

## ***Probing the Heart of God!***

Genesis 18:16-33

In Genesis 18 we find Abraham engrossed in a fascinating conversation with God. At first, it appears that we are looking in on a collective bargaining session. But there is clearly something much deeper going on between the Lord and this man, Abraham, who has been called by God because of his capacity for faith.

Abraham is exploring the heart of God. His questions aren't hypothetical. Neither are they merely speculative – they are probative. Abraham is probing the very heart and mind of God. He is striving to really know God, to understand Him, to experience that moment of spiritual illumination and insight when one feels that the blindfold has finally been removed – or at least partially drawn back – so as to provide an intersection between the heart of man and the heart of the Living God.

Abraham is on a spiritual journey whose destination is that place where Divine and human thoughts and wills and feelings all intermingle and flow together as one. Abraham feels the weight of many questions:

- What kind of Being is this God?
- Is He relational and responsive?
- Is He reliable and righteous?
- Is God merciful, or only judgmental?

In this world of ceaseless wandering, this world of perplexity and lostness, can I find a home in the heart of God? These are the kinds of questions to which he needs real answers, for we must not forget that Abraham had no Bible, no theology books. He must go directly to God and begin to probe the depths of His infinite Being.

Notice that in verse 17 the Lord says, “***Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?***” Then the Lord reminds Abraham of what God has promised him. He exhorts Abraham to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just so that God will be able to bring to pass all that had been promised.

Psalms 25:14 says that, “***The Lord confides in those who fear Him; He makes His covenant known to them.***” Our God wants to take us into His confidence. He will tell us as much as we can handle in the same way that a loving parent will tell a child as much as they can handle. We have to keep that parent-child relationship in mind, recognizing our own limitations over against the vast knowledge and immeasurable ways of God. The fact is, we are just too small to always see what God is up to. We need to move into the heart of God in prayer, thereby giving ourselves a chance to grow, a chance for our spiritual capacity to be enlarged.

One of the secrets of a successful prayer-life is the realization that we are limited in terms of our size, knowledge, experience, understanding, and vulnerability to sin.

Like a small child, we are free to speak our minds and express what is in our hearts. Like a child, however, we must also be grateful for a Parent, our Heavenly Father, who knows better and places higher limits on our lesser requests. Ruth Graham, wife of Billy Graham, adds her perspective as she shares an episode with her own son:

**He was not quite tall enough to see over the dashboard of the car I was driving. “Hurry-up, Mom!” he urged. But he was too young to read the road signs that said FORTY-FIVE MILES PER HOUR. As I began to apply the brakes, he demanded, “Why are you stopping?”**

**“There is a school bus that has just stopped,” I explained. Then I thought to myself, “How like me when I pray. Spiritually I am too young to read the road signs [of life], too small to see what lies ahead. Yet, how often I am guilty of telling God how to run things.” We make our requests, but we should never insist on having our own way lest we become one of those of whom it was said, “He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul” (Psa. 106:15). We may pray in simple, child-like faith – urgently, persistently. But we must always pray, “Thy will be done.”**

Prayer requires faith – faith in the existence of God, faith in the willingness of God to listen, faith in God’s goodness, faith in the power of God, and faith in God’s answers.

Prayer also calls us to faith in the sovereignty of God – in other words, God’s right and ability to govern and to rule. Why? This is because the Lord knows what we do not know. He sees what is hidden from our sight. Does it not make sense to trust someone who knows more than we know, who sees farther, understands more fully than we do? Does it not make sense to defer to the One who created all things and who sees all things in their totality than for us to stubbornly insist on having things our own way – and getting angry and giving up on prayer when God overrides our fallible requests?

Prayer’s first goal is not to change God’s mind to do things my way. It is to explore the heart and mind of God so that He can change *me* to do things *God’s* way. It is a little like taking a car in for a wheel alignment. All the bumps and potholes can throw the wheels out of alignment with the car’s frame. The technicians don’t bend the frame to align with the wheels. They adjust to wheels to line up with the frame. So, we need to be constantly realigned with God; our thoughts with His thoughts; our will with His will; our life with the life of God. Prayer’s first goal is to align us with God (cf. Isa. 55:8-9).

