takes the riches from the King of Sodom, the King of Sodom will say, I made Abraham rich. So Abraham refuses all that because he wants people to know that God is the One that's blessed him. And so it's easy to start taking credit for things that God has done. Somewhere along the way, we kind of start to lose our way and think maybe it's our method, think it's some formula or, we're just super Christian and I think is a challenge. Those of us in leadership roles face when God steps in and does something amazing, how do you respond to that?