

Lech Lecha**Go Forth Yourself****What Are You Looking At?**

Torah: Gen. 12:1-17:27

(1) 13:16: ***"I will render your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust of the earth, so also could your posterity be counted"***. There are no limits to the power and to the promises of G-d, even when they were given to a senior citizen whose wife was sterile – and it is still coming true. It wasn't a idea Abram came up with and trusted G-d for, it was a promise he received that he initially had trouble believing. Believing in that which we cannot yet see, in the midst of impossible obstacles is the meaning of faith in the G-d of the supernatural who wants us to believe more in Him and His word than we do in the circumstances and the apparent dead ends which litter our path on our way home to our Father's as-of-yet invisible home in as-of-yet invisible glory.

(2) 14:14: ***"As soon as Abram learned that his brother had been made prisoner, he armed 318 of his bravest servants, born in his house and pursued the kings to Dan."*** He was not a feeble, frail old man with no resources and no resolve. He was capable of doing a lot on his own and G-d blessed both his faith and his obedient courage. He was not afraid to stand up and take action to deal with problems in his life, even the big ones.

(3) 17:1: ***"When Abram was 99 years old, the L-rd appeared to Abram and said to him: I am G-d all Mighty, walk before my face and possess integrity."*** Abram did not have a relationship with G-d which promised him unconditional blessing because of his special position – he had a calling, similar to Noah's which called for him to be a light to the nations around him by walking with the L-rd in both faith and integrity – which is the double edged signal sign of a believer – faith in the supernatural G-d and integrity in how we live our lives in this life.

(4) 17:27: ***"And all the people of his house, born in his house, or acquired by money from a stranger, were circumcised with him."*** Israel has always been a nation composed of the natural born and those became members of the community in their generations and there has never been a distinction where one group is considered superior to the other, because they all have the same calling and walk by the same standard – faith in the promises and obedience to the Word.

Haftarah: Is. 40:27-41:16

(5) 40:31: ***"But those who trust in YHVH renew their strength. They take flight like eagles, they run and do not grow weary, and they walk and do not get tired."*** Our walk with G-d is never a drain on our energy or on our resources, like something we do out of obligation, but which does not empower our lives – it is both a source of inspiration and of strength and renewal which carries us and empowers us.

(6) 41:10: ***"Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not look around all worried, for I am your G-d; I strengthen you, I come to your aid, I uphold you with my triumphant right hand."*** So much can go wrong in this life (and usually does), but as citizens of the life which is to come, we understand that until it is our turn to leave this live, He is with us to see His purposes accomplished in us and we shall always overcome and be delivered by Him until our role in His kingdom has been fulfilled.

Brit Chadashah: Rom. 4:1-25

(7) 4:11: ***"He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of righteousness that he had obtained by faith when he was uncircumcised, in order to be the father of all the uncircumcised who believe, in order that righteousness would also be imputed unto them."*** Abraham is our father, either by faith or by blood. His blood will always be among us and his faith will always call out to us. How are you answering it?

Ps. 110**Jewish Hero: Lot the prophet**

Our passage this week is taken from the Book of Colossians: “***You who were dead in your offenses and by the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made you alive with Him, in forgiving us all our transgressions; He has erased the record which condemned us and which stood against us with its legal demands. He eliminated it, nailing it to the cross.***” (Colossians 2:13, 14)

Before I talk to you this morning about the wonderful, enduring power of the cross, I want to deal with two side issues which relate to this passage. First of all, even though here he is addressing Gentiles, Paul is not saying that the cross does not apply also to Jewish people – he is indeed saying that it also applies to Gentiles, as we saw in today’s Haftarah portion. You do not have to become a Jew for the cross to apply to you and neither do you have to cease being a Jew for this same cross to apply to you. When we believe, we all become children of Abraham’s faith; whether we are children of his flesh or not.

Secondly, the record which stood against us with its legal demands is not the Law of Moses. Paul is referring to the Roman custom of nailing a certificate above the head of a crucified person, outlining their crimes. Our L-rd’s certificate read: Yeshua of Nazareth, King of the Jews. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that He who knew no sin was made sin for us, in order that in Him we might be made the righteousness of G-d in Him. The Law of Moses is the basis upon which the Gospel is built and never stands in opposition to it.

I want to touch on how the power of the cross applies to our lives, both as Jews and as Gentiles, because substitutionary atonement (dying in someone else’s place) is as Jewish as circumcision and our Messiah’s death on the cross (and His subsequent resurrection and ascension) are not foreign ideas imposed on Judaism from the outside.

I want to refer to three key passages which deal with substitutionary atonement.

Gen. 3:15: You shall bruise his heel, but he shall strike your head. (The seed of woman shall be wounded by the serpent, but in the wounding shall defeat him – a foot wound is rarely fatal, but a head wound generally is).

Gen. 22:13. Abraham took the ram and offered it in the place of his son. (G-d gave the ram so that the only son of Abraham would be spared, later He would give His only Son so that we all would be spared – this is very kosher theology)

Is. 53: 5, 6: He was wounded and broken for our iniquities and the L-rd has made all of our iniquities to fall upon Him,

There are other passages which speak about this vicarious atonement (dying in the place of the sinner) – in fact the entire sacrificial system was based on offering a sacrifice for sin, in place of the sinner and so that the blood of the sacrifice would cover and cleanse the offender, for without the shedding of blood, there is not forgiveness (Heb. 9:22).

I would encourage you to study the book of Joshua in light of two passages of Scripture which explain how our Messiah’s death could be applied to us. Gal. 3:13 quotes Deut. 21:23 when it pronounces a curse on anyone who is hung on a tree. Joshua 12:24 mentions that Joshua executed 31 kings during the conquest of Canaan. And after he hung the King of Jericho, he also hung all the kings of the cities he conquered (8:29;10:26; 10:28; 10:39 show how he treated the kings).

