

A VENTURE OF FAITH

Genesis 12:1-5

In the grey dawn of history the first great character who arrests our attention is that of Abraham. He would command our notice for this, if for nothing else, that he is referred to as the "friend of God" and the "father of the faithful." Surely it will be good for us to study the inner life and the outward conduct of this great man, in order that we, too, may become not servants only, but "friends" of God, or His favored confidants from whom He will not hide His secrets, but to whom He will make known His will. Abraham was truly the most illustrious personage in ancient history and one of the colossal characters of all time. Other names have come down to us from those early days, but the name of Abraham stands out among them as the moon stands out in a star-filled sky. Of all the men whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament, he is the only one whom God called His friend. In Isaiah 41:8 God said, "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." This noble and heroic figure was God's chosen instrument for the realization of the divine purposes of redemption.

Abraham was the product of a pagan home in a nation of idolaters. His family worshipped Idols (Joshua 24:2), rather than the one true God. This family lived in Ur of the Chaldees, which was located in the rich valley of the Euphrates River in lower Mesopotamia, or what is known to day as Iraq. Excavations of Ur have shown that in those days the city was noted for its advanced civilization and culture. These excavations have also revealed that the religion included the grossest type of idol worship and involved human sacrifice in the death rites of royal persons. Many of their pagan religious practices were of the most immoral and shocking nature.

"Ur" means "flame," and "Chaldee" means "destruction." Literally, then, God found Abraham in the place of the flame and in the land of destruction. I call your attention to this because the story of Abraham is an example of a sinner saved by grace through faith. It is in the place of the flame and judgment and of the land of destruction that the Lord finds every sinner whom He saves.

Even though Abraham lived in the midst of idolatry, and in the center of moon worship, he came to believe in the true God, Who dealt with him in sovereign grace.

Abraham was the name which was given to him by his parents and it means "exalted father". Later, God changed his name to Abraham, which means "the father of a multitude." Abraham is venerated by the Jews, the Christians and the Mohammedans.

While Abraham was living quietly in Ur, supervising the company of servants who were looking after his large flocks and herds, there came a call to him from God to leave his home, his relatives and his country, and to go out into a strange land. We do not know the exact manner in which this summons came from God, although it is possible and even probable that He spoke to him in an audible voice, but it was very explicit, and the patriarch recognized it as being divine. We have not been told whether this divine call came to Abraham amid the performance of the duties of his position, in the evening hour of meditation or in the still and solemn night, but he received the message, which made such a tremendous impression upon his will, saying, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." This is the pattern of the call that comes to every child of God at the beginning of his Christian life. The call of God is always away from the world, away from sin and away from the former manner of life.

It was made clear to Abraham that he was to leave home and security in order to found a great nation in a strange and forbidding land called Canaan. Furthermore, Abraham was called to leave his nearest and dearest relatives. Likewise with the Christian, he must not allow his relatives to come between him and the will of God. Moreover, God called

him to leave the house of his father, but not to take his family with him. Note that the initial move came from God and not from Abraham. If God had not called him, Abraham might have stayed in Ur until he died. In the call of Abraham we see the sovereign grace of God in action. God's choice of Abraham to be the recipient and instrument of His grace might well be a theme for endless wonder.

Abraham's call was both "from" and "unto." It was from the idolatry of his own land, from fellowship with his kindred, and from occupation with the pursuits of his own people. It was unto fellowship with God Himself, unto purity of worship and unto the purposes which had been formulated in heaven. God wants separated and dedicated believers in every day. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (II Corinthians 6:17). This call comes to every believer in Christ. The separated life is the crying need today. All who would be used of God today must know the meaning of separation from the world and its idols.

God called Abraham to become the founder of a new nation through which He could work out His redemptive plan. Along with that sovereign and gracious call there came an invaluable seven-fold promise or pledge. God pledged Himself to make of Abraham a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great, to make him a world-wide blessing, to bless those who blessed Abraham, to curse any who might curse him, and through him to bless all the families on the earth.

This divine pledge should serve as a reminder to us that God's protecting care is guaranteed to all of His children today while they are engaged in the doing of his blessed will. Those who honor Christ will be blessed and honored by the Father.

God's call to Abraham was unmistakably clear. It was a call to faith, obedience, separation and dedication. It took faith to leave the land of his nativity, with its advanced civilization and high living standards, and go out as a pilgrim, especially since he did not know where he was going.

When that call reached Abraham, he had to make a choice between the security of that which was settled and familiar and the uncertainty of the great unknown. On one side there were a thousand safeguards for his life and happiness -- the old home, the old possessions, the old ties of kinship and the old circle of friends. On the other side there were a thousand risks, and God. Because God called him it was necessary for him to listen and heed the call, even though it involved hardship. It was no small matter for him to tear himself from those who were united with him by the ties of blood and to start for a land which, as yet, he did not know. It will ever be thus. The call of God always involves a wrench from much that nature holds dear. Each step of real advance in the way of the Lord will involve an altar on which some dear fragment of the self-life has been offered, or a monument by which some cherished idol has been buried. But the blessedness which awaits us will more than compensate us from the sacrifices which we may have to make.

