

Heart of Avraham

(an adaptation of Beit Avraham, last year's message)

a lesson on Parashah 4, Vayera

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We saw last week that Avraham was called out from Haran to the land of Kena'an. He was not only a gentile, but likely a worshipper, in one form or another, of the Mesopotamian lunar god Sin. He was most likely an educated man, which along with the blessings of God, led to his success after being brought to the land. He may have had a pagan beginning to his life, but after being called by God to a journey of faith, Avraham quickly learned who his God was, and became His servant.

Adonai appeared to him [Yitzchak] that same night and said, "I am the God of Avraham your father. Don't be afraid, because I am with you; I will bless you and increase your descendants for the sake of my servant Avraham." [B'resheet/Genesis 26:24]

Because of Avraham's love and devotion to God, and his obedience to Him in all that God told him to do, God prospered this man by giving him a large household and many possessions. I am being a bit redundant. How so? You see, in that time whenever you talk about a man, you not only talk about the physical man himself, but you talk about everyone in that man's family and everything he possesses. When we read in Scripture of a man traveling from one place to another, we often overlook the fact that chances are that man was not traveling alone. All or part of his household was traveling with him, including his wife or wives, children, servants, cattle, and possessions. He was responsible for all of these people as well as his stuff and their stuff. Conversely, everyone in the household answered to, and lived by the standards and beliefs of their master. This is why if a man sinned, it often affected his entire household. If he succeeded, they enjoyed the prosperity. Now for a passage from last week's parashah. This is God talking to Avraham.

*Here is my covenant, which you are to keep, between me and you, along with your descendants after you: every male among you is to be circumcised. You are to be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; this will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. Generation after generation, every male among you who is eight days old is to be circumcised, including slaves born within your household and those bought from a **foreigner** not descended from you. The slave born in your house and the person bought with your money must be circumcised; thus my covenant will be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. [B'resheet/Genesis 17:10-13]*

I would imagine that a household as large as that of Avraham would have had many servants outside the blood family line from multiple national backgrounds. Here's the thing. Yes, there is a thing. Notice that when Avraham was circumcised, thus taking on the sign of the covenant God made with him, not only was he circumcised and all the males in his

family, but so were all the foreign servants bought into his household. This would mean that the covenant applied just as much to the foreigner as to the blood relative living in the household of Avraham. Thus Avraham would live up to his name as the father of nations, in the plural, not a nation in the singular, referring only to Isra'el. Granted, this does not mean that Isra'el does not have special place amongst all the other nations. The covenant is still made primarily with Avraham and his descendants, but those outside can still become adopted into the covenant by being bought into the household of Avraham.

"For I have made myself known to him, so that he will give orders to his children and to his household after him to keep the way of Adonai and to do what is right and just, so that Adonai may bring about for Avraham what he has promised him." [B' resheet/Genesis 18:19]

What would it have meant to live in the household of Avraham? Firstly, Avraham was a Godly man. He would have expected the same from all those living in his household. Avraham was a man who continually sought to learn more about this God who called him out of a land of paganism and confusion to make him the father of nations. Part of that learning meant testing, as we see with God telling Avraham to sacrifice his promised son Isaac. However, with the testing comes hope in knowing that God is in control and knowing that His promises can be trusted. I see Avraham's house as a busy yet well organized house in order to manage the wealth that he had. We see also that Avraham had military, a well trained one too. So everyone had a job according to the skills each one had. I'm sure even the young ones had their chores. Everyone had a place and everyone supported one another for the well being of the community.

This is something which goes against the way we are taught by our modern American culture, where each person is a master of his or her own destiny. We end up thinking of "numero uno", and so things which serve ourselves and no one else. Think about this for a moment, if you serve yourself, you have one person looking out for you. If you are part of a community in which each person serves everyone else, each person has as many people caring for them as there are people in the community, minus one. This is how the household of Avraham is designed to operate. If we are Believers, we have to see ourselves as being part of this community.

Yeshua, born of the seed of Avraham, has purchased us with His own blood. [1Corinthians 6:20] Therefore, we are not only servants of God, but servants of the household of Avraham. In this way, the Avrahamic Covenant applies to us, who, though Gentile by birth, have, through faith in Yeshua, become part of Beit Avraham. If this sounds a little far fetched for you, take a look at these verses.

"For in union with the Messiah, you are all children of God through this trusting faithfulness; because as many of you as were immersed into the Messiah have clothed yourselves with the Messiah, in whom there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female; for in union with the Messiah Yeshua, you are all one. Also, if you belong to the Messiah, you are seed of Avraham and heirs according to the promise. [Galatians 3:26-29]

So, there were two ways into Avraham's household. Either they were born into it, or they were bought into it. Either way, both were circumcised and the covenant then applied to them both. It is the same today, as those of us, who through faith in Messiah Yeshua, have been bought with His blood and brought into Beit Avraham as servants of God.