The O.T. is filled with stories of those who refused to give up on God, even when circumstances were not going their way. Daniel decided that he would rather spend a night in the lion’s den than a day without communing with the Living God.

If you remember the story, a decree had been issued forbidding the saying of prayers to anyone but King Darius. But Daniel stood firm. “No,” he said, “I will pray to my God.” The Bible tells us that he did so three times a day. He was so determined to move deeper into the heart of God that he was willing to go into the lion’s den. Oh that we would have that kind of determination!

It is not our place to fall into despair over matters of destiny, frustration with the way things are, or fear of the future. It is our great and very precious privilege to put our faith and trust in our God, who is faithful, and who holds both the present and the future in the palm of His hand. Faith follows, not because it always sees where it is going, but because it sees the One it loves; the One who knows the way; the One who said, “I AM the way!” – the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

These are just some of the things that Abraham would begin to discover as he probed the heart of God. He would discover that God is not a machine, programmed to dispense death and judgment.

He would discover that God values the righteous more than He craves the destruction of the wicked. “*For the sake of ten I will not destroy the city.*” That’s what the Lord had said. We must not be so short-sighted as to think that God was making calculations, that if only nine righteous were found He would destroy it. No, the numbers are not the point at all. The point that Abraham discovered was that God is not a capricious tyrant waiting to mete our death and judgment so He could destroy an entire city. Abraham made the marvelous discovery that our God is absolutely free, free to intervene with grace and mercy, free to break apart the bond of indictment and punishment.

Abraham would make the heart-warming discovery that with God it takes only a small number of righteous ones to bless a community with grace and mercy.

Alas, we say, alas that they were not to be found in the city! For God is more than a score-keeper, more than a guardian of morality who is ready to pounce and judge and punish. No, God is ready to celebrate the faith of a few by offering grace to all who are willing to repent. How forcefully this would be shown centuries later when Christ Himself would mount the Cross in full payment for the sins of the whole world. It was in freedom that our Lord was lifted up to break the death-grip of indictment and judgment in favour of grace, mercy, and a new start for fallen humanity.

It turns out, Abraham discovers, that God is not a tyrant. He really is righteous; He really is good. And from that flows good news.

Without prayer, without entering into conversation and communion with the Living God, would Abraham have made these discoveries? Hardly! Would he have really come to know the Lord in an intimate and deeply personal way? Not at all! The same is just as true of us. No-one can truly know God without such a relationship.

This morning the same God to whom Abraham spoke nearly four thousand years ago invites us to probe His heart and mind. He invites us to explore the limitless dimensions of His Being. He calls us to probe the heights and depths of His love and grace. He wants to share His will with us and take us into His confidence. After all, we are His children!

When we were very young and small, our parents seemed to be as gods to us. They towered over us like trees. They were all-powerful and all-knowing. But as we grew up and matured, we began to realize that they were finite and fallible human beings. They were flawed and beset with imperfections and weaknesses like everybody else. We still loved them. The childish naivete may have evaporated, but not our love.

How different it is with our God. The more we probe Him and explore the limitless dimensions of His Being the more of His perfections we discover. We find out that He is not like everyone else; in fact, there is no one like Him! With our God there are no flaws, no imperfections, no weaknesses, nothing to cause disappointment. A voyage of personal discovery with God takes the believer deeper into the unfathomable love, the inextinguishable light, and the incomparable life of God. We learn that He will not only do what is right, He will do what is best.

Abraham would continue to commune and converse with God. He would learn to love and trust the Lord more and more. This would be borne out later when the Lord would test Abraham profoundly concerning the life of his son Isaac. It would be a test that Abraham would pass only because he had already developed an intimate knowledge of God and an unflinching faith and trust in Him.

This morning the challenge is for each of us to so commune and converse with God that we learn to love and obey Him more and more. Then we, like Abraham, will be ready for the ultimate tests that come to every life.

So let us probe the heart of God. Let us explore Him. Let us make every day a day of discovery with our God.