The kings were hung to cleanse the land, but their bodies could not stay on the cross over night, or the curse which they absorbed would return to the land. Our L-rd hung on a cross as the King of the Jews and His body was removed from the cross, so that the curse He absorbed would not return to the generations and nations of mankind for whom He died, for the Jew first and also for the Gentile.

This means that He could be a blessing to all nations in that He defeated sin in His body and took this victory to the cross, so that He could be a sinless substitutionary sacrifice for our sins – for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. The entire sacrificial system anticipated this mighty act of atonement and understood that all the sacrifices were only symbols of the reality which was to come.

To misunderstand the Law of Moses would be to believe that the righteousness of the Law is that which saves us or presents us as acceptable to G-d. Instead, we understand that our righteousness is the reaction which G-d wants to the atonement He won for us when His Son died on the cross.

Well how does that apply to us, nearly 2,000 years later? Let us go back and look at what was written on the cross. He was executed as a criminal – condemned by the highest Jewish court and executed by the Roman civil authority, so that the priests (the Jewish people) could offer Him up on behalf of all people and so that Gentiles could never be excluded from His sacrifice, because the Roman civil authority actually carried out the sentence.

But what was His crime? He claimed to be the King, the Messiah of promise – the legal representative of the eternal kingdom of David which G-d promised our people that He would one day establish over all the nations and generations or all mankind.

There was a basic misunderstanding among the many 24 or 72 forms of Judaism competing for the spiritual allegiance of our people in the days of the New Testament. Most contemporary Jewish commentators looked at the 320 odd prophecies which spoke about the advent and the ministry of our Messiah and correctly understood that the ultimate act which would win eternal salvation had to happen in their generation.

What they did not understand was that this act would not immediately usher in the eternal kingdom, but was intended to be carried by the Jewish people to the ends of the earth so that all the scattered nations and generations of Adam and Eve could also participate in the benefits of the eternal salvation which the King was going to win.

There was no clear consensus as to the meaning of the passages where Messiah would die and rise and they had a selective view of Him and His ministry and most were convinced that both aspects of redemption (atonement and the everlasting kingdom) would occur simultaneously during their lifetime.

G-d's purposes are never limited or even slowed down by the misunderstandings of His people or by the unbelief of the world. Our L-rd came, lived, died, resurrected and ascended according to the Scriptures and He will return one day, also according to the Scriptures. In fact He will do all that He promised He would do in the Scriptures, nothing more and nothing less.

So the Sanhedrin thought that they were dealing with just another Messianic pretender and wanted to avoid any possibility of a civil disturbance during the festivities associated with the celebration of First Fruits, which was the temple's biggest and most lucrative celebration of the year. Whether they just violated the Scriptures or also violated the stipulations of Jewish law, they were fulfilling what the L-rd said would happen when His Messiah came to earth to fulfill the atonement part of His ministry.

By this one act, He erased the sins of all previous generations, of all the present generation and of all the subsequent generations. How? His took sinless human nature to the cross and His divine nature applied it for all time. It does not have to be repeated or duplicated and the one who committed no crime is still able to absorb all and any crime because He is the king who was hung on a tree to remove the curse by having it dumped on Him.

When we accept His guilty verdict, we can also accept His forgiveness in an exchange where we surrender our sin to Him and receive forgiveness – this was done symbolically through the sacrificial system. No one would offer a sin sacrifice who did not feel that they had committed sin, and on the day of Atonement, the High Priest would offer one double sacrifice for all the sins which the people had committed over the year and he would release the atonement goat so that the people would know their sins no longer existed before G-d.

Our L-rd did not have to offer a sacrifice for His sins and was able to take the sins of all mankind on Himself so that His shed blood would forgive forwards, backwards and all around.

So where are your sins? They are in one of two places. They are either nailed to the cross or you are stuck with them. How do you nail them to the cross? Three ways and I will close with this. First of all you get ready to nail them by admitting that they exist by calling a spade a spade. Next you confess them (surrender them) to Him (even the ones which you are unaware of (Ps, 139: 23, 24 and Ps. 19:13) on a case by case basis and lastly, just in case there are those you have missed, once a month (or whenever you want to), you observe the L-rd's Table and symbolically attach yourself to the enduring reality of the cross.

He nailed all sin to the cross, so the price has been paid and we proclaim this while we wait for the next stage of salvation to burst forth on our world – His coming Kingdom. Neither His cross, nor His Kingdom depend on human effort or recognition to be real and everyone will one day have to acknowledge both realities. He said what He was going to do and did what he said he was going to do and will do what he says He has to do.

Living by the power of the cross prepares us for the coming kingdom and makes sure that our hearts and lives are detached from the kingdoms of this world.

How is your sin nailing doing? Are you keeping short accounts with G-d? It does not have to be a morbid thing where we have to rehearse all of our sins in order to have them forgiven – I am a firm believer in daily Tashlikh (casting away) – not so that I can continue to sin, but that I can place myself under the power of His forgiveness and allow the power of the cross to keep on breaking the power of sin, whenever it tries to enslave me to this world, to my flesh or the enemy.

The power of the cross also prepares us to practice the righteousness of the Law, not as a means to access the cross, but as a response to having accessed the cross. Have you accessed the cross? What is your reaction to this access?

May we all grow in faith and obedience, following the example of our father Abraham, so that when the Kingdom finally bursts forth, we do not suffer loss because all or part of our lives, have not been set free by the power of the cross.

Let's pray.