A woman from Kena'an who was living there came to him, pleading, "Sir, have pity on me. Son of David! My daughter is cruelly held under the power of demons!" But Yeshua did not say a word to her. Then his talmidim came to him and urged him, "Send her away, because she is following us and keeps pestering us with her crying." He said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Isra'el." But she came, fell at his feet and said, "Sir, help me!" He answered, "It is not right to take the children's food and toss it to their pet dogs. She said, "That is true, sir, but even the dogs eat the leftovers that fall from their master's table." Then Yeshua answered her, "Lady, you are a person of great trust. Let your desire be granted." And her daughter was healed at that very moment. [Mattityahu/Matthew 15:22-28]

In this story, I don't think Yeshua is making an exception to his statement. He came for Israel, not gentiles. However, as we see in Romans 11, a person's faith engrafts them into the vine on Israel. Because of her faith, she was brought into the household of Avraham and was able to eat at the table as a child of God, rather than one of the dogs.

In our parashah this week, we see something else about Avraham worthy of paying attention to. He had a heart for people. When God wanted to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Avraham pleaded with God to try to save the city on account of the few righteous people who lived there. It appears Avraham, Lot, and their families are the last righteous people left, and once they leave, God's judgment rains down. He didn't just ask God to destroy the wicked and spare the righteous, but to spare the who city, both the righteous and the wicked on behalf of the righteous. This shows Avraham's heart for all people, both good and bad. He went on behalf of the people to try to keep them from God's judgment. This is the office of a priest. He stood in the gap to save anyone he could. Though the city was ultimately destroyed, his heart was that of God in that he wished that none be lost.

For, brothers, I want you to understand this truth which God formerly concealed but has now revealed, so that you won't imagine you know more than you actually do. It is that stoniness, to a degree, has come upon Isra'el, until the Gentile world enters in its fullness; and that it is in this way that all Isra'el will be saved. [Romans 11:25-26]

We see that Avraham had the same heart as that of Yeshua. This may be due in part to the fact that Avraham came from a pagan background. However, unlike many who are saved by the grace of God out of the pit of sin and death, Avraham never forgot his roots. His relationship with God never gave him the arrogance of a spoiled prince. He desired mercy for all, just as Yeshua paid the ultimate price for sin, for all who would

live in faith in Him. This same Messiah taught all those who are of Avraham to live as Avraham did, and that in doing so would show Him to be the Messiah.

So Yeshua said to the Judeans who had trusted him, "If you obey what I say, then you are really my talmidim, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered, "We are the seed of Avraham and have never been slaves to anyone; so what do you mean by saying, 'You will be set free'?" Yeshua answered them, "Yes, indeed! I tell you that everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin. Now a slave does not remain with a family forever, but a son does remain with it forever. So if the Son frees you, you will really be free! I know you are the seed of Avraham. Yet you are out to kill me, because what I am saying makes no headway in you. I say what my Father has shown me; you do what your father has told you!" They answered him, "Our father is Avraham." Yeshua replied, "If you are children of Avraham, then do the things Avraham did! As it is, you are out to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Avraham did nothing like that! You are doing the things your father does." "We're not illegitimate children!" they said to him. "We have only one Father – God!" Yeshua replied to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me; because I came out from God; and now I have arrived here. I did not come on my own; he sent me. Why don't you understand what I'm saying? Because you can't bear to listen to my message. You belong to your father, Satan, and you want to carry out your father's desires. From the start he was a murderer, and he has never stood by the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he is speaking in character; because he is a liar – indeed, the inventor of the lie! [Yochanan/John 8:31-44]

Living in the house of Avraham requires having the heart of Avraham. As servants of Avraham, we are also servants of God. As we do what he does, we learn to be more like our Messiah. We can never let our heart grow cold toward those who are not in the family, especially if we are servants bought into the household.

As we study Torah, we find treasures that make our lives better, and help us to draw closer to God. We are not to keep these treasures for ourselves. Avraham may have been the first evangelical in the Bible. Notice his first inclination was to go to God on behalf of those he wished to save. At that point, it was up to God what He wished to do. Avraham was merely God's servant. The fact the God had Avraham and his family leave, and Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed was God's choice. Like Nineveh, God could have sent Avraham back into the city to warn them of the impending disaster. Our first step in evangelism is bringing the person up in prayer and asking for God's mercy on his or her life. What we do from there will be dependent on the person, the situation, and the will of God. This means that effective evangelism depends more on an intimate relationship with God, than any kind of formula or method.

In our outreach, we have to be careful about "saving" people and not having anything to offer them they come to God's table. We can't be so concerned about outreach that we forget about inreach. In fact, if we do inreach properly, others will know us by our love and want what we have. We won't have to be so focused on outreach. Yeshua came for Israel, and likewise, our primary concern ought to be to care for those in the community. As we serve one another, we become a light that attracts those on the outside to the love and grace of our Messiah.

This does not mean that we don't share God's love with the lost. Just as our heart for others comes out of our love for God, our evangelism has to be out of a sincere concern for others. We have to learn to see people the way God sees them, and remember who and what we were without Him. Without God, Avraham would have been a pagan in a land of confusion. Without God where would we be, those of us who know God? I don't know where I'd be, but I don't want to know either. Do we rejoice over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, or mourn over the souls lost that day? If we do not have the heart of Avraham, then do we belong in his household? If we don't belong in Avraham's household, do we belong in Yeshua's Kingdom? I'll let you figure that out for yourself.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, so that you have a sincere love for your brothers, love each other deeply, with all your heart. [1Kefa/1Peter 1:22]