God's commands are not always accompanied by reasons, but they are always accompanied by promises, which are either expressed or understood. To give a promise shows that the reason, though sometimes hidden, is all-sufficient. God promised Abraham that, if he would go and do what He commanded him, He would make of him a great nation. When Abraham left the land of his birth, the people whom he knew, the comforts of his home and the polytheistic religion of his fathers and went forth on this venture of faith, God did make of him a great nation. His posterity, the Jews, were great in their monotheistic religion, great in the literature which they produced, great in their financial acumen and their intellectual genius. How God blessed Abraham! He blessed him with His own presence, protection and power. God promised Abraham that He would give him a family through which would come the Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of the world and the Saviour of men. He promised to make him a blessing to others. He assured

Abraham that those who would be gracious to his seed in turn would be blessed of God, and that those who would be hateful to them would be cursed of God. It is always encouraging to remember that God's commands are always accompanied by promises. If this is His command: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"; this is the promise: "And thou shalt be saved." If this is the command: "Sell that thou hast and give to the poor"; this is the promise: "And thou shalt have treasure in heaven." God expects us to hear His call and to obey His command. The man who obeys is a man of faith, but the one who disobeys is without faith.

Abraham believed God and set out to make of life an illustrious adventure. What a word that is -- adventure! What a tang in the very sound of it! The lure of the distant is in it. The thrill of the mysterious is in it. Adventure! Who does not like and rejoice in it? Somebody has said that the greatest line in English literature is the one on adventure which most of us learned at school -- "Over the hills and far away." Anyway, those words are full of magic and romance.

In a sense, all of life is an adventure. What a stupendous adventure is birth into this world! Every birth is the beginning of untold possibilities. Then, learning to walk is an adventure. Starting to school is an adventure. Going away to college is a tremendous adventure. Falling in love is an adventure. Then, there is the great adventure of getting married. Life is a series of adventures. All that lies between the cradle and the grave is an adventure. Each new day is a bundle of unexplored potentialities. Who knows what a day or a year will bring forth? Is it not an adventure just to live, to go through the mysterious years, to meet life's tests and trials, its branching roads, its opening and closing doors? The Christian life is the adventure of adventures.

It was eminently wise for Abraham to leave Ur. So often it is the case that nothing strengthens a young man more than to be transplanted into a responsible position. When he is thrown on his own resources, he will develop powers of which there never would have been a trace, if he had always lived at home, dependent on others and surrounded by plenty or by luxury. What is true of the natural qualities of the soul is pre-eminently true of faith. As long as a person is at rest amid favorable and undisturbed surroundings his faith remains undeveloped but when he is pushed out of these circumstances, with nobody upon whom he can depend except God, then his faith grows strong.

In response to the call and command of God, Abraham went forth without knowing whither he went or what the future held in store for him, and without asking any questions of God. However, Abraham's obedience was only partial. In spite of the command to leave his kindred, Abraham took his father, Terah, with him. In fact, Genesis 11:31 says, "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." But Haran was not the place to which God commanded Abraham to go. He had been told to go to Canaan, but they stopped at Haran instead, which was only about half the distance to their destination.

Abraham and those of his family who accompanied him spent about six years in Haran, but they were wasted years. There is no evidence that Abraham built any altars or prayed as he should have while he was in Haran. Neither is there any record of any revelation from God, or any encouragement from Him, or any personal victory, growth, progress or joy while he remained in Haran. Neither the place of disobedience nor that of partial obedience can ever be the place of joyous, full and complete blessing.

Perhaps Abraham and his party did not have any intention of remaining permanently in Haran, but he did not move on until God removed his father, Terah, by death. Abraham had to bury his father and sever the ties of the flesh before he would proceed to the

place of victory and promise. How much easier it would have been for Abraham to have left his father behind in Ur of the Chaldees, as God had commanded him, than to bury him here in this strange land!

What is it in your life, Christian, which hinders you and keeps you from the joy and victory which obedience to the Lord would bring you? From what do you need to be separated? You know what it is. Is it some secret sin, some habit, some lust, some carnal thing you are pampering, condoning and excusing? Remember this, before you can make any progress in the Christian life, it must go. A believer who is out of fellowship with God frequently does meaner and lower things than a sinner who has never been saved. Put away your sin, turn your life over completely to the Lord once and for all and experience the new joy of His presence, fellowship, power and blessings. Dig that grave in Haran now, and then go on to the life of victory in Canaan.

It must have been hard for Abraham to sever the ties of the flesh, but it had to take place before he would go farther. How much better it would have been for him to have obeyed God willingly and immediately by separation from the world and the flesh rather than to have disobeyed him and been deprived of so many blessings!

As soon as every tie had been cut by the death of his father, Abraham left the halfway place of compromise and set out on the pilgrimage to which he had been called. It was by faith that he at length obeyed God. Departure is the first act of faith of every child of God. Conversion means a departure, a break with the former life, the beginning of a journey along the narrow way from earth to heaven. At the age of seventy-five Abraham took his departure from Haran, taking with him his family and his possessions. Neither souls nor substance were left in the place of compromise. If either had been, Abraham likely would have been tempted to return. In starting on this pilgrimage again he dedicated to God all that he had -- his family, his household and his property. He took all with him for use in the service of his God. He did not expect to return, nor did he anticipate the return of his people.

Abraham's first stop was at Shechem. There he built an altar and worshipped God. It was an altar of remembrance. His next stop was at Bethel. There he built an altar and "called upon the name of the Lord." He confessed his faith in God and acknowledged his dependence upon and gratitude to God. Where Abraham pitched his tent he built an altar. When he moved his tent, the altar stood to show where the man of God had been.

Having learned the folly of procrastination and dawdling along the way, Abraham and his company set out to go into the land of Canaan, and "into the land of Canaan they came." Finally, his obedience was complete. For us, as for Abraham, the secret of entering the land of promise is glad submission to the divine will. As we enter by faith and walk in the pathway of obedience, we shall be rewarded with intimate fellowship with God, increasing fruitfulness in life and inexhaustible fulness for others. If you will do what God wants you to do, He will go with you and enable you to do it.